

### Station # 3; Silk Road Activity: Ancient China: Buddhism and the Silk Road

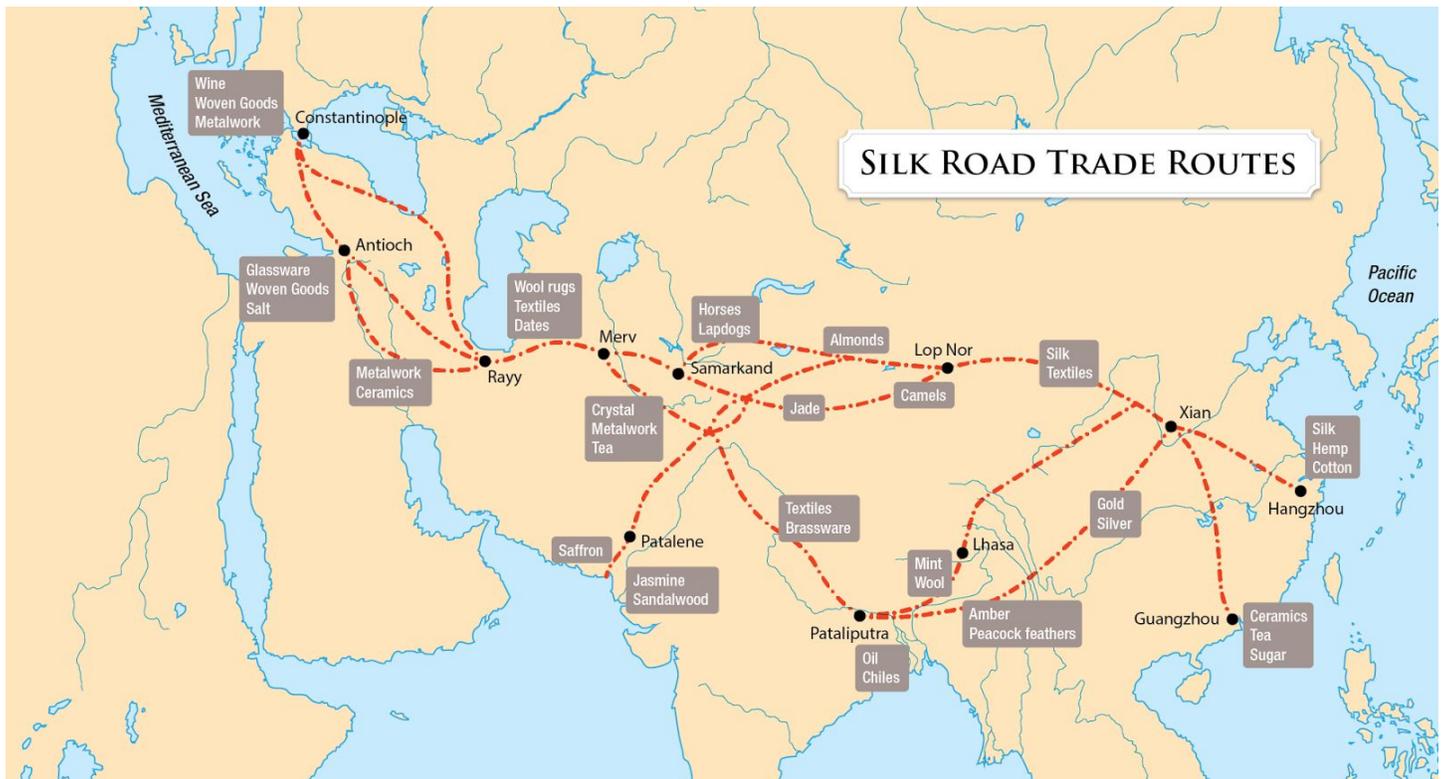
Which had the greater impact—the goods or the ideas exchanged along the Silk Road?

A silk road?

The Silk Road was not made of silk, and it was not a single road. It was a series of trade routes that stretched from China westward to the Mediterranean Sea in the west.

At its busiest period of trade, the Silk Road was over 4,000 miles long.

Traders and merchants rarely traveled the entire distance. They moved in stages with native guides from central Asia serving as middlemen. One of the



earliest European travelers to explore the Silk Road was Marco Polo. (13th century Italian merchant who told Europeans about the wealth of goods he discovered in China)

#### How did the Silk Road get started?

In 139 BCE, Emperor Wudi of the Han Dynasty sent a traveler named Zhang Qian on a trade mission to purchase horses from nomads. Zhang traveled 2,500 miles, through the Taklamakan Desert and beyond. After thirteen years he returned to China with tales of a great civilization to the west. That civilization was ancient Rome.

This initial contact between the Han Empire and the future Roman Empire would begin a relationship that lasted for centuries. Wudi sent out more expeditions, and various trade routes opened up. These routes formed the trade network known as the Silk Road.

Watch the [Silk Road: Connecting the ancient world through trade](#) video to the 4:20 mark and answer the questions that follow.

1. How was the Silk Road like today's Internet?
2. Who was Zhang Qian and how did he impact the growth of trade along the Silk Road?
3. What goods did the Romans get from ancient China?  
a. glassware                      b. silk                                  c. precious metals
4. What goods did the Chinese get from ancient Rome?  
a. gunpowder                      b. glassware                      c. jade

**CONSIDER  
this...**

### What's so great about silk?

Silk is a fabulously soft material with a beautiful sheen. One of the strongest natural fibers, it is both lightweight and warm. The Chinese produced the rich cloth and guarded the secret for making it. During the Han dynasty, anyone caught exporting silkworm eggs was sentenced to death. The Romans (among others) wanted the prized cloth. Traders were therefore willing to take the considerable risks in traveling the Silk Road to bring silk to Rome.



## Challenges vs benefits

Read the following sources to complete a list of the potential benefits and challenges encountered in your 360° look at the Silk Road. (click on each link)

- [Silk Road](#)
- [Map of the Silk Road](#) Follow the routes on the map and notice the geographic challenges travelers faced—for example, crossing the Zagros Mountains or traveling around the Taklamakan Desert.
- [About the Silk Road](#) Focus on the first five sections of this UNESCO article.

- Silk Road Trade Routes: Horses and Camels Select the Horses and Camels article from the banner at the top.

**Take a 360° look at travel along the Silk Road!**

Potential Benefits	
Potential Challenges	

**Legacy: The spread of Buddhism**



Use information from the following sites to answer the questions below:

- Silk Road Start reading at the paragraph that begins, "From about the first century..."
- Buddhism and Its Spread Along the Silk Road Read the opening quote and paragraph; then skip to the heading Buddhism Introduced to China from the Silk Road and read through the Buddhist Art and its Impact section.

1. How did the Han emperor bring Buddhism from India to China?
2. What physical evidence of Buddhism spreading exists along Silk Road routes north of India?
3. The Mahayana school of Buddhism spread north along the Silk Road from India to which other countries? Select all that apply.

China     Korea     Japan     Tibet



Consider all that you have learned as you answer the following question.  
Which had a greater impact—the exchange of goods or ideas along the Silk Road?

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