

Silk Road Learning Adventure

Exploring the geography of China's ancient Silk Road: religion, trade, art and culture

Asst Prof Dr Steven A Martin

<https://www.stevenandrewmartin.com/silk-road/>

<https://www.stevenandrewmartin.com/pakistan/>

Objectives of today's class

To discover, develop and express your own ideas about China's ancient Silk Road in terms of physical, cultural and historical geographies. Intended outcomes include being able to demonstrate a broad understanding of the ancient Silk Road using archaeology and literature as a lens to better appreciate east-west cultural exchanges. Objectives are met as we grasp the context, extent and significance of the Silk Road in terms of commerce, religion, language and art across time.

Active learning experience: Map-making exercises – reconstructing an ancient landscape

Can we research the Silk Road through map-making? Starting with a base map of China, students draw and design personal Silk Road maps, locating and incorporating key geographical features, including mountains, rivers, deserts, and ancient and modern landmarks and cities. Together, we reconstruct the physical and human landscapes of the ancient Silk Road.

In-class teamwork project: Search, discover and present online resources

As independent mature-age students, how can we study the Silk Road? Students form small groups and discover and share online resources, including websites, archives, non-profit organizations, university programs, and videos. Each group chooses one online resource to present and defend: Why did you choose the resource and what is its value and applicability to Silk Road studies?

Self-direct learning and critical thinking – Take home assignment

(1) How did Buddhism change China and (2) how did China change Buddhism? (3) In what way is Chinese Buddhism different than Thai Buddhism?

Silk Road concepts in geographical context – Topics for discussion

Physical geography: (1) Natural environments – mountains, rivers, deserts, oases, landmarks; (2) Built environments – The Great Wall, desert outposts, garrisons, sanctuaries and grottoes.

Cultural Geography: (1) Peoples, religions (mainly Buddhism, Islam and Christianity), languages and literature; (2) Cultural centers, cities, homelands, territories, empires and civilizations.

Historical geography: (1) Great travelers on the Silk Road – religious pilgrims and sites (eastbound and westbound); (2) Great explorers of the Silk Road – traders, invaders, geographers and archaeologists.