

Name: _____

Period: _____

Date: _____

Marco Polo and the Reopening of the Ancient Silk Road

Directions: Read about the Silk Road and answer the questions on the back.

The Silk Road

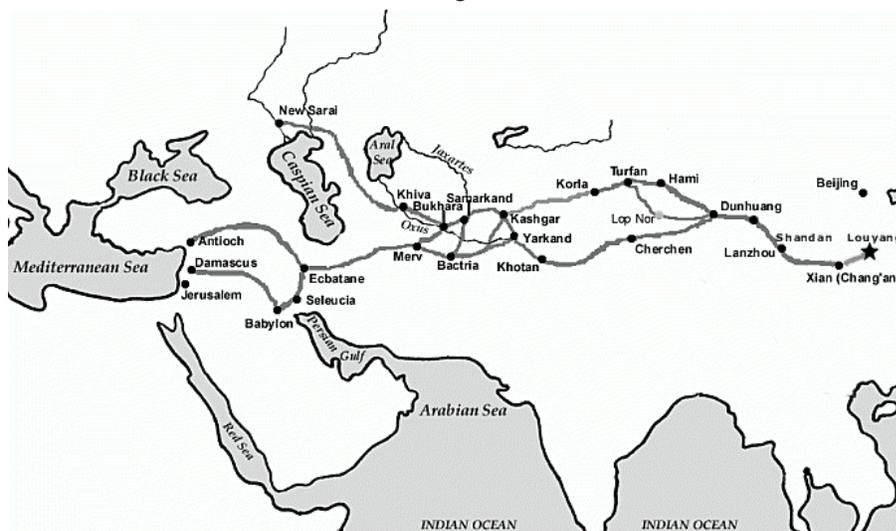
The Silk Road was not really just one road. There were many roads along the general route between China and Europe. These routes connected the East and West both geographically and culturally, allowing an exchange of goods and ideas between the two regions. One trade route went from the city of Changan, across Asia, westward across the Iranian plateau, and then on to the Mediterranean Sea. Another began at Changan, but then went south and then west toward the Mediterranean.

Traders and Merchants on the Overland Route

The Silk Road originated in the 2nd century B.C. during the Han Dynasty in China.

Emperor Wudi sent out a diplomat to the northwest frontier. When the diplomat returned, people became interested in his stories of lands to the west. People in Central Asia and Europe also learned of the silk and other products available in China. As a result, traders began to follow the Silk Road between China, India, and Rome.

People called the East-West trade routes the "Silk Road" because silk was one of the most important trade items that traveled along these routes. Many other items were carried along the Silk Road besides silk, including jade, horses, ivory, glass, spices, cotton, and incense. The people who traveled the Silk Road also shared ideas about science, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, warfare, and religion.



The Reopening of the Ancient Silk Road

The fall of the Han dynasty in about A.D. 220 caused trade along the Silk Road to decline. Trade increased during the Tang Dynasty and then fell again with end of the Tang Dynasty in the early 900s. When the Mongols gained power in China in the 13th century, travel along the Silk Road resumed, bringing frequent contact between Europe and China.

The Mongols welcomed travelers from Europe and encouraged the exchange of ideas and goods. People in Europe learned about Chinese inventions such as gunpowder, printing, and the compass. People in the West once again became interested in what China had to offer.

Marco Polo—A European Travels to China

One traveler along the Silk Road was instrumental in drawing interest in China. Marco Polo traveled from Venice, Italy, across Central Asia and China to Beijing.

Marco Polo left for China in 1271, when he was 17 years old. He stayed in China for almost 20 years, spending time in the court of Kublai Khan. Upon his return to Italy, Marco Polo wrote a book, called *The Description of the World*, about the time he spent in China. In the book, he described the wonders he saw all over China. He described the banquet held in Kublai Khan's palace with musicians, singers, dancers, elephants, and lions that entertained more than 6,000 guests. He wrote about the paper money merchants used, and about the straight, clean streets and the beautiful lakes, canals, and bridges. He also told how the people burned coal for fuel and used rice to make wine.

1. What is the Silk Road?

2. Which two continents did it connect?

3. When did overland traders first begin using the Silk Road?

4. Who was Marco Polo?

5. When did Marco Polo travel to China?

6. Why was the reopening of the ancient Silk Road significant?

7. In the box below, draw a picture to illustrate some of the goods and ideas that were traded on the Silk Road.

