

Academic Essay Source Texts

Title **The Silk Road, describe its development over time, how it was used, and give reasons for its decline.**

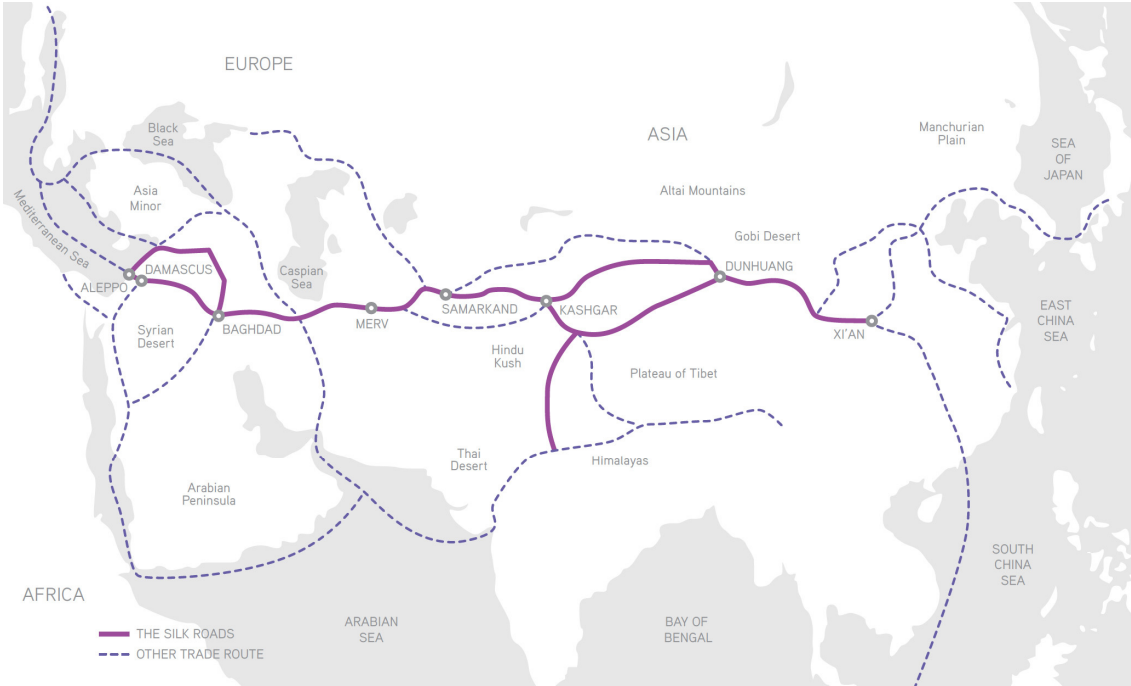
[Text 1] Out of China

The Han dynasty Silk Road began at the magnificent capital city of Xian. The route took traders westwards into Gansu Province through Lanzhou, and on to Jiayuguan – the giant barrier of the Great Wall. Along the way, it passed through Dunhuang, one of the well-known Chinese historical and cultural cities, and the bright pearl of the ancient Silk Road.

The Silk Road then divided into three main routes. The southern route ran west along the northern foot of Kunlun Mountains, to Hetian, then reached Kashgar – another key point on the Silk Road, and eventually reached India (New Delhi) or instead passed through Afghanistan to reach the coast of the Mediterranean or Arabia. The central route went west along the southern foot of the Tianshan Mountains by Aksu, and then led to Russia. The northern route was along the northern foot of the Tianshan Mountains, starting at Hami, and passing through Urumqi to Almaty, today’s Kazakhstan.

The ancient Silk Road passed through deserts and over snow-capped peaks. It was full of difficulties and obstacles, but it was the only way for China to connect with the West between the second century B.C.E. and the 10th century. Various ancient cultures of the West and East, including some lost cultures, have left remnants of themselves along the route. Although sections of the Silk Road have been buried by sand in deserts, the local dry climate has some amazingly preserved sites several thousand years old.

Source: Smith, J. (2006). *The Origins of the Silk Road*. Retrieved from, <http://www.chinapast.com>.



[Text 2] **The Silk Road**

The Silk Road was a historically important international trade route between China and the Mediterranean Sea, from which trade goods could then be transported to Western Europe. Because a large part of the trade along this road consisted of silk, it was named 'the Silk Road' by Ferdinand von Richthofen, an eminent German geographer, in 1877.

The Silk Road lasted about 1,600 years. It was not only an ancient international trade route, but also a splendid cultural bridge connecting the cultures of China, India, Persia, Arabia, Greek and Rome. In addition to silk, technological inventions and religions were introduced to the many countries that this route passed through. As a result, historians have called the Silk Road the "information superhighway" (the internet of its day), and have emphasized not only its importance in transporting goods, but also in the spread of knowledge and ideas between the East and West.

The Silk Road was first traveled by a Chinese diplomat, Zhang Qian, when he was sent on a diplomatic mission to Central Asia during the Han dynasty in the 2nd century BCE*. In this way, knowledge of China spread to Central Asia, and vice versa. When Zhang Qian returned to China he was able to convey information about Central Asia to the Chinese people.

One of the consequences of this exchange of knowledge was that it made people in each area desire goods produced in the other areas. Persians and Romans were fond of Chinese silk and this created greater trade along the Silk Road. The Roman love of silk became so great that they even exchanged silk for the same weight in gold. During the Chinese Tang dynasty 30% of the trade on the Silk Road consisted of silk.

By the mid 8th century, under the Tang dynasty, the Silk Road had reached its peak. This was largely due to the internal stability and economic development these rulers brought to their country. The Chinese government carried out many favorable policies that encouraged trade between the East and the West, and this helped in the development of the Silk Road.

At the same time, ideas and religions were also spread from East to West and from West to East. With the Silk Road acting as an "information superhighway", the exchange of ideas grew to a larger scale than ever before. And, as a result, the most prosperous period of the Silk Road occurred during the Tang dynasty.

The discovery of a sea route from Europe to Asia in the late 15th century was damaging to the Silk Road trade route. With less cost, trouble and danger, it became easier to transport many goods by sea instead of by land. A consequence of this was a significant decline in the Silk Road. The bustling streets, wealthy cities and solid walls of its magnificent cities became covered by the vast sands of the desert, and today, people can only see the splendid history of The Silk Road in the endless ruins that still lie along it.

*BCE: Abbreviation for 'Before Common Era', an alternative to the use of B.C. in designating the first period of the Gregorian Calendar, the era of prehistory and much of antiquity.

Source: Evans, P. (2000). The Silk Road. Retrieved from, <http://www.eastertravel.org>

[Text 3] **The Decline of the Route**

The decline of the Silk Road was largely due to the development of the silk route by sea, as it was becoming easier and safer to transport goods by water instead of overland. Ships had become stronger, and the sea route opened new markets and commercial opportunities in Southern Asia, which had previously been closed off.

A drawback of the land route was the problem of 'tribal politics' between the different peoples who inhabited the areas that the route passed through. The success of the Silk Route depended on the countries it passed through being at peace with each other. Obviously, political instability and war between countries made it more difficult to transport goods along the Road.

In addition, there were many stops or staging points along the Silk Road, as goods made their long journey from the East to the West. With each stop along the way, merchants would sell their goods to other merchants, who, in turn, would transport them further along the route to the next major city and sell them to the merchants located there. This process naturally resulted in a mark up or increase in the price of the goods. This was because they were bought and sold many times by many different traders, as these goods slowly made their way along the route.

In contrast, the sea route had fewer stops, and so goods travelling by sea could be sold at lower prices than goods transported on the land route. However, trade through the sea route sometimes suffered disruption caused by bad weather and piracy.

A further problem was the drift of deserts into some of the towns situated along the route of the Silk Road. If people had to leave any town or settlement during times of war, then it would be covered by the sands of the desert in a very short time, making it very difficult to return and settle there when peace returned. Living in such places involved a continual battle against the desert, and maintaining good water supplies was always difficult.

The attitude of later rulers of China also damaged the trade route. The Ming dynasty preferred a foreign policy of isolation instead of contact with other countries. As a result, trade with the West decreased, as did the traffic of ideas along the Road and, consequently, contact between East and West declined.

Source: Best, G. *The Silk Road's Decline*. Retrieved from, <http://www.chinaguide.com>

[Text 4] **Trade on the Silk Road**

The Silk Road was an extensive network of overland trade routes across the Asian continent. They connected East, South, and Western Asia with the Mediterranean world, including North Africa and Europe extending over 8,000 km (5,000 miles). In reality, there was not one Silk Road but many small routes, or Silk Routes that connected with each other to form what we know today as the Silk Road.

These so-called "Silk Routes" transported not only silk but also many other products. They were also very important routes for the exchange of culture and technology between countries. They linked traders, merchants, pilgrims, soldiers, and urban dwellers from China to the faraway Mediterranean Sea for thousands of years.

The importance of the Silk Road can be seen in many different areas. The routes enabled people to transport trade goods, especially luxuries such as silk, satins, musk, rubies, diamonds, and pearls. At the same time, these routes also spread knowledge, ideas, cultures, and even diseases to and from different parts of the world including China, India, Asia Minor and the Mediterranean. Trade on the Silk Road was a significant factor in the development of the great civilizations of China, India, Egypt, Persia, Arabia, Rome, Byzantium, and in several ways helped to lay the foundations of the modern world.

Although the name the Silk Road suggests a continuous journey, very few travelers traveled the route from start to finish. For the most part, a merchant or trader would transport goods only along part of the route and not all the way along it. Goods were bought and sold many times by different traders, in the busy markets of the oasis towns that were situated along the route.

The Central Asian part of the trade route began over 2,000 years ago as a response to the increased demand for silk. The Persians and Romans were fond of Chinese silk, and were prepared to pay good prices for it. The development of the route was carried out during the Chinese Han Dynasty, largely through the work and journeys of the diplomat Zhang Qian. In the late Middle Ages – around the 15th century – transcontinental trade on the Silk Road declined as sea trade increased.

Source: Trade on the Silk Road (2002). Retrieved from, <http://en.wikipedia.org>

Citations

Source references, formatted to APA citations

Text 01	
Text 02	
Text 03	
Text 04	