CHAPTER - II
DECLINE OF THE SILK ROUTE

Down fall of the Tang Empire in the early 10th century gave a deathblow to the trade along the Silk Route. The trade on the route declined sharply till in the 13th century, when the conquests of the Mongols ushered in an era of frequent and extended contacts between East and West. This increased contact created a demand for Asian goods in Europe, a demand that eventually inspired the search for a sea route to Asia.

After the Tang rule, the traffic along the Silk Route was subsided. The Five Dynasties period did not maintain the internal stability of the Tang Dynasty, and again neighboring states started to plunder the caravans. China was partially unified again in Song dynasty (960 –1279 A.D.), but the Silk Route was not as important as it had been in the Tang. With the decline of Tang power and the rise of Islam between the eighth and tenth centuries, central Asian region again slipped out of China’s control. The area remained under the actual influence or control of Imperial China only intermittently for less than five centuries during a period of two thousand years.

Mainly the decline of Silk Route started with the crumbling of the Mongol Empire due to the internecine feuds among various Mongol Khans. Chinese nationalism and isolationism emphasized with the revival of Islam in the West and rise of Ming in China, by this the land route communication suffered a setback. With the development of easy and profitable sea routes, the long and arduous land route was side lined. There were many factors behind the decline of the Silk Route:-

2.1 Downfall of Tang Dynasty

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Fall of the Tang dynasty led to political chaos, an unstable economy and less support to extravagant foreign imports. At the same time, entire communities, active oasis towns, thriving monasteries and grottoes along the Silk Route were appearing in the space of frail, as the glacier-fed streams ran dry or changed course. The Great Tang dynasty came to its end in the year 907 AD. The Tang was, however, a period during which the Chinese people greatly extended the areas of their demographic dominance by migration towards the west, where no such ecological barriers existed. Armed conflicts were the constant feature on the northern borders with Inner Asia, where the non Chinese peoples possessed the means to sorely test Chinese military capacities. Their striking force enabled the northern peoples to take active parts in Tang China's internal power struggles. Inner Asian military power became a component of Tang internal politics from the mid-eighth century onward.

During the time of Emperor Su Tsung (756-762) military generals in northern region were worked like a dictator. He sought aid from Central Asia against the An Lu-Shan and his capable general Shih-Ssu-Ming (himself a Turk). A small Arab troop sent by the Caliph Abu-Jafar, and an important Uighur cavalry arrived from Turkistan in substantial strength. At the end of 757 A.D. there was a great battle in the neighborhood of the capital, in which An Lu-Shan was defeated by the Uighurs, shortly afterwards he was murdered by one of his eunuch. The victors Uighurs further received 10,000 rolls of Silk in payment from the Tang government with a promise of 20,000 rolls per year. The Turk Shih Ssu-Ming entered into An Lu-Shan's heritage and dominated so large part of eastern China that the Chinese once more made use of the Uighurs to bring him down.

The later Tang emperors never regained full control, over their country. The character of governing was changed. Among those holders of real power who were Chinese, they had come from the defeated forces of Huang-Chao or from other bandit uprisings. The great families of the Tang civil and bureaucratic elite played almost no

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4 ibid., p. 185.
part in the final struggles of the Tang to survive. As a sector of elite society they had
been largely nullified if not eliminated.

The later Tang emperors were like the pawns of contesting military leaders. One such leader, a Chinese named Zhu. Wen, a former captain in Huang Chao’s rebel armies, seized the capital in 901 A.D. Then in 905 A.D. he killed the emperor and most of the Tang imperial family and placed a teenage imperial prince on the throne as his puppet. Finally, in 907 A.D. he abandoned all pretenses and declared himself the founding emperor of a new dynasty. In 908 he killed the deposed last Tang emperor, a boy of sixteen. That cycle of violence began the Liang, the first of the Five Dynasties. So by the maladministration, Tang Empire ultimately brought to its end.

Obviously, collapse of the Tang Empire was the important factor of the decline of the Silk Route. Import and export of China with western world through the Silk Route almost decreased at the end of ninth century. Businessmen were engaged in the uprisings against the Tang power. Later Tang emperors had not decided about the situation of commerce in proper way. Peasantry and businessmen stood against the Tangs, e.g. Wang-Hsien-Chih was a peasant and Huang-Chao a merchant, whose led the uprisings. Within these circumstances Silk Route could not survive like early golden time.

2.2 The Chaos of Five Dynasties

After the collapse of the Tang dynasty in 907 A.D., China followed fifty years of black chaos, known as the period of ‘Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdom’, when local military governors declared themselves ruler or even ‘emperor’ of territory they happened to hold. None of the Five Dynasties, based in north China, was able to reunify the China. The political instability reflected in the short lived Five Dynasties. In the separate regional power bases that produced the Ten States was a direct

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6 F.W. Mote, n-2, p.7.
outgrowth of the decentralization of political and military power. The military governors throughout the provinces enhanced their prospects of surviving in the competition among themselves.

In these territories there was comparative peace and economic progress, since they were able to control their own affairs and were no longer dependent on a corrupt central government. "As an example of these states, in Chu state, Ma Yin, a carpenter had declared King to himself. He controlled some of the main trade routes, set up a clean administration, bought up all merchandise which the merchants brought, but allowed them only local products, mainly tea, iron and lead. This regulation gave him a personal income of several millions every year".8

There had been certain changes in this period. The north west of China, the region of the old capital Changan had been so ruined by the fighting that had gone farther north, that it was eliminated as a centre of power for a hundred years; it had been largely depopulated. The north was under the Kitan's rule; its trade, which in past had been with the Huang-ho basin, was now perforce diverted to Peking, which soon became the main centre of the power of the Kitan. One important event of this time was the great persecution of Buddhism in 955 A.D., which affected the trade along the Silk Route. Not only because 30,336 temples and monasteries were secularized but some 2,700 with 61,200 were monks left.9 Although the immediate reason for this action was the change of monks of the monasteries as the soldiers.

Political chaos of Five Dynasties carried out the decline of silk route. Decentralization of Power in China finished the economic relations with the neighbours' states. Government of Five Dynasties was not interested in silk trade with Roman Empire. Central Asians and Persian middle men were not enforced the exchange of silk and other production because Border States were fighting with each others. Within these circumstances, chaos of Five Dynasties consisted as a factor of Silk Route decline.

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9 ibid., p. 207.
The attitude of the later Chinese dynasties was the final blow to the trade route. The isolationist policies of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912 A.D.) dynasties did nothing to encourage trade between China and the rapidly developing West.

2.3 Advance of Islam towards Central Asia

The revival of Islam in Central Asia led to the destruction of non-Islamic artwork and architecture in key cities. Arrival of Islam in China raised the barriers on the land route once again. After the Muslim defeat of the Sasanian Empire in 651 A.D., Arab armies sought to bring Islam to the land beyond Oxus and Transoxiana. An Arab army from Basra (in today's Iraq), succeeded in taking the great oasis city of Merv in 651 A.D. During the early years the Arabs lacked a power base in Central Asia, they were compelled to rule through the nobles and administrators of the former Sasanian regime but by the end of the seventh century some 50,000 families from Kufa and Basra joined their men in Merv and the city became the base for the Muslim conquest of Central Asia.

During the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750 A.D.) and the earlier time of the Abbasid Caliphate (749-1258 A.D.), Merv was the capital of the eastern Islamic territories. This state of affairs prevailed until the transfer of the capital to Nishapur during the Tahirid dynasty (821-73). The first military incursion in oxus began in 673 A.D., led by Ubaidullah Ziyad, governor of Khurasan. Termez was taken in 676 AD and attacks were launched against the great caravan cities of Bukhara and Samarkand, led by the Khorezm dynasty. General Qutabia ibn Muslim, appointed governor of Khurasan in 704 AD, consolidated Arab control of the region. Bukhara fell to the Arabs in 709 AD, followed by Samarkahd in 712 AD. Qutaiba systematically killed off all the scholars of Khorezm in an attempt to erase the country’s culture. He

11 Jonathan Tucker, n-5, p. 212.
established a large Arab garrison at Samarkand and rampaged through Chach (Tashkent), Khujand and Ferghana. Qutabia swept all before him, brushing aside all opposition including attempts by surviving relatives of the last Sasanian ruler, Yezdegard III raised an army against him and to elicit Chinese support. Advancement of Quotaiba was finally checked when his patron Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, governor of Iraq had died. After death of Qutaiba the Arab tribes of Khurasan were riven by internal disputes and few territorial gain were made. Abbasids soldiers worked to achieve the overthrow of the Umayyad Caliphate and north of the Syr Darya River, the Turgesh Turks rallied to the cause of the beleaguered Sogdian armies who had fled to the Ferghana valley in 721 AD.\textsuperscript{12} In 724 A.D. the Turgesh Turk heavily defeated a Muslim expeditionary force sent into the Ferghana Valley. Turks controlled almost all the territory north of the Amu Darya (Oxus) and at times it appeared that the Arabs completely ousted from Transoxiana. The Sogdian chieftain Divastich, the last ruler of Penjikent, fled to the mountain citadel of Mugh after the fall of Penjikent.\textsuperscript{13}

The death of the Turgesh Khagan Su-Lu brought about the disintegration of the Turks state. With the threat to their rule removed, the Arabs were able to introduce a process of reconciliation and pacification to Central Asia. The last Umayyad governor, Nasr-ibn-Sayyar, succeeded in 737 AD and pursued a strategy of amnesty and tax reform among his subjects and Sogadian landowners. Many people voluntarily converted to Islam and Sogadian merchants financed many of the Arab's expeditions.

Trade along the silk route profoundly effected with the rise of Islam, its followers had conquered Byzantine Syria, the whole of the North Africa, Sasanian Persia and much of Central Asia. The power of Islam held sway from Spain to Ferghana Valley.\textsuperscript{14} Arab traders controlled both maritime and land routes and Muslim Persia developed a domestic silk industry that rivaled China's industries.


\textsuperscript{13} Jonathan Tucker, n-5, p. 268.

\textsuperscript{14} ibid., p. 213.
Islam spread throughout Central Asia at three levels.\(^{15}\)

(i) At the political level (as an instrument of foreign policy).

(ii) At the commercial level (followers and converts enjoyed greater opportunities for trade), and

(iii) At the level of assimilation (successive generations would forget the ways of the past).

Islamic rule over the western half of the silk route came fairly and was established by the mid-eighth century. Muslims thereafter controlled much of trans-Asian trade, which became the major factor of the decline of the Silk Route. Main factor was the Muslim domination of commercial activities. The presence of Muslim rule and the increasing Muslim dominance of trade meant that advancement of Islam came first in the urban areas along the Silk Route. The gradual Islamisation of the nomadic Turkic peoples of Central Asia at first directly tied to their increasing participation in the oasis based Silk Route trade in the tenth century.\(^{16}\) It accelerated by the political activities of three Turkic Muslim dynasties the Qara Khanids, the Ghaznavids and the Seljuks supplemented by the proselytizing efforts of Muslim missionaries.\(^{17}\)

The government of China attempted to regain control of the lucrative trade routes across Central Asia in eighth century. Arab and Chinese armies finally clashed in 751 AD, at the river Talas. The Chinese army fought but was eventually defeated by the Arab troops of Ziyad ibn-Salih. Many Chinese were captured and sent to work in Samarkand and Damascus where they taught skills to the native craftsmen, including the techniques of paper and silk manufacture. A more important consequence of the battle was that Chinese control of Central Asia was lost for the next thousand years. Although the Arabs did not pursue the fleeing Chinese troops and the battle marked the limit of their territorial expansion, they remained the dominant force in Silk Route trade until the coming of the Mongols in the thirteenth century.

\(^{15}\) Richard C. Foltz, n-10, p. 95.

\(^{16}\) ibid., p. 97.

\(^{17}\) ibid., p. 97.
After the end of Umayyad dynasty Caliphate was moved from Damascus to Baghdad. The demise of the Umayyad Caliphate was coupled with the ascent of Persian culture and language in Central Asia. The old culture and language of Bactria, Khorezm and Sogdiana disappeared from the pages of history and were replaced by all Persian things. The reasons for the Persianisation of Central Asia were complained but include the fact that the merchants of Central Asia were prepared to embrace Islam and accept foreign rule so long as the trade rules and the commerce they conducted along them were safeguarded. Persian quickly became the language of choice among the Arab soldiers and Sogdian merchant of Central Asia.

The period of Abbasid rule (749-1258 AD) gave rise of many technological and cultural developments, many of which reached the West via the Silk Route. Arab soldiers who got the chance of looting those prosperous towns of Central Asia that lay on the Silk Route were naturally ever ready for battle. After the disintegration of the Abbasid Caliphate adjustments in Islamic institution and the Abbasid Caliphate adjustments in Islamic institution and the reorganization of the state and society affected long distance trade in general and silk trade in particular. The Islamic empire separated into two major linguistic domains. While Arabic contained to be the official language of the western sphere, Persian became the lingua franca of the region much larger than the former Persian empires, including Central and South Asia. There were many regional states. While the Ghaznavids and Saljuks still sought legitimacy from the caliphate in Baghdad, Shi’ite regimes, such as the Buwayhid, Hamdianids, Qurmatians and Fatimids threatened the dominance of Sunni Orthodoxy. The Buwahids even claimed glory by establishing a link with ancient Iranian Kings.

During the ninth century a number of semi-autonomous Islamic states began to emerge in Central Asia. The Tahirids (AD 821-73) and Saphavids (AD 867-908) were quickly followed by the empire of the Samanids, a dynasty founded by the empire of the Samanids, a dynasty founded by an Iranian noble, Samon, from northern

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18 Mahapandita Rahula Sankrityayana, n-12, p. 151.
Afghanistan. Samon's four grandsons became governors of Herat, Samarkand, Ferghana and Tashkand. Nasr-ibn Ahmad, son of the Ferghana governor, eventually assumed control of all Transoxiana, Samanid territory reached its greatest extent during the reign of Nasr II ibn Ahmad (AD 914-43) from Tashkend (Chach) in the north and Ferghana in the northeast to Ray (South of Tehran) in the southwest.

Under Samanid rule the trade along the Silk Route, both east and west, became safe again and commerce flourished. Midway between Samarkand and Bukhara, the massive brick-built caravanserai at Rabat-I Malik attests to the high level of commercial activity along the Silk Road during the tenth and eleventh centuries. A list of trade goods compiled by the tenth century Arab geographer Mukadisi is provided. Rugs and prayer mats from Bukhara and Samarkand; woolen cloth and fine weavings; cotton, silk, soap, cosmetics; bows and other weapons; armour; horse-fittings; tents, food stuffs (including raisins, nuts, sesame and honey); livestock (including horses, sheep and cattle); hawks for hunting; gold, silver, sulphur and iron-all were exported to China and the West. The tens of thousands of Samanid coins found in Scandinavia and lesser numbers of the same that were unearthed in Central Europe, a testament to the commercial reach of the Silk Route traders of Central Asia. Silk cloth was the Silk Road's staple currency and patterned silks (known as Zandaniji) were more valuable than almost any other commodity. The "St. Josse Silk", produced in Khurashan around 960 for the Samanid amir Abu Mansur Bakhtgin, was formerly in the church of St. Josse sur Mer in the Pas de Calais. Its motifs are an extraordinary mix of styles from the countries of the Silk Route.

Samanids were burning Sunni Muslims and they embarked upon a concerted campaign to first convert and then provide military training to the region's Turkish tribesmen. These Turkish military slaves embraced Islam but retained their own traditions, language and culture. In 961 AD a Turkish slave-soldier named Alptigin, successfully engineered his own appointment as governor of Khurashan. He was

22 ibid., p.20.
23 Jonathan Tucker, n-5, p.216.
sharply divested of his post, however, and sought refuge in the town of Ghazni. After his death in 963 AD he was succeeded by another ex-slave named Sebuktgin, founder of the Ghaznavid Empire and regarded himself as a loyal vessel of the Samanids. To the north another Turkish dynasty, the Kharakhanids displaced the Karluks of the region east of Ferghana and established themselves at the town of Uzgen on the banks of a tributary of the Syr Darya. The first Turkish tribes to adopt Islam appear to have emerged in the area around Balasagun. During the tenth century their territories were extended eastwards as far as Kashgar where they established their capital under Satuk Boghra Khan. During their final years the Samanids were sandwiched precariously between the Ghaznavids and Kharakhanids. In 999 A.D. fighting erupted between the last Samanid ruler, Abd-al-Malik II and the Mahmud of Ghazni. Abd-al-Malik was defeated by Mahmud and the Samanids abandoned Khurasan to the victors. The Kharakhanid ruler Arslan Ilk Nasr grasped the opportunity and seized Bukhara and annexed the whole of Transoxiana. The fall of the Samanid dynasty marked the end of Persian domination of Central Asia. The Samanid empire was divided between the Ghaznavids and the Kharakhanids, both Turkish dynasties.

In 1006 A.D., while Mahmud was campaigning in India, Arslan invaded Khurasan and seized Balkh and Nishapur. Mahmud drove them out of Khurasan in 1008 A.D. and the Ghaznavids progressively enlarged their empire, by 1025 A.D. it extended as far as Iraq in the west and as the Ganges in the South. The same year Mahmud attacked the Kharakhanid ruler Alitigin and advanced briefly as far as Samarkand. The Ghaznavids were defeated by the Seljuks—another Turkish tribe who lived around the mouth of the Syr Darya River. After their defeat by the Seljuks in 1140 A.D., the Ghaznavids were expelled from Khurasan and confined to their domains in Northern India and Afghanistan. In 1055 A.D. the Seljuks entered in Baghdad, where the Abbasid caliph handed over control of all the Central Asia to them. The Seljuk Empire was expended east and west until it extended from the Mediterranean to the Oxus, in 1071, the Byzantine Emperor Romanus Diogenes was taken captive by the sultan Alp-Arslan. After Diogenes’s defeat the Seljuks

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established the Sultanate of “Rum” (i.e., ‘eastern Rome’) in present day Turkey, thereby laying the foundation for the emergence of the Ottoman Empire some two centuries later. After a short time they took over a large territory of Kharakhanids in Central Asia. In 1129 A.D, the Seljuk Empire fractured as a result of nepotism and feuds among the ruling clans. Sultan Sanjar the last ruler of Seljuks sustained the Seljuk Empire for a while, until 1141 A.D. when a new threat emerged in the shape of the Kharakhatai. It was a non-Muslim tribe of Mongolian descent. In about 1128 A.D. they entered Kashgaria with an army and attacked the Kharakhanids from the rear. Kharakhitai wrested town after town from the Muslims and the defeat of Sanjar gave them the great Silk Route cities of Samarkand and Bukhara. Later on Kharakhitais invaded Kharezm, by this the extents of their empire was Hami in China’s Xinjiang province and the Aral Sea.

Decline of the Seljuks gave a chance to the Khorezmshahs, the vassals of the Seljuks to build a new ruling territory. Khorezmshahs were Muslim Turks who saw themselves as defenders of the faith against the pagan Kharakhitai. During the region of Muhammad, the Khorezmian territories were expended to include to Ghurid lands in Afghanistan. It was inevitable that Shah Muhammad of Khorezm and Muhammad of Ghur would come to blows. The first battle occurred in 1204 A.D. and the Khorezmian ruler lost it. Later on, Khorezm territory came under the control of Mongol storm. However, the fanatical spread of Islam in Central Asia was one of the most critical factors of the decline of the Silk Route. During this period, the Buddhist civilization disappeared along the silk road and the most destructive element was the loss of Seridian art. Only those caves and monastries that had been swallowed by the sands centuries before were able to survive unmutilated by the followers of Islam. The entire Taklamakan region was thoroughly entrenched in Islam; Buddhist stupas and temples were either destroyed or left to crumble.

2.4 Spread of Islam in China

Coming of Islam in China was a major factor of the decline of the Silk Road. The advent of Islam in Western China via the Silk Route was a fascinated event.

26 ibid., p. 218.
27 Mahapandita Rahula Sankrityayana, n-12, p.229.
According to the records of the Tang dynasty, two embassies, once from Yezdgard, the grandson of Khosro and the other from the Roman Empire came to the court of Tai-Tsung, the second emperor of Tangs, both reported their defeat by the Arabs. Yezdgard, the last of Sassanian Kings of Iran, had sought refuge with the Turkish tribes of Farghana and had also sought friendship with emperor Tai Tsung whose capital was at Changan. The Chinese were at the height of their power, and had frontiers with the Persian Empire. In 650 A.D., Tai Tsung died and his son Emperor Kao Tsung received an appeal for help from Firuz, the son of Yezdgerd. Kao Tsung sent an emissary to Caliph Osman to plead for Firuz and the Caliph in return sent one of his generals to Xian in 651 AD and thus the first Muslim embassy was established in Western China.

At the time when Mohammad Bin Qasim landed in Sind, Kutaiba Bin Muslim was making advances in Central Asia. Emperor Hsuan Tsung of Tang dynasty sent 200,000 men under his nephew to stem the tide but he was defeated at the battle of Talas in 751 A.D. by Kutaiba Bin Muslim and many Chinese were taken prisoners. A more enduring consequence of the battle was that Chinese of Central Asia was lost for the next thousand years. A Turk named An Lu-Shan led a rebellion in China. Emperor Hsuan Tsung was driven from capital and he abdicated in favour of his son Tsu Tsung who appealed to the Arabs for help. Abu Jaffar, the 3rd Caliph sent 4,000 Arabs who recovered Xian and Honanfu for the emperor. These Arabian soldiers married and settled down in China and formed the nucleus of the naturalised Chinese Muslims in Western China.

As a result of contact with Muslims, many Chinese accepted Islam. The person responsible for converting the whole of South Xinjiang too Islam was the Satuk Bogra Khan of Karakhanid Kingdom. The advent of Islam, in Western China had a profound effect on trade along the silk routs.

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30 Jonathan, Tucker, n-5, p. 213.
31 Iqbal M. Shafi, n-29, p. 18.
2.5 The Collapse of the Mongol Empire

There was one unforeseen consequence of the rise of the marauders along the Silk Route, attracted by the riches passing through: some of the nomadic tribes became skilled warriors, able to conquer rich cities and fertile lands and forge strong military empires.

The collapse of the Mongol empire in the fifteenth-century led to a precipitous decline of the Silk Routes trade in Central Asia. The flourishing towns and oases sank into poverty, and nomadic empire such as the Mongol, could no longer match the advanced military technology (gun, rifles, cannons, etc). In fact Qing China and Tsarist Russia gained control over these regions and ruled what was by then a mostly Turkis Muslim population. By this, Central Asia and the Silk Route seemed to disappear from the historical stage.

The Mongol Empire in Chinese and in Central Asian history was created by Temochin, who later became famous as Chengiz Khan or “Universal Ruler” in 1206. The Mongols created an empire that ultimately included all of Mongolia, China, Korea, Russia, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Transoxiana, Syria and the Caucasus. They were purely nomadic tribes. The Kin dynasty was then ruling over North China, but even at that period, the Mongols were strong enough to merit the status of allies of the Chinese, and towards the end of the 12th century the Chinese government incited them against the Tatars. By 1206 A.D., Chengiz Khan defeated the Naimun tribe, killed their ruler Jamuka, and brought the whole of Mongolia under his sway. He now proclaimed himself King of Mongolia. Chengiz maintained strict discipline in his army. After some years of preparation, the Mongol army began to advance towards China. In 1215, after the fall of Peking, the whole of North China came under his control. Khwarizm was the first Islamic state in Central Asia to face the Mongols, Chengiz Khan sought to open trading relations with the Kharezmshahs. Envoys were sent to Muhammad in his capital at Kung Urgench with the following message:

“I am master of the rising sun while you rule those of the setting sun. Let us conclude a firm treaty of friendship and peace. Merchants and their caravans should

33 Erik Hildinger, n-24, p. 109.
come and go in both directions, carrying the valuable products and ordinary goods from my land to yours, just as they do from your land to mine".34

After some time, a trading caravan with Mongol envoys reached Central Asian city of Otrar. The local governor, a relative of the Shah, ignored their diplomatic status and ordered them all killed. This was a declaration of war. The conflict that followed drew the Mongols into Western Asia and generated the three great campaigns that over the next forty years led to the establishment of the Mongol Khanates in Central Asia, Persia and Russia.

Muhammad’s fragile and newly fledged empire, riven by hatred between its Iranian and Turkish peoples, was no match for the well-organized legions of Chengiz Khan. He launched his campaign against Khwarezm with a force of 150,000 to 200,000 men.35 Otrar was the first to fall. The hopeless governor Inal-Khan who had ordered the killing of the merchants was captured and tortured to death.

Next campaign was against Bukhara, this time by a force led by Chengiz himself. Most of the people fled the city and were spared but the some Turkish soldiers were spared but the some Turkish soldiers who defend the city were annihilated. Samarkand was attacked in 1220, again by an army led by the Chengiz Khan. In 1221, the Mongols captured the Khorezmian capital, Kunya Urgench and Chengiz occupied Balakh in the same year. Bamyan, Ghazni and hilly areas of Afghanistan were taken over by the Mongols in the trace of victory.

Mongols then advanced towards the Caucasus and attacked Georgia. Their next step was to invade Russia and by 1241 they had seized the southern area of Russia and advanced as far as Hungry, Poland and Romania.36 Also in 1241 Mongol troops under an army led by Batu Khan were at the gates of Vienna and the whole of Western Europe lay supine before them. Baghdad was attacked and destroyed in 1258

36 Mahapandita Rahula Sankrityayana, n-12, p-256.
by the army of Mongol Khan Hulagu. The last Abbasid caliph sewn into a sack and trampled to death by horses. Syria was next and many of its cities, including Aleppo and Damascus were sacked.

The limits of the Mongols westward expansion were reached in 1260 when they attacked Egypt. The Mongols were pushed out of Egypt and Syria. Hulagu settled himself in Persia as the Il-Khan and remained there without returning to Mongolia. So ended the last great Mongol campaign from Mongolia to Western Asia and Europe.

To the east, the Mongol advance continues. In 1259 A.D. Khubilai Khan Grandson of Chengiz Khan became the great khan and during his long rule (from 1259-1294), the Song rulers of China were defeated and entire country fell under Mongol control. Khubilai and his descendents, with their capital at Beijing, ruled China as the Yuan dynasty until 1368 A.D.

Under the reign of Chengiz Khan, all the country between Iran and Turan (the land of the Turks) enjoyed such peace that a man might have journeyed from the land of sunrise to the land of sunset with a golden platter upon his head without suffering the least violence from anyone. Crime -especially theft-was ruthlessly stamped out, anarchy and strife among the countries along the Silk Route came to an end. With their safety guaranted merchants practised their craft as never before. An interesting innovation of the Mongols was the use of the passport, known as Paizi. Post station were setup at intervals of about 40-50 km and travellers carrying paizi were able to traverse the empire unimpeded, a system which greatly faciliated trade and diplomatic contacts.

Among the many Europeans to travel the Silk Road at the time of Mongols were Marco Polo, Johannes Di Plano Carpini and William of Rubric. One, a French

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37 F.W. Mote, n-2, p.441.
woman named Paquette had accompanied her Russian husband who served the Khan as an architect. In fourteenth century, trade was so well developed that European merchants began to compile guides for travellers. Pegolotti, a mercantile agent in the employ of the powerful Bardi family of Florence, ever travelled to China. he was a gather of in formations and stories from travellers. Ibn Battuta setout in 1325 A.D. on a journey through Egypt, Iran, Central Asia and Northern India. After residing in Delhi for eight years he took a ship to China. Ibn Battuta regarded by both within and without the Islamic world, as one of the greatest traveler in history.

Merchandise from all the Mongol domains flowed into the Karakorum city. Excavations of graves in and around the site have unearthed large numbers of coins from the Arab world and China, fabrics from China and Persia, furs from Russia and Eastern Europe and slaves from every province of the Mongol Empire. In the arts, the forcible movement of peoples to serve the Mongols resulted in a wide dissemination of new styles and ideas. Islamic art was revitalized by influences from China that travelled westwards during the years of Pox Mongolia. The emergence of Persian miniature painting during the 14th century was undoubtly a result of patronage by II-Khans, who also encouraged the writing of poetry and historical literature.

The merchants from abroad, especially those belonging to the peoples allied to the Mongols had in every respect a privileged position in Mongol Empire. They were free of taxation, free to travel all over the country and received privileged treatment in the use of means of transport. The impoverishment of China began with the flow abroad of her metallic currency.

Trade along the ancient Silk Route was safe and good during the Mongol period. As a result of this imperial approval, a large number of people of different nationalities and creeds took part in the trade across Asia and settled in China. After the collapse of the Mongol empire, region came under control of Turkic Muslim. Yuan dynasty was finally replaced by the Ming dynasty in 1368. With the disintegration of the Mongol empire, the revival of Islam and the isolationist policies

40 ibid., p. 224.
41 Wolfram, Eberhard, n-3, p. 237.
of the Ming dynasty rose barriers again on the land route between East and West. The steady advance of Islam, temporarily halted by the Mongols continued until it formed a major force across Central Asia. The end of the Timurid Empire which succeeded after Mongols in Central Asia was one of a number of events that brought about the final decline of the Silk Route trade. After Ulugh Beg’s passing in 1449 the Timurid Empire finally disintegrated as town after town fell to the Uzbeks and the absence of centralized control in Central Asia meant that the safety of merchants along the trade routes could no longer be guaranteed. Caravans were forced to hire an armed escort, resulting in higher costs. All East-West trade was now compelled to pass through Ottoman Turks in 1453, bringing the Byzantine Empire to an end and bringing the eastern Mediterranean under Muslim control. All East-West trade was now compelled to pass through Ottoman territory and this resulted in an additional financial burden on merchants in the form of toll and taxes. By these factors the decline of the Silk Route was definite.

2.6 Opening of the Sea Route

The discovery of sea route from Europe to Asia in the late 15th century dealt a damaging blow to the Silk Route trade. It was easier and safer to transport goods by water than overland, where problems with 'tribal politics' between the different peoples along the route and with the intermediaries, all taking their cuts, took their toll. The European trading powers began to seek ways to evade the ottoman monopoly and to reduce these costs, ushering in an era of maritime exploration that transformed the way in which trade conducted during the coming centuries. The first voyages began during the early part of the 15th century, sponsored by Prince Henry "The Navigator" of Portugal, to seek ivory, gold and slaves. In 1498 A.D. Vasco-Da-Gama discovered the maritime route to India and in 1510 A.D. the Portuguese Goa, quickly followed in 1511 A.D. by the Malay port of Malacca-both becoming important bases for trade with the East. Under the newly founded Mughal Empire the Portuguese were granted trading rights and by the 1540 they were engaged in

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commerce with Thailand, Burma, Cambodia and Japan. For more than a century Portuguese dominated trade with Africa and India.

China was a maritime power during the Ming Empire in 15th Century. The Chinese state became directly involved in promoting and expanding China’s maritime activities. During the early years of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 A.D.) Chinese emperors launched a number of expeditions led by the Admiral Zheng He. He distinguished himself in a number of military posts and became a favorite of Emperor Yongle. Yongle restored China to a position of economic and military strength and selected Zheng to lead a series of maritime expeditions to unite the countries of South and Southeast Asia under Chinese hegemony. Zheng led seven different voyages under the Emperors Yongle and Xuande.44 First involved more than sixty ships-the largest 130 meters in length-carrying 27,00 men, in 1405 AD.45 The flotilla left Suzhou and travelled for two years explored the coastline of Vietnam, Java, Sumatra, Sri Lanka, Malacca and Southwestern India. Zheng’s forth expedition from 1413-15 was a round trip of 12,000 km stopping at Hormuz on the Persian Gulf.46 The fleet than sailed down the Arabian coast as far as Dholar and Aden and went on to explore the east coast of Africa. A part of the expedition made a detour by land to visit Mecca and Egypt. When this fleet return to China in 1415 they brought envoys from more than thirty countries to pay homage to the Chinese court and a rich cargo that included a giraffe.47 The final official expedition was sent after Chengzu’s death in 1431-143348 Zheng He died in 1433 and was buried at Nanjing, near the great shipyards where the ships were built.49 This final expedition all revisited the Persian Gulf, the east African coastline and although the voyages did not result in the establishment of permanent settlements in the places, which they visited.

These maritime expeditions of Zheng He sought to advance China’s commercial interests, his ships carried cargoes that included raw and embroidered

44 Jonathan Tucker, n-5, p.266.
45 ibid., p.266.
46 ibid., p.266.
47 ibid., p.266.
48 L. Boulnois, n-43, p. 615.
49 ibid., p.615.
silks, camphor, musk, pearls precious metals, rice, millet and beans.\textsuperscript{50} He returned to China with spices, gems, medicines, pigments and exotic animals—both as tribute and as the proceeds of barter with the countries along the route.\textsuperscript{51}

Further voyages were not sent towards west. Officials of the court objected that they were too expensive and produced nothing of value.\textsuperscript{52} The state ceased its building of the largest ships and there after built only smaller war and transport vessels needed for its coastal and inland water ways naval operations. Chinese merchants continued to trade but without official approval.

The Portuguese arrived on the cost of Southern China in 1557 and regarded with undisguised contempt by the Chinese. They established a trading part a Macau. The Portuguese controlled most of the maritime trade with the East from their bases at Goa and Macau. The Portuguese continued to dominate trade across the Indian Ocean. Chinese merchants also traded with the Dutch in Taiwan. The Portuguese continued to seek out other ports on the southeast coast and tried other devices for being granted to trade. They found a small peninsula on the southwest side of the estuary and there conducted trade fairs when their ships arrived, buying rich Chinese goods, mainly silk, to trade throughout the region or to take back to Europe.\textsuperscript{53}

The Dutch, the English, the Spanish and the other Europeans had joined the Portuguese in building mercantile empire in Asia after the and of the Ming dynasty.\textsuperscript{54} Long a participant in international maritime trade, China at this time experienced the consequences of the greatly enlarged patterns in world trade. The southern cost of China was visited during the eighteenth century by the British. England was the principal client of China at this time. She paid for her tea and silk in coins. Silk, like

\textsuperscript{50} L. Boulnois, n-43, p. 219.
\textsuperscript{51} Jonathan, Tucker, n-5, p. 267.
\textsuperscript{52} F.W. Mote, n-2, p. 615.
\textsuperscript{53} ibid., p. 722.
tea was a highly profitable cargo—a high value for a relatively low weight for England.55

2.7 Start of Maritime Trade Through Astrakhan

In 1554 A.D. Russians annexed Astrakhan from Ottoman Empire.56 This area was in dispute until 1569 when after an abortive campaign to region this lost the Ottoman Empire relinquished claims to Astrakhan. The port of Azov in Astrakhan was a centre of Venetian merchant activity.57 Azov was a major port on the Black Sea that had been trading site for European and Asian merchants for hundreds of years. The Astrakhan port open to European merchants drastically changed the dynamics of Persian trade. Ottoman Empire no longer had a strangle hold on Persia’s finances.

The road from the Persian land to Astrakhan leads through Julfa was the strong reason of the decline of the old Silk Route. From Tabriz there were two main trade routes for Silk in the sixteenth century. The eastern route through Khuy to Erzurum and the northern route through Julfa to Erzurum.58 Julfa gained an economic boom out of proportion to its earlier role in the scheme of the silk trade.

The Crimean port Azov in Astrakhan was frequented by European and Asian merchants during sixteenth century. And old silk route fell down because of tribal some activities in that region. Chinese and other Asian merchants selected the port of Astrakhan to trade with western world.

Throughout this period the cities of the Silk Route starved of revenue from land-based commerce, began to wither and die. The political powers along the Silk Route drew frontiers between themselves and became economically and culturally cut off from each other. Land route remained more or less in its original state, the same

55 L. Boulnois, n.43, p.218.
57 ibid., p. 229.
terrain of deserts and mountains that had been travelled by Marco Polo. Merchants, missionaries and diplomats followed its trails no longer. Up to the time of the First Ward War it was frequented only by short-distance caravans; trading between neighboring peoples.