

History 108 The Silk Road

Professor Ruth Mostern

**University of California, Merced
Spring 2010**

Meeting Time and Place:

- Lectures: Monday & Wednesday 10:00-11:15 COB 288

How to Reach Me:

- Office Hours: 3:00-5:00 Monday or by appointment, COB 379
- Email: rmostern@ucmerced.edu
- Phone: (209) 228-2961

Graduate Research Fellow

- Elana Gainor
- Email: egainor@ucmerced.edu

Course Website:

Available via UCMCROPS.

Course Description

This course covers immense geographical, temporal, and conceptual breadth. The Silk Road can refer to the steppelands that stretch across Eurasia from Hungary to the Pacific; or to the land and sea routes by which traders moved goods and ideas between Africa, Asia, and Europe; or even to the broader notion of cross-cultural exchange in the Old World. The Silk Road can refer to the entirety of human history, from hominid migrations to contemporary conflicts in Iran and Afghanistan.

However, the travel routes that constituted the Silk Road were limited and discrete. On land, Silk Road travelers traversed some of the world's most arid and high-altitude terrain. On sea, they were at the mercy of particular ocean currents, wind patterns, and safe harbors. Therefore, Silk Road geography is organized around particular mountain passes, desert oases, entrepôt cities, and ocean ports. Silk Road travelers exchanged goods—from pepper to porcelain to lapis lazuli—that were mined, harvested, or manufactured in distinct locales.

One characteristic of Silk Road history is that many travelers—Marco Polo is the best known—wrote narratives about their journeys or became the subjects of biographies. It is possible to reconstruct and trace the routes of Greek generals, Tibetan foot soldiers, Khotanese dancers, Chinese monks, and Persian sailors, and to study their experiences.

We will follow five themes through the semester:

- *The Centrality of Central Asia.* In most history classes that focus on some part of Eurasia, vast bureaucratic empires like China, Rome and Persia take center stage, while nomads and pastoralists remain at the periphery. What happens if we turn that around?
- *The Movement of Culture.* Most history classes approach culture as something specific to a civilization and investigate it based on domestic factors. What if significant beliefs about beauty, ethics, and the divine in fact came from thousands of miles away?
- *Commerce, Politics and Religion.* Silk Road merchants rested at monasteries, armies protected markets, and missionaries traveled with trade caravans. How did commerce, politics, and religion intersect?
- *The Meaning of Travel.* Silk Road travelers wrote about their journeys. Why were they so prolific? What were they trying to communicate, and to whom? Why did they travel in the first place? What can we learn from their accounts, and what should we mistrust about them?
- *Climate, Geography, and History.* As historical climates fluctuated, Central Asian pastoralists dependant on pasturage moved to new locations, sometimes displacing sedentary farmers and conquering their cities. In addition, routes and settlements could only exist where travel was safe and feasible. How do climate and geography influence history?

Course Goals

This class approaches Silk Road history through geography as well as through books and artworks. In particular, it focuses on active learning using a digital globe: Google Earth. You will learn to pan, zoom and tilt around the earth and rotate the globe to explore phenomena at any scale from a single building to the whole planet. You will learn to create spatially located points, lines, and polygons, import and overlay historical maps, associate text commentary and images with any of the features on the map, and make hyperlinks to external resources. Using Google Earth's spreadsheet import feature, you will create databases using other software and visualize them in Google Earth, and using Google Earth's timeline feature, you will animate spatial phenomena over time. Google Earth is an intuitive and useable tool, and you should be able to make sophisticated projects by the end of this semester.

Each Monday, you will discuss books and artworks, participate in lecture and discussion, and make presentations. Each Wednesday will be a research and design laboratory. Early in the semester, you will select one travel narrative of your choice to study in depth. Over the course of the semester, you will read the narrative carefully, create a database modeling the journey, events, and landmarks depicted in it, and determine the spatial coordinates of the relevant locations. You will research the context of your narrative, write a paper about your traveler, and

illustrate what you have learned using images. Finally, you will design and implement a Google Earth application organized around your narrative. Each week, you will learn the research and technology tools that you need for the next step.

This class is an experiment! Graduate Research Fellow Elana Gainor will observe and evaluate the research and design lab and work with you on your assignments. Elana and I will ask you to assess the class and provide feedback throughout the semester. We expect you to be honest and critical, and we will make adjustments based on what we learn about it.

Student Learning Outcomes

In this course, you will read and discuss works of Silk Road history. You will also conduct original research and design digital maps. By the end of the semester, you will be able to:

- Describe how Silk Road travelers represented routes and places according to particular historical and cultural circumstances.
- Communicate about historical phenomena using integrated images, digital maps, digital timelines, text, and hyperlinks.
- Explain how long-distance Eurasian movements of microbes, people, ideas, goods, and population shaped world history.

Required Texts

The following three required texts are available for purchase:

- Christopher Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) [ISBN 978-0691135892]
- Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Exchange from Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000) [978-0312233389]
- Liu Xinru, *The Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Interaction in Eurasia* (Washington: American Historical Association, 1998) [0-87229-106-5]

The following required text is available for download through the UC Merced Library:

- David Crowder, *Google Earth for Dummies* (For Dummies, 2007) [978-0470095287]

Additional required material is available for download or by hyperlink from the Resources section of the course website.

Participation

You are expected to complete assigned readings and homework prior to class, attend class, and participate actively in discussions, lab exercises, and other class work. Frequent absences without an approved excuse will seriously impact your course grade.

Grading

65% of your grade in the course will be determined by your final project, and 35% of your grade will be determined based on other work. The due dates and grade breakdown are as follows:

Final Project: Total 65%	Other Graded Work: Total 35%
<i>February 17:</i> Topic Statement—ungraded	<i>February 3:</i> Map Quiz—5%
<i>March 3:</i> Bibliography and abstract—5%	<i>February 24:</i> Midterm Paper—15%
<i>March 17:</i> Gazetteer and timeline—5%	<i>All Semester:</i> Participation—15%
<i>April 7:</i> Episodes—10%	
<i>April 21:</i> Ten page paper—15%	
<i>May 12:</i> Final Project—30%	

Additional information about formats, grading standards and requirements will be distributed closer to the due date of each assignment.

Barring illness or emergency, your grade on late assignments will be reduced one-third of a grade per day late (e.g. an A will become an A-, then a B+, then a B).

Special Needs

Students with disabilities who may need accommodations, please see me the first day of class. You may also email me or contact me during office hours. Please contact the Disability Services Center, disability.ucmerced.edu, for more information.

Student Advising

The Student Advising and Learning Center (SALC) provides advising and tutoring, including workshops in time management and study skills. For more information, visit learning.ucmerced.edu.

Academic Honesty

There is an excellent handbook about original work, citation standards, and other guidelines to academic practices at www.library.ucla.edu/b Bruinsuccess/. Plagiarism is not always easy to define, and not all cases are clear-cut. If you have any questions about a particular instance, please contact your teaching assistant or me before you submit a paper.

Serious instances of plagiarism, such as submitting an essay obtained from an online paper mill, or copying any work without attribution, will be addressed in accordance with university guidelines. Minor variants of plagiarism will result in an initial caution without immediate consequence for a grade. You are expected to know and abide by the UC Merced Academic

Honesty policy, available online at <http://studentlife.ucmerced.edu/what-we-do/student-judicial-affairs/academicy-honesty-policy>.

Wikipedia and other web resources without identifiable authorship can be fantastic learning aids, but they must be used with care. Wikipedia and other unauthored websites must always be corroborated using other sources. Quoting from websites without attribution is a serious plagiarism violation, and it is easy to spot. For more information about evaluating web resources, see www.lib.umd.edu/guides/evaluate.html.

Course Outline and Weekly Schedule (Possible Additional Readings TBA, Lab Topics Provisional)

Week 1: Introduction to the Course

January 20	Introduction
------------	--------------

Week 2: The Silk Road and its Geography

January 25	The Silk Road and Its Geography
January 27	Introduction to Google Earth and Spatial History Tools and Exemplars
Homework	• Liu Xinru, <i>The Silk Road</i>, Chapter 1-2 [course text] • <i>The Silk Road: Two Thousand Years in the Heart of Asia</i>, “Coiled Dragons and Filmy Fleeces: Jade and Silk” [CROPS] • <i>Pathfinders</i>, “Stirrings: Landward Explorations in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages” [CROPS] • Lab Preparation TBA

Week 3: What is the Silk Road?

February 1	What is the Silk Road?
February 3	Research and Design Lab: Researching the Silk Road (Library Presentation)
Homework	• Liu Xinru, <i>The Silk Road</i>, Chapter 3-4 [course text] • Foltz, <i>Religions of the Silk Road</i>, Chapter 1 [course text] • <i>Along the Silk Road</i>, “Fashioned from Fiber,” “Astrology and a Japanese Star Mandala,” “Traveling Technologies” [CROPS] • Lab Preparation TBA

Map Quiz February 3 in class

Week 4: The Bronze Age: The Chariot Era

February 8	Horse Domestication and the Indo-European Migrations
February 10	Research and Design Lab: Google Earth Tools
Homework	• Beckwith, <i>Empires of the Silk Road</i>, Chapter 1 [course text] • Lab Preparation TBA

Week 5: NO CLASS

February 15	President’s Day
February 17	Instructor Out of Town
Homework	• James Clifford, <i>Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth</i>

	<i>Century</i> , excerpts TBA [CROPS] Mary Louise Pratt, <i>Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation</i>, excerpts TBA [CROPS]
--	--

Topic Statement Due February 17 in CROPS Dropbox

Week 6: The Creation of the Silk Road: Scythians and their Neighbors

February 22	The First Steppe Kingdoms
February 24	Research and Design Lab: WordPress
Homework	- Beckwith, <i>Empires of the Silk Road</i>, Chapter 2 [course text] - Foltz, <i>Religions of the Silk Road</i>, Chapter 2 [course text] - Lab Preparation TBA

Midterm Paper Due February 24

Week 7: The Han and Roman Silk Road

March 1	The Silk Road in the Age of Empire
March 3	Research and Design Lab: Developing a Historical Gazetteer
Homework	- Beckwith, <i>Empires of the Silk Road</i>, Chapter 3 [course text] - Lab Preparation TBA

Bibliography and Abstract Due March 3

Week 8: The Buddhist Silk Road

March 8	The Buddhist Silk Road
March 10	Research and Design Lab: Georeferencing
Homework	- Beckwith, <i>Empires of the Silk Road</i>, Chapter 4 and 5 [course text] - Foltz, <i>Religions of the Silk Road</i>, Chapter 3 [course text] - Lab Preparation TBA

Week 9: Turks and Tibetans, Nestorians and Manicheans

March 15	The Cosmopolitan Silk Road
March 17	Research and Design Lab: Importing a Gazetteer into Google Earth
Homework	- Foltz, <i>Religions of the Silk Road</i>, Chapter 4 [course text] - Beckwith, <i>Empires of the Silk Road</i>, Chapter 6 [course text] <i>Life Along the Silk Road</i>, "The Merchant's Tale" [CROPS] - Lab Preparation TBA

Gazetteer and Timeline Due March 17

Spring Break March 22-26

Week 10: Silk Road Revolutions and the Rise of Islam

March 29	What Happened in the Eighth Century?
April 1	Research and Design Lab: History Engine
Homework	• Beckwith, <i>Empires of the Silk Road</i>, Chapter 7 [course text] • Foltz, <i>Religions of the Silk Road</i>, Chapter 5 [course text] • Lab Preparation TBA

Week 11: The Mongol Silk Road I

April 5	<i>Pax Mongolica?</i>
April 7	Research and Design Lab: Working with Timelines in Google Earth
Homework	• Beckwith, <i>Empires of the Silk Road</i>, Chapter 8 [course text] • Foltz, <i>Religions of the Silk Road</i>, Chapter 6 • Lab Preparation TBA

Episodes Due April 7

Week 12: The Third Age of Empire in Central Asia

April 12	The End of the Mongol Era and the Origins of Europe
April 14	Research and Design Lab: Putting it All Together
Homework	• Beckwith, <i>Empires of the Silk Road</i>, Chapter 9 [course text] • Lab Preparation TBA

Week 13: The Silk Road Shuts Down

April 19	The Partition of Central Asia and the Rise of the Sea Lanes
April 21	Research and Design Lab: Troubleshooting Workshop
Homework	• Beckwith, <i>Empires of the Silk Road</i>, Chapter 10 [course text] • Foltz, <i>Religions of the Silk Road</i>, Chapter 7 [course text] • Lab Preparation TBA

Ten Page Paper Due April 21

Week 14: Foreign Devils on the Silk Road

April 26	The “Great Game” Era
April 28	Research and Design Lab: Putting it All Together
Homework	• Beckwith, <i>Empires of the Silk Road</i>, Chapter 11 [course text] • Lab Preparation TBA

Week 15: The Silk Road Today

May 3	What’s Next for Central Asia?
May 5	Research and Design Lab: Presentations
Homework	• Beckwith, <i>Empires of the Silk Road</i>, Chapter 12 [course text]

Final Projects Due May 12. Possible Public Demonstration TBA
--