CHAPTER – I

THE SILK ROUTE: HISTORY

The term “Silk Route” was first used by German geographer Ferdinand Von Richthofen in 19th century when he referred to an ancient trunk road crossing in Central Asia.1 This Great Silk Route, the first trans-continental trade and diplomatic road in the history of mankind connecting China and the Far East with Europe and India passed through Central Asia covering 6,400 kms. The Silk Route was a network of roads, which followed the wide and varied contacts between the peoples of the Mediterranean countries, Near and Middle East, Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent and East Asia. Silk Route included the so called “Oasis Route”, connecting caravan cities in the desert and semi-desert areas of Central Asia; the “Steppe Route”, the commercial route controlled by nomadic tribes who lived in the Eurasian steppe region extending to the north of the Oasis Route; and the “Southern Sea Route”, which linked the China Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean.

1.1. The Old Silk Route

There was no one Silk Route, but many routes, roads, and paths that headed in an east-west direction. Some routes were well developed and relatively free from bandits, while others were less protected and had fewer oasis towns which offered protection from the bandits. One route along the southern edge of the Takla Makan was quite risky, but it took lesser time to cross. Kashgar (Kashi) being the meeting point of the various roads of the Silk Route, became one of the most important trade centre of Central Asia. The main route was, the “Oasis Route” which was the most popular not only because of its historical significance in terms of East-West trade and cultural exchange, but also because it attracted people mainly because this route evolved through consistent human efforts, with countless people traveling along this route over thousands of years. The terminals of the Oasis Route were Changan (Xian) in the East and Rome in the West; and later on Luayang in the East and Byzantium

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The route crossed many hazardous regions such as the Takla Makan desert, the Tien Shan and Kunlun Shan, the Pamirs, the Karakum and Kyzylkum deserts, and the Hindu Kush. The Takla Makan dessert was called by the local people as "the Land of Death", or "the Land of Irrevocable Death". At the foot of steep mountains, there were oases of various sizes with streams and springs. Cities were constructed in the oases and protected by gates and walls, and these cities were surrounded by green trees, farmlands and orchards, with ponds possessing water and flower beds. Many travellers from various lands gathered in the oases to form markets and open air trading markets where they traded goods which they had brought from their respective localities. People of these oasis cities formed caravan and got engaged in the intermediate activities of the East–West trade.

The "Oasis Silk Route" along which people travelled from one oasis to another, is a gigantic landmark of human activity, in which natural dangers and perils for a distance of thousands of kilometers were overcome. This developed as a shortest trunk road between the East and the West passing through Central Asia. The 4,000 kms long section of the Oasis Silk Route that ran through East and West Turkistan was located in the heart of Asia. Earlier, people had to fight many natural hazards including vast deserts, snow covered hills swept by freezing winds, deep valleys with torrential mountain streams and steep cliffs. They were also terrified of evil spirits, bandit and highway robbers. There were four major areas that defied human access in Innermost Asia. They were Bailongdui (desert around Lop–Nor), the Takla Makan desert, the Pamirs and the steep cliffs in the upper reaches of the Indus. Through the Oasis Route was far more dangerous than the Steppe Route, yet so many people–kings, aristocrats, army generals, local governors, merchants, artisans, Buddhist monks, missionaries, scholars, exiles, musicians and dancers, artists, soldiers and refugees – choose the Oasis Route for their travel at the risk of their lives; because the Steppe Route was mostly occupied by nomadic tribes, prohibiting easy access, and lacked towns, markets and accommodation facilities. No water

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3 ibid., p.17.
4 ibid., p.17.
supply, food or other necessities for travel, entertainment or medical services were made available for caravans and travelers along the Steppe Route. The caravan city states along the Oasis Route maintained accommodation and market facilities for caravans and travelers.

The second important constituent of the Silk Route was the Steppe Route. It had been used by nomads when they moved from east to west or vice-versa. They used this route for securing fodder for their cattle. The Steppe Route originated from the migration of nomadic cattle raising tribes in the pre-historic age, and then these nomadic equestrian tribes developed the metal culture that commonly called Scytho-Sibarian style, disseminated to the East and West by way of this Steppe Route. This metal culture was diffused by the sixth to fourth centuries B.C. in the Kazakh plain, Altai mountains, the semi–plain in the upstream of the Yenisey in the Central Eurasian continent, as far as the Steppe regions in Southern Russia and the Donau river basin in the West and the semi–plain, semi- desert region in Mongolia and near the Great Wall of China in the east. The ancient nomadic equestrian tribes bore this metal culture and the Steppe Route through which it was spread.

The Steppe Route was not a road but it was a continuation of plains from east to west which served as an artery of traffic in Northern Eurasia. It was a convenient artery for nomadic equestrian tribes for migrating in any direction and to breed cattle or trade at various locations. The Steppe Route was itself a fertile pasturage and also a stage of military activities. It was virtually a huge economic and cultural pipeline through which not only products from both East and West were exchanged but also technology and information's from various parts of the world were brought to nomadic equestrian tribes in Central Asia. The migration of equestrian nomads living in Eurasia made possible by the Steppe route and this route served as a natural highway through which the life style of the nomads, animal patterns and gold culture were diffused in East and West directions. These nomadic groups (called Hu by the Chinese) conducted trade with neighboring regions from a very early period, including the purchase of silks, bronze mirrors and weapons from China; furs and

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gold from Siberia; nephrite jade and wool from East Turkistan, and horses from West Turkistan.

The opening of the Southern Sea Route made the third gigantic landmark of the Silk Route to connect the Orient and Occident both in terms of politics and culture. It was not only by way of Central Asia and the lands of the Parthian that silk came to Europe; it could also be purchased in certain distant ports in India. Southern Sea Route was discovered by the use of winds to help mariners along a route, and it was made possible by a Roman pilot who discovered the direct route across the Indian Ocean. Southern Sea Route started from the Southern coast of China in of Kuangchou (Canton), rounding the peninsula of Indo–China, through the Malacca Straits and up to the mouth of the Ganga. Archaeological excavations differentiates between the products which came from southern China by way of north–east India and those which came from northern China via the Central Asian route. Towards the end of the first century A.D., the bulk of silk imported by Mediterranean countries was carried by sea and not over the land route through Persia.6

1.2. Alignment of the Silk Route

The Great Silk Route spanned half the then known world. It started from Changan (literally, eternal peace)7 which is today’s Xian and was the capital of China during Chi, Han, Sui and Tang dynasties. Passing through Kansu, the principal route bifurcated at Anxi near Dun Huang. The northern route passed through well known oasis like Hami, Turfan, Urumqi and either went further west to Ili and to the area of Caspian Sea or trenched off south to Korla, Kucha, Aksu and Kashgar. It skirted round the Taklamakan desert (Tarim Basin) from the North. The southern route passed through Dun Huang, Niya, Keria, Khotan, Karghalik, Yarkand (Shache) and joined the northern route at Kashgar.8 There was another middle route which went west from Dun Huang through Yumen Pass (The Jade Gate), to Lop Nor going along the extended Great Wall to the ruined city Loulan from where it either went North

7 Marylin M. Rhie, n.23, p.6.
West to join the Northern route at Korla or South West to meet the Southern route at Jechiang (Shanshan).

The road again bifurcated from Kashgar which was the junction of the two principle routes. The western route continued over the Roof of the World (Pamirs) towards Samarkand, Balkh, Bukhara, Merv, Nissa through Parthia to the shores of the Mediterranean at Antiock and then on to Rome and Alexandria by ship. The southern route turned to Tashkurghan to cross the Karakoram pass and then on to the great Buddhist University of Taxila or to Gandhara. There were other routes also, the one from Khotan or Yarkand to Leh and on to Srinagar in Kashmir and the other over the Taghdumbash Pamirs, through Wakhan to Afghanistan and Iran.

1.3. **History of the Silk Fabric**

Sericulture or silk production has a long and colorful history unknown to most people. For centuries the West knew very little about silk and the people who made it. Pliny, the Roman historian, wrote in his Natural History in 70 BC "Silk was obtained by removing the down from the leaves with the help of water...". For more than two thousand years the Chinese kept the secret of silk altogether to themselves. In 8th century B.C., Lei-tsu, the queen of the legendary Chinese Emperor Huang-tî, invented the basic methods of weaving and embroidering with silk thread. Silk is the most fundamental elements of the tradition of Chinese civilization. Words like silkworm, mulberry and silk itself used many times ancient tents and in Chinese inscriptions. One another important fact is that the Chinese archaeologists found a silkwarm cocoon among objects dating from the Neolithic age; it gives the long back history of silk with the Chinese culture.

Producing silk is a lengthy process and demands constant close attention. To produce high quality silk, there are two conditions which need to be fulfilled - preventing the moth from hatching out and perfecting the diet on which the silkworms should feed. Chinese developed secret ways for both.

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9 Jonathan Tucker, n.6, p.12.
10 L. Boulnois, n-6, p. 59.
The idea of manufacturing silk came in the mind of Lei-tsu when she was closely watching a silk worm spin its thread. She discovered that how best to treat the silk worm and its thread and ensuring that the resultant tissue would surpass all the other materials of the orient. This discovery took place in the north of China in Shantung, this province is still a great producer of wild silk.

Confucius compiled the catalogues of the principal products of the various Chinese provinces during the reign of Emperor Yu of the fifth century B.C. in his book “Shu-Ching”, a collection of ancient documents relating to the history of China. The frontiers characteristics of China were like pre–Han period: the sea to the east, the Yang-tzu to the south, and to the west the immeasurable Kan-su stretching away to the lands of the barbarians. The tribute of Yu indicate that there were six provinces producing silk and it paid as tribute to the emperor, silk was to begin with exclusively for the use of the ruler. Silk was permitted only for the emperor, his close relations and the very highest of his dignitaries. Within the palace, the emperor is believed to have worn a robe of white silk; outside, he, his principal wife, and the heir to the throne wore yellow, the color of the earth.

More rapid methods of silk manufacturing began to exceed the demands of the aristocracy and silk came into ever more general use. Gradually the various classes of society began wearing tunics of silk, and silk came into more general use. As well as being used for clothing and decoration, silk was quite quickly put to industrial use by the Chinese. This was something which happened in the West only in modern times. Silk, indeed, rapidly became one of the principal elements of the Chinese economy. Silk was used for musical instruments, fishing-lines, bowstrings, bonds of all kinds, and even rag paper, the word’s first luxury paper. Eventually even the common people were able to wear garments of silk.

During the Han Dynasty, silk ceased to be a mere industrial material and became an absolute value in itself. Farmers paid their taxes in grain and silk. Silk began to be used for paying civil servants and rewarding subjects for outstanding

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services. Values were calculated in lengths of silk as they had been calculated in pounds of gold. Before long it was to become a currency used in trade with foreign countries. This use of silk continued during the Tang as well. It is possible that this added importance was the result of a major increase in production.

In spite of their secrecy, however, the Chinese were destined to lose their monopoly on silk production. Sericulture reached Korea around 200 BC, when waves of Chinese immigrants arrived there. Silk reached the West through a number of different channels. Shortly after AD 300, sericulture traveled westward and the cultivation of the silkworm was established in India.

From about the fourth century BC, the Greeks and Romans began talking of Seres, the Kingdom of Silk. Some historians believe the first Romans to set eyes upon the fabulous fabric were the legions of Marcus Licinius Crassus, Governor of Syria. At the fateful battle of Carrhae near the Euphrates River in 53 BC, the soldiers were so startled by the bright silken banners of the Parthian troops that they fled in panic. Within decades Chinese silks became widely worn by the rich and noble families of Rome. The Roman Emperor Heliogabalus (AD 218 - 222) wore nothing but silk. By 380 AD, Marcellinus Ammianus reported, "The use of silk which was once confined to the nobility has now spread to all classes without distinction, even to the lowest." The craving of silk continued to increase over the centuries. The price of silk was very high in Rome. The best Chinese bark (a particular kind of silk) cost as much as 300 denarii (a Roman soldier's salary for an entire year!). Many sources quote that Roman citizens' demand for imported silks was so great as to be damaging to the Roman economy.

1.4. The Great Silk Route: Formation and Development

The western end of the Silk Route appears to have developed earlier than the eastern end. The Persian empire controlled a large swathe of the Middle East, extending as far as the Indian kingdoms to the east. Trade between the different parts of the empire was already starting to influence the cultures of these regions when Alexander the Great conquered this area as far as Ferghana on the border of the modern-day Xinjiang region of China. Here, in 329 BC, he founded the city of Alexandria.
For the next three centuries, the Greeks remained in central Asia, always expanding eastward. In fact, the Greek historian Strabo, writing in the 1st century BC, stated that 'they extended their empire even as far as the Seres [China].' Some historians think that Euthydemus (r. 230-200 BC) of Bactria, which had been Persia's eastern-most province, may have led expeditions as far as Kashgar in Chinese Turkestan, resulting in the first official contacts between China and the West.

The process of the Silk Road formation towards the West started with a marital alliance. A princess of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E. - CE 220) sent to marry the Shanyu or ruler of a pastoral nomadic people known in the Chinese sources as the Hsiung-nu (the predecessors to the Huns) who tended their animals in the area of modern Mongolia and southern Siberia. This group, which needed trade with China, became increasingly bellicose when denied such commerce. Ecological crisis also could have prompted them to raid Chinese settlements to obtain the goods they required. The Han, which professed to be economically self sufficient, tried to limit commercial and diplomatic relations with these peoples, whom they perceived as "barbarians". Yet awareness of the threat posed by the Hsiung-nu cavalry and armies compelled the Chinese dynasty to seek peace. One of their tactics was martial alliances, and thus the dispatch of the Princess.

Despite the marital alliances, the Han–Hsiung nu remained fraught with conflict and Chinese denied badly needed trade to the pastoral nomads. Simultaneously, economic difficulties, on occasion, compelled the Hsiung-nu to raid Chinese border settlements. Deciding to seek assistance against its bellicose neighbours, around 139 B.C.E. the Han emperor of China, Wu-ti sent Chang-Chien to Central Asia to forge such an alliance.12 Chang traveled through the oases and towns that would eventually constitute the Silk Roads and reached Central Asia but was rebuffed in his efforts to secure allies. Chang mission was failed but learned quite a bit from his travels in which he spent around thirteen years. During this time he was captured and imprisoned by the Hsiung-nu. Chang escaped from the prison and was

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12 Richard C. Foltz, n.1, p.2.
imprisoned by them again on his way but finally he managed to return and offer his report to the emperor.

A historian has suggested that Chang’s mission was less an official embassy than “an intelligence mission staffed with expendable personnel”. Chang suggested to Wu-ti tempting opportunities for trade with western land. Within a few years Chinese merchants were regularly braving the difficult journey west through the Gansu corridor, around the Takla Makan desert, and into Central Asia. Trade seems to have thrived in next years. Wu-ti was particularly keen on obtaining horses from Ta–yuan, probably the Farghana Valley, which Chang had visited. The Chinese referred to these mounts as “heavenly horses”. The people of Ta–yuan were reluctant for these horses, however in 104 BCE the Han emperor sent his general Li Kuang–li as the head of a large army with instructions to acquire these horses by force. Supply was not sufficient so much army starved on route. But Wu-ti reinforced massively and finally succeeded in gaining the inhabitants of Ta–yuan to capitulate. Chinese managed to bring home only thirty “heavenly horses”, but the trade route had been definitively opened and its eastern part put under the control of Han Empire. Trans-Asian over land trade linked the West with China much earlier than Han times (silk has been found in Egypt from around 1000 BCE and in Europe from around 300 years later) but these Han efforts provided the long and dangerous Trans-continental journey as a single trip. Through this route silk and other high value goods were transported in contiguous stages under the control of various political and economic systems.

1.5. Silk Route Under the Han Empire (206BC – 200AD)

The development of Central Asian trade routes caused some problems for Han rulers in China. Bandits took advantage of the terrain to plunder trade caravans along

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14 Richard C. Foltz, n.10, p.3.
the Gansu Corridor. As a result, trade began to suffer great losses at the expense of merchants at either end of the route. Han rulers answered this threat by constructing forts and defensive walls along part of the route. These sections were later combined to form the 'Great Wall' which still stands today as a testament to human achievement. It became apparent to later Han rulers that in order to control the route, especially the Takla Makan region, a permanent local government had to be established. Once a local government in the Takla Makan region was secure, the growth of settlement along the routes really began to take off. Under the protection of the Han Empire, the settlements were able to reap the benefits of secure and reliable trade. They also absorbed a lot of the local culture, and the cultures that passed them by along the route.

During the Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), many settlements were set up along the Silk Route, mostly in oasis areas. The settlers profited from the passing trade, and also absorbed much of the local culture as well as the alien cultures they encountered through commerce. Local people undoubtedly acted as guides for the caravans over the most dangerous sections of the route.

The Han Empire set up the local government at Wutei, not far from Kuqa on the northern border of the Taklimakan, in order to protect the states in this area, which numbered about 50 at that time. At the same time the city of Gaochang was constructed in the Turfan basin. This city was developed into the center of the Huihe Kingdom; these peoples later became the Uygur minority of this region. Many settlements were set up along the way, mostly in the oasis areas, and profited from the passing trade. They also absorbed a lot of the local culture and the cultures that passed them by along the route. In 115 BC, Wudi sent the first Chinese embassy to Anxi (Persia), to the court of the Parthian King Mithridates II. Its aims were commercial and the Parthian sovereign having responded courteously. By the historians this mission started the trade relations between China and Persia and the latter purchasing of Chinese silk. Few years later the Parthian were able to dazzle the Ramans with their banners of embroidered silk which imparted from China.

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16 Jonathan Tucker, n.6, p.82.
In 104 B.C., 102 B.C. and 42 B.C., Han armies conducted campaigns across the Pamirs as far west as Sogdiana and Ferghana in Central Asia opening up the Silk Road even further. During the 42 BC campaign they laid siege to a walled settlement in Sogdiana, probably by the Talas River, this event described in the history of Han Empire. The defenders were Xiongnu but the settlement was protected by wooden railings, a structure favoured by the Romans which were unknown in the East till this event. The sinologist Homer Dubs (Dubs, 1957) explained that Xiongnu defenders were assisted by Roman soldiers and captives taken at the Battle of Carrhae and sent East as slaves. The Chinese were victorious and captured 145 of the Roman soldiers, these captives taken back to China as this was the first contact of China with the Romans.

The progress of commerce with the west was started mutually by the arrival of some foreigners at Xian and this was also the cause of foreign influence on the art. As China expanded its borders into Central Asia merchants and envoys started to arrive in China to swear allegiance to the Han court and to bring exotic goods as tribute. Chinese merchants joined many of the expeditions towards west and developed a process of trade and cultural interchange. The Han dynasty acquired technical innovations from neighbouring countries through the Silk Road. These innovations were critical in the development of Chinese civilization and absorbed via early trade and military contacts on the Silk Road. These innovations were harnesses, saddles and stirrups (from the Steppe nomads), construction methods for bridges and mountain roads, knowledge of medicinal plants and poisons and the cultivation of cotton and seafaring (from India).

Merchants frequently pretenced an emissaries to the Han court in order to ensure a favourable reception for their goods. During the reign of Chengdi (33-7 BC) all the delegations who had come to pay to tribute to the Han all belongs from merchants group of various places. From 73 AD onwards General Ban Chao (31-103

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17 ibid., p.82.
18 ibid., p.82.
AD) of Han emperor began the process of restoring Han rule in Central Asia. The various states of the Tarim Basin had submitted to Han rule till 91 AD. This was happened through a process achieved by Ban Chao at minimal expense and using of local troops. This enabled China to reoccupy its control of the Silk Road. Within same period he appointed “Protector General of the Western Region” and led an expedition across Central Asia as far as the Caspian Sea. Ban Chao dispatched an emissary called Gan Xing to Da Qin (Rome) in 97 AD. Gan Xing was deterred from continuing his journey and he preserved the lucrative role of the Parthians as middlemen in the Silk trade between China and Rome. The Romans refer repeatedly to China as the “land of Seres,” a country where silk was produced by combing it from trees, and the Chinese believed that the Romans were physically similar to the Chinese and they called the country ‘Great Qin’ after China.

The first century A.D. of Han rule was a period of growing trade between China and the West. Hou Han Shou (the Han historian) mentioned that the peasant colonies were founded in the fertile lands, inns and posts for changing horses were established along the main routes, messengers and couriers traveled in every season of the year and the merchant strangers knocked daily on our gates.

Trade and commerce of Han dynasty with its neighbours influenced the art. Predominating ideas from Steppe art, such as confronting animals or openwork narratives and landscapes are to be found on Chinese bronze belt plaques and harness fittings. These were absorbed via their trade with the Xiongnu. A silver box and a jade rhyton (drinking harm) found in tank reflect contacts with Western and Central Asia. When the region was absorbed into the Chinese empire in 111 BC, the new Han rulers of the South introduced Chinese culture and craftsmanship but indigenous styles were not entirely displaced. A lot of examples of Han dynasty art reveal contacts with the influences from the Southeast Asia and Central Asia. The naked Cherub appears on a liquer plate unearthed at the tomb of General Zhu Ran (d.249 AD) in Ma’anshan, Anhui province. This plate dates to the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 AD) an contains an inscription that suggests it was manufactured in Chengdu, Sichuan province. This

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20 Jonathan Tucker, n.6, p.83.
21 Xinru Liu, n.9, p.11.
motif occurs many times in Roman mosaic and on silver vessels and this is a fact that it has traveled so far with unchanged form.\textsuperscript{22} Such motifs reached China through the intermediary of nomadic art.\textsuperscript{23} New metallurgical techniques as granulation, loop in loop chains and an early form of cloisonné were acquired from the West via Chinese contact with the nomads during the Eastern Zhoa dynasty and perfected during the Qin and Han dynasties.\textsuperscript{24}

Artistic styles such as the carving of narrative scenes on stone and the production of stone sculpture in the round have no precedent in previous dynasties. Their origins may be traced to the sculpture and carved reliefs of the Greco-Roman world and of Assyria by a process of gradual dissemination along the Silk Road.\textsuperscript{25} This is also the case with the more naturalistic style of Han art. During the feudal societies of previous dynasties art was produced almost exclusively for ritual use, but during the affluent years of the Han dynasty it was created to beautify the home and the new qualities of dynamism, naturalism and the inclination must be due to ideas imported from the outer world.

1.6. Silk Route During the Tang Dynasty (618 AD – 207 AD)

The height of the importance of the Silk Road was during the Tang dynasty, with relative internal stability in China after the division of the earlier dynasties since the Han. The individual states has mostly been assimilated and the threats from marauding peoples was rather less. In the seventh century, the Chinese traveler Xuan Zhuang crossed the region on his way to obtain Buddhist scriptures from India. He followed the northern branch of the Silk Road round the Taklimakan on his outward journey, and he returned to the Tang capital at Xian via the southern route. He is still seen by the Chinese as an important influence in the development of Buddhism in

\textsuperscript{22} Jonathan Tucker, n.6, p.85.
\textsuperscript{24} ibid., p.49.
\textsuperscript{25} Jonathan Tucker, n.6, p.86.
China and his travels were dramatized by in the popular classic “Tales of a journey to the West”.26

While when the Silk Road was first established, silk was not the chief commodity. Han dynasty made very little profit from it until the Romans were fanatic about silk that the large profits came in. The Roams love silk so much that they even exchanged silk for its weight in gold. During the Tang dynasty, thirty percent of the trade on the Silk Road was comprised of silk.

The civilization and art of the Silk Road achieved its climax point in the Tang Dynasty. Xian, as the starting point of the route, as well as the capital of the dynasty developed into one of the largest and most cosmopolitan cities of the time. By 742 AD, the population had reached about two million and the city itself covered almost the same area as present day Xian, considerably more than within the present walls of the city.27 The 754 AD census showed that five thousand foreigners lived in the Xian, Turks, Iranians, Indians and others from along the Road, as well a Japanese, Koreans and Malayas from the east.28 In these foreigners many were missionaries, merchants and pilgrims but every other occupation was also represented. Rare plants, medicines, spiced and other goods from the west were to be found in the markets of the city. It is quite clear, however, despite the exotic imports, that the Chinese regarded all foreigners as barbarians; the gifts provided for the Emperors by foreign rulers were simply considered as tribute from vessel states.

Tang Emperors of China welcomed foreigners and foreign trade. A Persian merchant and a Central Asian dancer represented the travelers of this time. The Persian merchant, a Muslim can be used to indicate the spread of such religions as Islam, Zoroastrianism and Nestorianism throughout Asia along the Silk Roads.29

28 ibid., p.6 of 9.
Account based on the travels of such traders yield descriptions of the lively markets in the Central Asian towns and in the great Chinese capital of Xian, of the products exchanged, and of the condition of commerce. The Central Asian dancer, who can be visualized through the Tang tricolored ceramic figurines of foreign entertainers (examples of which may be found in almost any museum with a significant collection of Chinese art), to reveal cultural diffusion in the case of music and dance and to show activities of the court.

The Nestorians, persecuted by the Council of Ephesus in 432 A.D. fled eastward to Central Asia and from there to Xian via the Silk Road where their first Church was established in 638 A.D. during the Tang Dynasty. Nestorian books have been found in ancient oases like Turfan and Dun Huang. The advent of Islam in Western China via the Silk Road makes a fascinating study. According to Tang Dynasty records two embassies, one from Yezdgerd, the grandson of Khosro and the other from the Roman empire came to the court of Tai Tsung, the second Tang Emperor (627-650 A.D.) in 638 and 643 respectively and both reported their defeat by the Arabs. Yezdgerd, the last of Sassanian kings of Iran had sought refuge with the Turkish tribes of Ferghana and had also sought friendship with emperor Tai Tsung. The Chinese were at the height of their power and had frontiers with the Persian Empire. In 650, 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 A.D. and thus the first Muslim Embassy was established in Western China.

Contacts with China and the states of the Korean peninsula gained greater intensity at the beginning of the sixth century when Japan experienced a wave of immigration. The Japanese sent students, officials and Buddhist monks to China for training. The Japanese, Yellow and Eastern Seas became a continuation of the Great Silk Road. From the sixth century on, Japan’s path to the West began in Osaka the sea

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30 Iqbal M. Shafi, n.9, p.16.
31 ibid., p.16.
32 ibid., p.16.
33 ibid., p.17.
route to Japan. The two largest collection of silk fabrics in the world brought to Japan from China in the Tang epoch testified the importance of the Silk Road in Japanese Civilization. These are found in the monastery of Horyuji and in the imperial treasure-trove of Shosian (in the City of Nara).\(^{34}\)

The art and civilization of the Silk Route, in common with that of the rest of China achieved its greatest glory during the Tang Dynasty which is generally regarded as China’s ‘Golden Age’.\(^{35}\) At the same time, with the spreading of various religions in the world range, more and more missionaries reached to the east in succession by this road. 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 Tang dynasty fortunately experienced the best flourishing period of the silk road. During the long period of peace and stability which characterize this era, prosperity reigned throughout the empire. Its capital Chang-an, the ‘Rome of Asia’\(^{36}\) and point of departure for travelers using the Silk Road, was one of the most splendid and cosmopolitan city on the earth.

1.7. Spread of Buddhism Along the Silk Route

Besides silk, paper and other goods, the Silk Route carried another commodity which was equally significant in world history. Along with trade and migration this world’s oldest international highway was the vehicle which spread Buddhism through Central Asia. Buddhism came into China from India as early as the first century AD, and changed the face of Silk Road towns with monasteries and pagodas. The transmission was launched from north-western India to modern Pakistan, Afghanistan, Central Asia, Xinjiang, China, Korea and Japan. Buddhism not only affected the lives and cultures on those regions but also left us with a world of wonders in arts and literature. Buddhism’s influence was seen in the art of the era, as more artists began using the image of the Buddha in their work.

\(^{34}\) Kyotaro Nishikawa, n.2, p.25

\(^{35}\) Peter Hopkirk, Foreign Devils on the Silk Road: The Search for the Lost Cities and Treasurer of Chinese Central Asia, (Oxford University Press, John Murry, 1980), p.28

\(^{36}\) ibid., p.28-30.
It is not certain when Buddhism reached China, but with the Silk Road opened, missionaries and pilgrims began to travel between China, Central Asia and India. The record described that Chang Chien, on his return from Ta-hsia (Ferghana) in the 2nd century BC, heard of a country named Tien-Chu (India) and their Buddhist teaching. This is probably the first time a Chinese heard about Buddhism. A century later, a Buddhist community is recorded at the court of a Han prince. However the most famous story is the Han emperor Mingdi’s dream about Buddha. In 68 A.D., Mingdi sent his official Cai Yin to Central Asia to learn more about Buddhism after a vision of a golden figure appeared to him in a dream. The next morning he asked his ministers what the dream meant and was told that he had seen the Buddha - the god of the West. Cai Yin returned after 3 years in India and brought back with him not only the image of Buddha and Buddhist scriptures but also two Buddhist monks named She-mo-teng and Chu-fa-lan to preach in China. This was the first time that China had Buddhist monks and their ways of worship. A few years later, a Buddhist community was established in Loyang, the capital. From then on, the Buddhism grew continuously. In 148 A.D., a Parthian missionary, Shih-kao arrived China. He set up a Buddhist temple at Loyang and began the long work of the translation of Buddhist scriptures into the Chinese language. The work of scripture translation continued until the 8th century when the Arabs accessed to Central Asia and India.

During the 4th Century, Kumarajiva, a Buddhist from Central Asia organised the first translation bureau better than anything that had existed before in China. He and his team translated some 98 works from many languages into Chinese of which 52 survive and are included in the Buddhist literature. By around 514 A.D. there were 2 million Buddhists in China, Buddhism (Mahayan) in China reached its

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37 Marylin M.Rhie, n.23, p.6.
38 ‘Buddhism Introduced to China from the Silk Road’, (web on line) www.silk-road.com.
39 Xinru Liu, n.9, p.67.
highest point during the Sui and Tang dynasties (581-907 A.D.). Popular forms of Buddhism filtered down to ordinary folk.

While numerous pilgrims arrived China from the West, Chinese Buddhist pilgrims were sent to India during different times and the accounts which some of them have left of their travels in the Silk Road provide valuable evidence of the state of Buddhism in Central Asia and India from the 4th to the 7th centuries. Some of the more famous Chinese pilgrims were Fa-hian (399 to 414), Xuan-zang (629-645) and I.tsing (671-695). Buddhism produced a body of texts more vast than any other movement in human history, making the study of even one school a potentially lifelong task. In China today philosophy professors warn their students, “The serious study of Buddhism is a Blak Hole – if you enter, you will never re-emerge”. 42 Buddhist manuscripts and artwork continued to pour into China changing the look of the civilization as a whole. By 742 AD, the Changan had become an exotic metropolis, boasting a population of nearly two million, five thousand of which were foreigners from along the Road, as well as Japanese, Koreans, and Maylayas.

According to the records of Chinese monks both Hinayana and Mahayana forms of Buddhism were practiced in India around the seventh century. Mahayana Buddhism which incorporates the idea of many Buddhas and Bodhisatvas was established through the help of great monks, such as Nagarjuna, the two brothers Asanga and Vasubandhu and support from various excellent doctrines, including those of “Boddisatvas, Tathagata-Garbha and Sukhavati”. 43 The Mahayana or “Great Vehicle” first gained influence in Central Asian regions such as Khotan, before displacing the nikaya schools from the Silk Road altogether. 44 As one contemporary scholar has cautiously put it, “it is just possible that the popularisation of the Mahayana was a phenomenon which took place outside the Indian subcontinent, for

44 Richard C. Foltz, n.1, p.39.
reasons connected perhaps with the transmission of Buddhism to other cultures”. This was branch of the Great Silk Route which ran over the Karakorum Range to the Gandhara kingdom of the Kushans and on to India. Buddhism certainly had a strong effect on some other lives in the steppes. Grousset has pointed out that once a nomadic tribe adopted the Buddhist faith, they no longer possessed tough barbaric and soldierly qualities. Eventually they lost their nomadic identity and were absorbed by the civilized neighbors. While the Mongols were controlling the Silk Road, Kublai Khan clearly showed his preference for Buddhism even though most of the Mongol kingdoms converted to Islam. Along this long and treacherous highway came what Kipling calls a “river of life”, conveying exotic goods and new ideas about Buddhist Philosophy.

1.8. Kushan and the Silk Route

Under the rule of the Kushans, northwest India and adjoining regions participated both in seagoing trade and in commerce along the Silk Route to China. The period of the 1st century A.D. introduced a new era in the Indian history when Kushans, belonging to the Yuehchi tribe of China, migrated into India from Central Asia. The Yueh-chi appear to have begun their migration in about 165 B.C. and arrived in Bactria in about 140 B.C.; thus migrating over a distance of more than 4,000 km within a single generation. They extended their rule across Bactria and the Kabul region and during the first century A.D. into the Gandhara Kingdom with Panjab. Much of this was accomplished during the reign of Kujula-Kadphises (ca 30-80 A.D) thereby ending Parthian rule in the area. Kushanas conquered large parts of Central Asia. Kushan kings issued coins that initiated the style of the Sythians and Parthians who preceded them. Fascinatingly, some of these coins include depictions of the Roman Emperor, Augustus, with modifications made to the design for them.

In second century A.D. the Kushan King Kanishka I ruled an empire that extended from the Gangentic Plain of northern India to Sogdiana. He administered

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46 Jonathan Tucker, n.6, p.66.
from two capitals: Purushapura (now Peshawar) near the Khyber Pass, and Mathura in northern India. Under Kanishka's rule, at the height of the dynasty, Kushan controlled a large territory ranging from the Aral Sea through areas that include present-day Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan into northern India as far east as Benares and as far south as Sanchi. Kanishka was the greatest of all the Kushan rulers. His rule brought prosperity and security and led to an increase in trade throughout the region. Bactria was the original nucleus and center of the Kushan Kingdom.

The Great Silk Route, the first transcontinental trade and diplomatic road in the history of mankind was laid across the lands of the Kushans and the Parthians from China to the Mediterranean Roman empire. The principal trade route from India passed through Taxila, through the Khyber Pass to Bamiyan and across the Hindu Kush to Balkh. From Balkh, the highway led east along the Wakhan corridor and through the Pamirs to China or north to Termez and onward to Central Asia. Bamiyan was the approximate halfway point of an arduous journey across the country. At the eastern end of this part of the Silk Road is the Khyber pass, rising through the foothills of the Sulaiman Range from its starting point, about 16 km west of Peshawar. The 45 km long pass has provided access to India since the beginning of recorded history.47

It was in the empire of the great Kushan King Kanishka that the agents of Maes Titianus set out from the Stone Tower for the eastern deserts and the land of the Seres. Their way that they took war of the oases of the Tarim, and this was under the hands of Kushanas. The east part of this great Route was under the China. It was undoubtedly the ascendancy of these two powers over the many small states in their area enabled the caravans of this period to go about their business in peace and with a reasonable degree of security. There were garrisons everywhere. It was a highly favourable period for trade.

Three western oases fell within the sphere of influence of the Indo-Scythian Kingdom of the Kushans.48 The isolated Chinese garrisons got together with the local

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47 Jonathan Tucker, n.6, p.57.
48 L. Boulnois, n. 5, p. 67.
population and the representatives of the Kushans and formed a united front against the Huns in order to ensure the continuance of the trade. There existed an agreement between China and the empire of the Kushans that was why Pan-Ch'ao sent an ambassador to Rome and he with his whole suite crossed the Kushans territory from side to side with no trouble at all. Both empires needed to be on good terms with each-other: the Chinese wanted an ally against the Tibetans and the Huns while the Kushans were anticipating trouble with the Persians in the west.

History records that Kushans and Chinese had one serious disagreement: a rejected proposal of marriage. In A.D. 90 the king of Kushans sent an ambassador to the court of China to ask on behalf of his sovereign for the hand in marriage of a Chinese princess. This ambassador was stopped by the commander of the Western Territories, who had no intention of allowing the visitors to carry out such an audacious project.49 The Chinese could sell their silk either to the Persians or the Kushans; and the offer of marriage may well have been made in the hope of securing the monopoly of silk purchase and resale, which would have been a serious blow for the Persians. By refusing the Kushan offer, China expressed her wish for an alliance with Persia. After all Persia win in this struggle and got this profitable alliance with Chinese.

The Gandhara region at the core of the Kushan empire was home to a multiethnic society tolerant of religious differences. Desirable for its strategic location, with direct access to the overland silk routes and links to the ports on the Arabian Sea, Gandhara had suffered many conquests and had been ruled by the Mauryans, Alexander the Great (327/26–325/24 B.C.), his Indo-Greek successors (third–second centuries B.C.), and a combination of Scythians and Parthians (second–first centuries B.C.). The melding of peoples produced an eclectic culture, vividly expressed in the visual arts produced during the Kushan period. The Kushan King sent an embassy to Rome because China and Persia were made their trade agreement. The kingdom of Kushans was hoping to form an association with Rome, due to the differences between China and Kushans. Therefore Rome and Kushans came on common platform and engaged in direct trade.

49 ibid., p.67-68.
It was in the Kushan period that the peoples of the East began to appreciate as never before the benefits of cultural relations and contacts, and so they proceeded to evolve common cultural values and build up a community of culture for everyone inhabiting the great empire. A most important feature of these cultural and economical contacts which made through the Great Silk Route was that in the process of cooperation each culture retained its local tradition, original character and national identity.

1.9. Trade Along the Silk Route

The Silk Route did not exist for the sole purpose of trading silk. Although silk was most remarkable for Westerners, it was only one of many items that were traded throughout the history of the Silk Road. Gold, precious metals, ivory, precious stones, and glass went towards China, while firs, ceramics, gun powder, jade, bronze objects, lacquer, and iron went west. All of these items went overland by way of caravan which consisted of anywhere to 100 to 1000 camels. Such caravans were extremely valuable and vulnerable to bandits; as such they needed escorts and a secure place to camp each night.

To the countries of the West, China was synonymous with Silk hence the name Seres. However, the process of producing this precious commodity was kept a well guarded secret. It was known only to the master weavers at centres like Hangchow in East Central China.\(^50\) There are many stories as to how a Han princess, married to a prince of Khotan, smuggled silk worm eggs in her elaborate wedding head-dress and thus made Khotan a centre for Silk weaving which famous for its ‘Atlas’.\(^51\) Or the story as to how some Nestarian monk smuggled the silk worm, eggs to Byzantium by concealing these in their hollowed-out wooden staff. Earlier the Parathions had come to know of silk and when the material found its way to Rome it became the rage of the time not only with the ladies who found it soft and enticing but also with men who loved to wear silk togas. The fashion caught on to the extent that it adversely affected the Roman economy so much so that in early time. Tiberius banned

\(^{50}\) Xinru Liu, n.9. p.11.
\(^{51}\) Iqbal M.Shafi, n.27, p.15.
men from using silk. However, apart from silk, China also exported ivory and precious stones, textiles and furs, ceramics and lacquer, cinnamon bark and a variety of spices. These goods were bartered or sold in the various oases on the way, in Central Asian cities like Samarkand and Bukhara, in Parthian and then in the Mediterranean lands. Goods were eventually shipped to Rome and Alexandria.

The Parthian, Kushans as well as the Central Asian traders played the role of middlemen and reaped profits on the two-way traffic. The returning caravans brought mainly gold from Greek and Roman Empires, jewels and pearls from India, house and rubies from Balakhshan. According to the Historical annals of China, a caravan moved out of China every lunar month. Each camel carried about 140 kilograms of weight and walked 30 kilometers per day. Pack-animals were changed at regular staging posts along the 9000 miles long route but many of these perished each year either in the deserts or on the high passes en-route. There were many instances of mass migration of entire communities along the route. The migration of Yuezhi, founders of the Kushan Empire is famous. The origin of Roma is uncertain but there are linguistic similarities between the Romani language and some dialects of India. It appears that Roma originated in north western India and departed from their homeland in about the ninth century.

1.10. The Markets of Silk and Its supply in Eurasia

Silk weaving began in the early centuries A.D. in West Asia, but they were depend on China for the supply of silk yarn. The technology of breeding silk worms was introduced a few centuries later. In India silk yarn had made from species other than the mulberry silk worm in early time. From the fourth century A.D., many countries began to produce polycrome patterned silk, though the Chinese retained their monopoly on translucent and thin fabric. Chinese patterned silk remained desired commodities in various countries but products from the Central Asian states, Sassianid Persia, India and Byzantium also reached foreign markets. Chinese patterned silk textile products were traded among these countries as luxury goods.

52 Richard C. Foltz, n.1, p.7.
53 Jonathan Tucker, n-6, p.16-17.
54 ibid. p.19.
55 Xinru Liu, n-9, p.15.
because they differed in weaving technology and artistic design. These differences, stemming from the different cultural backgrounds of the producers made them exotic in foreign countries and added to their appeal as luxury goods. Silk transactions took the form of diplomatic gestures because its high transport costs and labour. Some special kinds of silk were reserved for very powerful and wealthy persons. Important silk market at that time were following:

1.10.1 China

Han-China tried to bar merchants from wearing embroidered and polychrome silk and this tradition of controlling the use and sale of luxury goods also followed by later Chinese rulers. The Northern Wei (AD 386-534) rulers tried to register all goldsmiths and other artisans, they ruled that whoever – whether a prince or a commoner-hired these artisans at his home exposed his whole family to a death sentence. A special category of these artisans under government control was referred to as the ‘Silk Weaving Households’.56 The royal manufacturers monopolized the production of certain kinds of polychrome silk in Tangs regime. All Chinese emperors used a large quantity of silk as gifts to foreigners for political reasons or in exchange for desirable foreign goods, they also tried to control its export. An edict of 714 forbade the sale to foreigners of the most exquisite silk products: polychrome patterned silks, damasks, gauzes, crepes, embroideries and other fine silk.57

The rulers tried to reserve certain luxury goods for themselves and the wealthy people also followed the style of elite. As long as the technology for producing the luxury silk was available, those allured by the possibility of high profits to make and sell fine silks. In the era of Shen-kui (AD 519-20), towards the end of the reign of the Northern Wei, the government tried to revive the sumptuary law that forbade merchants and artisans to wear gold and silver ornaments, as well as embroidery and polychrome patterned silk, but it could not enforce the law at all.58 There were so many centers of silk weaving that the government could not possibly control the

56 Wang Chung-Lo, History of the Wei, Chin and Northern and Southern Dynasties, (Shanghai: People's Publisher, 1979), p.536.
production and export of silk within the Tangs dynasty. A study of the silk samples found in Central Asia shows that it came from various parts of China. 59

It is not known when foreign silk entered into China, but it is clear that this lost the popularity of domestic silks. As early as the forth century AD, there is a record of women in the west frontier region, Ho-hsi, wearing a five coloured silk fabric made in foreign countries. 60 Later records show that the foreign produced silks that entered China were from the Central Asian countries, Persia, and Byzantium. These Chinese documents are dated mid fifth century. One important kind of foreign produced silk was Kucha polychrome patterned silk made in Turfan. This was referred to a specific kind of silk fabric which originating in Kucha. Another kind of Central Asian silk fabric, Zandaniji, woven in place near Bukhara around the seventh century was also found in Tunhung. 61

Envoys and traders presented the best foreign silk products to the emperor. From the 6th century, Sassanian polychrome silk became very famous, so that visitors from Central Asia and South Asia brought Persian silk as gifts or tribute to the Chinese court. The Hua state (an unidentified state in Central Asia) sent Persian silk along with a yellow lion and white sable fur in 520 AD. 62 Envoys from Khuttal and Kapisa offered Persian polycrome silk to a Tang emperor. 63 About the polychrome silk from the Roman empire has been mentioned in the biography of the late forth century Buddhist preacher, Kumarajiva. It is said that the king of Kucha honoured Kumarajiva with silk from the Roman empire. 64 It is hard to accept the early date of the fourth century for Roman or Byzantium silk appearing in Central Asia because the

59 Liu, Man-ch’un, Silk Trade Along the Silk Route from the Han to Tang, (Lan Chou: People’s Publisher, 1982), p.88.
silk from the Byzantine empire was known in China by the sixth century. In his famous book, "The Golden Peaches of Samarkand", Edward Schafer identifies a sample from Astana, Turfan, with its octagonal design (Ast. vii. 1.06, National Museum, New Delhi) as representing a Byzantium Greek Style.65

Some changes in Chinese silk weaving, both in technology and design introduced when the silk fabric imported from other countries. "From Han to Tang, the weaving technology of patterned silk first underwent a transition from wrap-faced compound tabby to wrap faced compound twill. While the wrap threads were still the carriers of patterned colours in compound twill weaving, the more complicated technology produced a more aesthetic effect than the simpler tabby weaving. The more fundamental transition in weaving technology was the change to weft faced compound twill. Weft faced technology was traditionally used for wool weaving in the West. When these countries developed silk weaving they naturally adopted this technology. Using weft-faced technology meant that weft threads were carriers of colours for designed patterns. The coloured weft threads were operated by hand and were thus more flexible in forming patterns than were the wrap threads which were fixed on the loom. This flexibility gave high - Tang silk a wider breadth, with larger and more elaborate patterns than that of previous periods".66

Many changes were taken place when Buddhism flourished in China. Foreign influence on designs made from the fifth century. Whereas auspicious animals such as the tiger, horse, deer and phoenix and other traditional Chinese sacred symbols dominated the designs on Han silk. After the Buddhist spread, auspicious objects from India such as the peacock, lion, elephant and Boddhi tree joined the menagerie of Chinese animals on textile design (e.g. Sinking Vighur Autonomous Region, Museum, 1972, pl.23, 26, 27).67 Central and Western Asian influence resulted in some designs showing stiff animals and plant motifs in contrast to the lively floating Han motifs. One example is a fifth or sixth century piece found in Astana with rows of

67 Xinru, Liu, n.9, p.18.
birds and sheep facing each other, separated by rows of trees.\textsuperscript{68} Iranian influence appears in the design of animal motifs in pearl roundels, where small circles form a larger circle with an animal motif inside.\textsuperscript{69} Weft-faced compound twill with typical Persian animal motifs and roundels had become very popular in China during the late seventh and the eighth century.

This kind of Chinese polychrome silks with foreign designs were produced for both foreign and domestic markets. Polychrome with Indian motifs were suitable for Buddhist pilgrims and Buddhist traders who carried that as donations westward to the land of Buddha. From the seventh century, Yang-Chou in South China specialized in making 'polychrome silk for the robs of foreigners'.\textsuperscript{70} Traditional ward-faced technology was still adequate for export purposes. Meanwhile, the Chinese elite built up their taste for imported silk. If there were not the genuine imported silk for Chinese requirement, elite persons bought domestic copies of silk. Enabled western technology for Tang artisans to not only make quite authentic foreign style silk, but to also absorb foreign traditions in weaving domestic style silks, thus producing silk with a high aesthetical value was the main special feature of Chinese silk.

\subsection*{1.10.2 Central Asia}

Silk trade started along the Central Asian routes in second century BC. People were suffered and benefited by this trade. Central Asian peoples were the earliest agents who transported silk products and transferred the technology of silk weaving and sericulture. However, these were not homogeneous or a stable population. While the sedentary communities with resided in oases along the trade routes were relatively stable, nomadic tribes and states were constantly on the move. Scythians, Hephthalites, various Turkic tribes and Arabs all controlled different parts of Central Asia after the retreat of Hsuing-nu. By this both nomadic and sedentary people were taken part in silk trade.

\textsuperscript{68} ibid., p.18.
\textsuperscript{69} Meister Michael, n.63, p.261, fig.26.
\textsuperscript{70} Liu Man-Ch'um, n.56, p.88.
Some painted bricks excavated from the tombs of Chia-yu Gate, a border region between the interior of China and Central Asia, depict scenes of people cultivating mulberry trees and taking care of cocoons.71 About a century later, literary sources referred to sericulture in the oasis states of Turfan and Argi.72 In Central Asian Kingdom used silk that did not endear them to their silk purchasing neighbours: capturing traders and commodities was not beneficial for long distance trade.

Its function as a medium of exchange, increased the flow of silk fabric into Central Asia. There was not any currency in politically unstable Central Asia like the copper coins of China. The flourishing trade along the silk routes required a common currency, and silk was the most popular thing so it was a parallel current to copper coins in China. Kharosthi documents dated to the late third or the early fourth century AD from Central Asia mention that silk fabric and garments were used as payment in transaction. The price of a woman was forty-one bolts of silk.73 A Buddhist monastery listed fines in bolts of silk for monks who broke its rules.74 As a monastery was a station for pilgrims and traders they preserved silk as their property. The practice of using bolts of silk was like the money in Central Asian region.

1.10.3 India

During the Gupta era, the silk industry from sericulture to weaving was well established. Mandasor silk weaving guild testifies to the prosperity of the trade.75 Kashmir endowed to develop a high tradition in uni and bi-voltine silk. Japanese authors have stated that the bi-voltine worm is the original race from which the univoltine evolved in colder climates and the multivoltines in warmer climates. The house of the original species should have been located in temperate climate and both the Indian Himalayan tracts as well as the South China zone could qualify for silk

71 Liu, Xinru, n.9, p.19.
72 ibid., p.19.
74 ibid., n.485, p.95.
worm (Bombyx-mori). Muga silk found in the eastern Himalayas, Nagaland, Assam, South Tripura and North Burma. Commercial exploitation is based on the semi domesticated worm in this region. The presence of this variety is also recorded in the valleys of Kumaon and Kamgra.\(^76\) Gold coloured muga, which was the most common in upper Assam. Chapa silk was reputed to be stronger and more pleasing then other, the name given to B. mori silk (China).\(^77\)

In eastern, central and south India, tasar is produced by A. mylitta; in Assam the worm was A.Frithii while in north-western India it is A.Sivalika. In the sub-Himalayan belt the A. Roylei pre-dominates. In China tasar is woven by the A. Pernyi.\(^78\) The tasar belt in India is divided into two, the tropical and temperate. Deccan plateau constitutes the home of the tropical tasar worm. Some of the tribal groups such as the Bhils of Bihar and Gonds of Madhya Pradesh, involved in tasar production. The temperate tasar tract extends from Jammu and Kashmir in the West to Manipur in the East, including Himachal Pradesh, the Kumaon and Garhwal divisions of Uttar Pradesh, Meghalaya and Nagaland.\(^79\) Eri silk was also famous in Indian markets.

Indians imported both silk textile and silk yarn from China, as India controlled part of the silk trade between China and Byzantium. Before the Byzantine acquired the knowledge of sericulture, their silk industry was heavily dependent on Chinese yarn, which they obtained through the Persians. The Persians in turn bought silk yarn from the Central Asians and Indians.\(^80\) If Persia had to buy silk from India, the Indians were obviously dealing in seric, i.e. Chinese silk yarn. Some of famous 'Cinamsuka' Indian silk used by the Indian elite and also exported to outside of India.

\(^77\) ibid., p.19.
\(^79\) ibid., p.56.
1.10.4 Persia

Persian merchants traveled to China from an early period. Sources suggest that the Persians began to weave polychrome silk in the fourth century A.D., but reliable literacy records and material evidence come only later in the Sassanian period. This silk woven with the golden thread was famous in east and west. Golden brocade trimmed with precious stones was the material of royal robes.

Silk samples which have been identified as Sassanian are often found in European churches and Egyptian tombs and some pieces from Central Asia. Sassanian silk clearly reached the territory of Byzantium and beyond. Sassanian silk fabrics were so popular that both westerners and easterners tried to copy them. They probably had to import some of the silk yarn for their looms from China. Trade with China via the land routes began in the second century BC, mainly through the trading posts in Sogdiana. As the Sassanians bought whole cargoes of Chinese silk from the Indians, they had an upper hand over Byzantium until the latter developed its own sericulture. By this trade Persia was a strong mediator between the China and Rome.

1.10.5 Byzantium

Around 150 BC the Hans who had brought Hioung–nou insurgency under control, proceeded to establish colonies in Central Asia. Increased access to silk led to significant development in Syrian weaving. The earliest examples of twill damask weave in silk are those of Syrian province dated to between the first and fourth centuries A.D.

Roman weavers developed the multiple heddle rod loom for weaving damask silk in eastern provinces in 250 AD. After the establishment of the Eastern Roman Empire at Byzantium in 330 AD, a silk industry was developed as imperial workshops. Later, Greece and Egypt, as part of the Byzantium Empire acquired the

82 ibid., p.1109.
silk industry on large scale. Till the time of Justinian’s reign (483–565), Byzantium depended on imported silk yarn.\textsuperscript{84} Competition with Persia for access to silk yarn was very stiff.

The silk industry in the Byzantium developed with new fashions in clothing. Silk textiles as an emblem of status became more and more elaborate in the period of Roman-Byzantium empire. During Justinian’s reign Byzantium started sericulture. Under the rule of Justin the private silk industry in the territory was virtually extinguished and the government monopoly on silks in purple and with gold embroidery became effective. Purple dye-houses and silk workshops became key government departments, occupying the same level as the imperial treasury and came under the administration of the minister of finance.\textsuperscript{85} The Romans used to be proud of their freedom to wear purple and silk according to their economic means. It is well known that Pliny blamed the drain of the Roman treasury on imported luxuries, including fine textiles such as cotton, silk, spices, paper and gem stones.\textsuperscript{86}

The historical Silk Route represents in history where people were forced to deal with cultural, national, and racial differences. Themes of cultural borrowing, interactions of civilizations, development of new economic institutions and technologies to facilitate commerce, together with the sheer excitement of travel and adventure conveyed through historical descriptions of the Silk Route. Silk was more valuable than Gold in early time, and Silk Route emerged as a boon for the people of China, Central Asia, India, Persia and Rome. As well as in Indian History Gupta era called “Golden age of India” same in Chinese History Tang’s age is depicted and that is only by the Silk Route and Silk production. Thus the Tang’s period shows by the historians as the golden age of the Silk Route.

\textsuperscript{85} Starensier, Actele La Barre, \textit{An Art Historical Study of the Byzantine Silk Industry}, (Columbia: Columbia University, 1982), p.76.
The Silk Route was an early example of political and cultural integration due to inter-regional trade. In its heyday, it sustained an international culture that brought together groups as diverse as the Magyars, Armenians and Chinese and encouraged them to integrate, and helped spread new products and, even more importantly, new ideas.