

SILK ROAD

THE SILK-ROAD
UNIVERSITIES NETWORK'S
WEB MAGAZINE

VOL.7 NO.1
JUNE 2025



**SILK-ROAD
UNIVERSITIES
NETWORK**



COVER STORY

**The Role of Silk Roads on Migration
& Globalization**

SPECIAL FEATURE

**SIUT Rector Stresses Cross-border
Academic Cooperation**

SILKROADIA

Biannual webzine of the Silk-Road Universities Network (SUN) -
a non-governmental, non-profit international organization

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Shi-yong Chon

SUN to Celebrate Milestone Year in the Heart of the Silk Roads

- Samarkand to Host 10th SUN Assembly and 9th IASS Conference
- Cover Story Explores Silk Roads in Migration and Globalization

Recent global events—ranging from restrictive immigration policies under U.S. President Donald Trump to ongoing refugee crises—have brought heightened awareness to the humanitarian and ethical dimensions of migration. Particularly striking was the Trump administration’s attempt to expel international students from institutions like Harvard University, a symbol of academic excel-

lence coveted by students worldwide. These developments have shaken global academic communities.

In stark contrast, the ancient Silk Roads were once thriving corridors not only for trade in silk and spices but also for the movement of people, ideas, religions, and technologies. These routes symbolize diversity, inclusivity, coexistence, and shared prosperity. It is in this spirit that the editorial team of ***SILKROADIA*** selected “The Role of the Silk Roads in Migration and Globalization” as the theme of this edition’s Cover Story section—offering timely reflections on how these ancient pathways continue to inspire modern interconnectedness.

Exploring the Impact of Silk Roads on Migration and Globalization

The Cover Story section features three insightful articles contributed by scholars from SUN member universities. These pieces shed light on how the Silk Roads shaped—and continue to influence—patterns of migration and global exchange.

Cover Story I, co-authored by Dr. Ronald

Steiner, Professor of Political Science at Chapman University (U.S.), and his student Ms. Katerina Vlahopoulitis, traces the profound historical role of the Silk Roads in facilitating migration and cultural globalization. Describing them as the world's "first great highways of migration, cultural exchange, and globalization," their article indicates the enduring relevance of SUN's mission to revive and reinterpret the legacy of the Silk Roads.

In **Cover Story II**, Dr. Lorenzo Pubblici of the University of Naples – L'Orientale offers another compelling perspective. His article argues that the Silk Road routes laid the foundations for modern globalization, shaping contemporary trade, diplomacy, and intercultural connections. He further explores the trade of enslaved peoples and the influence of various religions—including Buddhism, Islam, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Nestorianism—along these routes.

The **Cover Story III** contribution comes from Dr. Nu Nguyet Anh Nguyen, Dean of the Faculty of Sociology at the University

of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, and Vice Dean Dr. Xuan Anh Nguyen. Titled “*From Silk Roads to Migration Routes: Vietnamese Workers in the Global Supply Chains*,” the article traces both the historical and current migration patterns of Vietnamese workers. The authors eloquently describe how “modern migration journeys are ‘weaving’ the globalized roads of the 21st century,” drawing a powerful parallel with the legacy of the Silk Roads.

SUN Expands Its Global Network

SUN’s reach continues to grow. At the 9th General Assembly held in Naples, Italy, last November, SUN welcomed five new member universities, including institutions from countries previously unrepresented within the network. These new members are: University of Donja Gorica (UDG) in Montenegro; University of Abou Bekr Belkaïd – Tlemcen, Ferhat Abbas University Sétif 1, University of Science and Technology Houari Boumediene (USTHB) in Algeria; and Mu’tah Universi-

ty in Jordan (SUN's second member from the Middle East country)

This expansion reflects SUN's commitment to building a truly global and inclusive academic network.

Celebrating SUN's 10th Anniversary in Samarkand

SUN's 10th anniversary will be celebrated in Samarkand, a city rich in Silk Road heritage, from September 29 to October 3. The 10th General Assembly and the 9th IASS Conference will be held jointly, co-hosted by SUN and Canadian University Dubai (SUN's chair university), in collaboration with three local member institutions: Samarkand International University of Technology, Silk Road International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage, and Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages.

This year's theme is both timely and forward-looking:

“Use of Technologies for Peaceful and Sustainable Tourism along the Silk Roads in the Era of Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, and Cyber Security: Challenges and

Opportunities for Universities.”

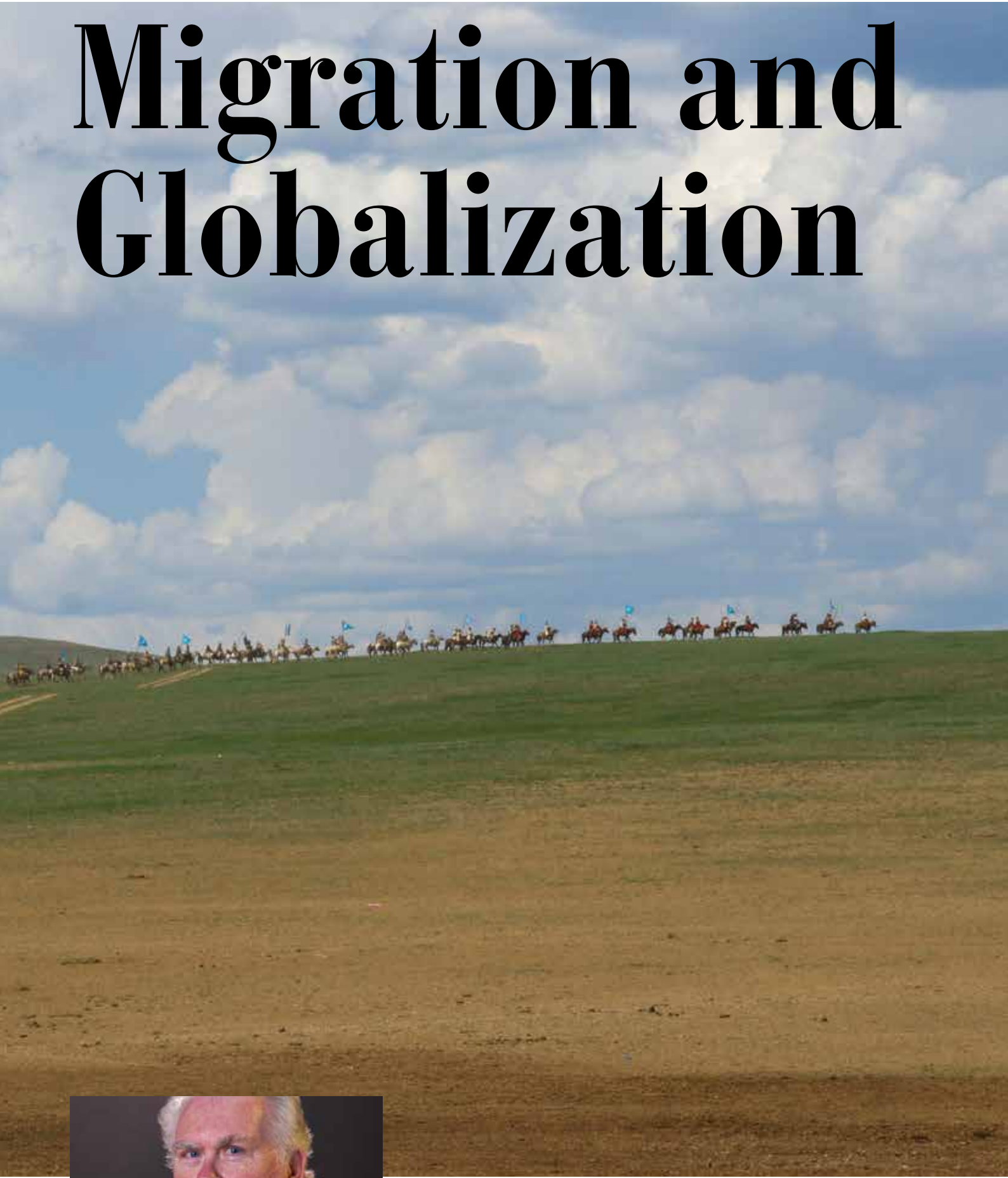
The theme highlights the transformative role that emerging technologies—AI, big data, and cybersecurity—can play in fostering sustainable and peaceful tourism along the Silk Roads. It also underscores the responsibility of universities to innovate, safeguard cultural heritage, and promote regional cooperation in the digital age.

For the first time, a series of interactive Roundtable Forums will be introduced, focusing on four key areas: Cultural Heritage Forum, Joint Research Collaboration Forum, Climate and Environmental Studies Forum, and Silk Road Language & Literature Forum.

These forums aim to nurture collaboration across institutions, spark cross-border research initiatives, and deepen academic exchange among faculty and students alike.

SUN’s upcoming programs in Samarkand reflect its evolving vision for a vibrant and meaningful future. **SILKROADIA** eagerly looks forward to celebrating this milestone with faculty and students from across our global network.

The Role of Silk Roads in Migration and Globalization



Dr. Ronald Steiner

Photo by Euihwan Cho



Katerina Vlahopouliotis

“The Silk Road was one of the least traveled routes in human history.”

This provocative observation by the noted Silk Road expert Prof. Valerie Hansen might disappoint fans of the romantic image of intrepid adventurers leading caravans on months or years long treks halfway across the world. But her larger point is equally provocative. The actual trade consisted of journeys within large but still limited regions, with goods passed along through a series of local merchants and middlemen. The international Silk Road trade actually was more local and conducted by regional networks of merchants, warriors, and pilgrims. Furthermore, the Silk Road was never a single, fixed road or maritime line, but rather a fluid network of paths and routes. And, of course, the “Silk Road” always was about far more than silk and other material goods. “[I]n the final analysis, the most historically important ‘commodities’ carried along these routes were ideas and culture

and not goods” (Andrea). The Silk Road’s historical importance was in the transmission of ideas, religions, and technologies, carried as much by refugees and migrants as by traders and merchants.

In fact one of the most important contributions of the Silk Roads was its facilitation in the spreading of religions, accomplished more by migration of peoples than by trade in goods. Buddhism, originated in India, was able to spread from its home country to China to other parts of Asia as well, exemplifying the influence the Silk Roads had over shaping local cultures and societies. In a similar way, Islam spread from the Arabian peninsula to Central Asia and beyond, further shaping identities along the Silk Roads. This spread of religions across various regions also meant that diverse religious practices coexisted amongst one another, such as Zoroastrianism, and even early Christianity.

While scholars contend that there is little evidence for the controversial theory that Jesus actually studied Buddhism or traveled to India, the well documented 1st century journey of Maes Titianus

from Syria to India and beyond shows that people of that time and place could and did make that trip. More importantly, evidence shows people in the Middle East could have been familiar with Buddhist concepts. “Historical evidence indicates that Jesus knew about Buddhism, simply because both he and it were in Judea during the same time” (Hanson).

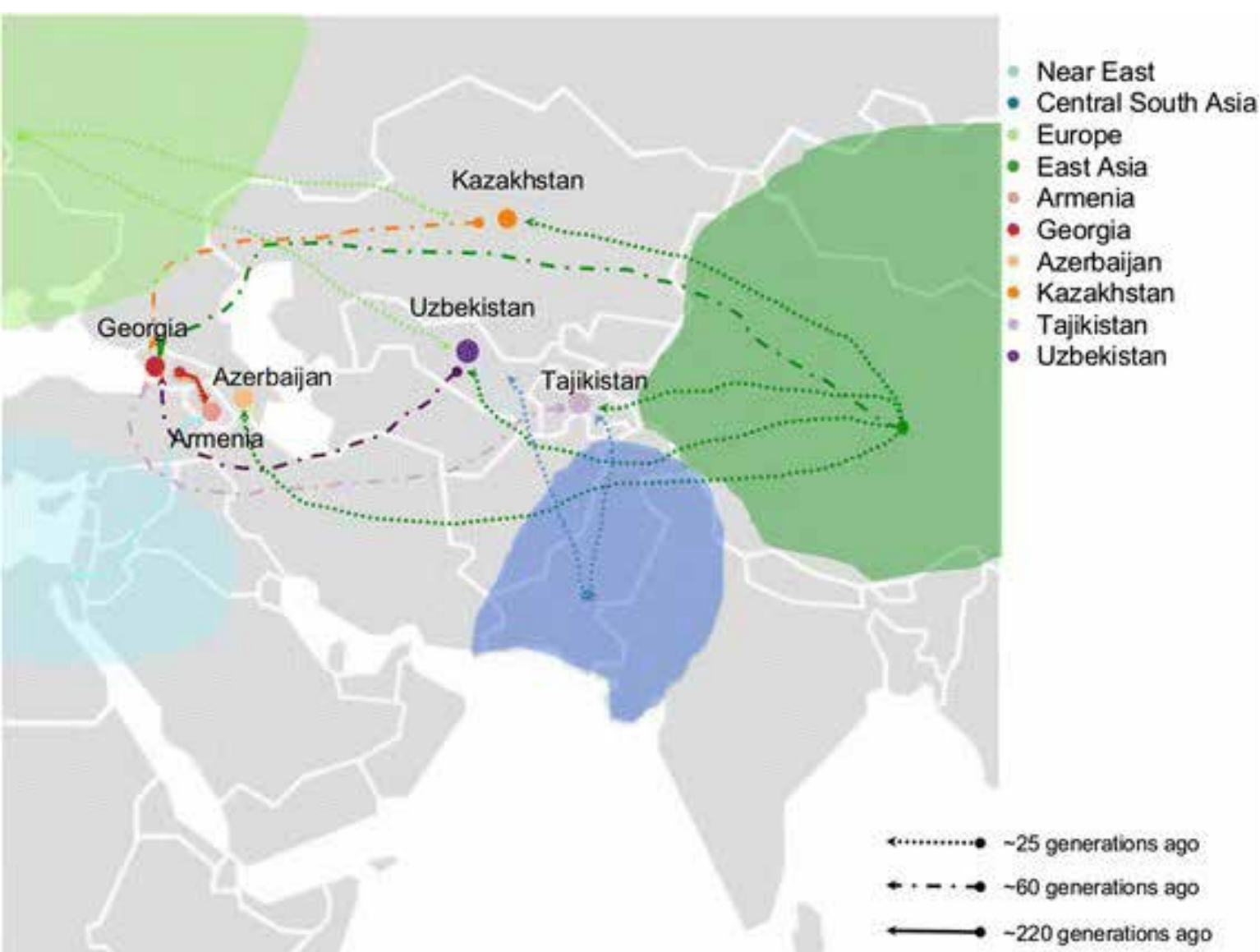
This clearly exemplifies how the existence of well established routes across Asia and beyond facilitated the spread of ideas and customs to the cities and people along the routes. The influence of the Roads was not limited to the spread of religion and goods, there was also a transmission of ideas, technologies, and artistic motifs. The migration of people, sometimes by force, was central in this exchange. One driving force in the spread of ideas was through “[p]apermaking, one of China’s four great inventions, [which] began to spread around the world through this passive form of immigration... immensely promoting the spread of human ideological fruit and enlightening the general public” (Wu).

Scholars increasingly encourage us to see the Silk Roads as a complicated network of inter-regional trade routes across Eurasia, and even part of Africa, developing for centuries before the so-called “Common Era” and lasting in some ways into the early 20th century CE (Whitfield 2019). Understanding that trade was predominantly local or regional, with goods changing hands many times on the way to distant destinations, reorients us away from that traditional but romantic emphasis on long-distance trade and towards an appreciation of the importance of local interactions in shaping the Silk Road’s history and challenges. It also is important to highlight one of the most quintessential aspects of the Silk Roads, which is that it was a place of migration.

Ming-Ce Wu of Sichuan University argues that migration should not be thought of as a byproduct of trade but instead as a central force driving historical transformation along the Silk Road. “Compared with other communicative activities on the Silk Road, migration has permanent, continuous and all-round influence on the spread

of culture, religion, art and technology. Migration connects various nationalities and promotes national integration, boosting ethnic, cultural, economic, and political localization. The dramatic change brought about by migration is unparalleled... With the high frequency of economic and trade exchanges, various spiritual and ideological exchanges followed” (Wu). Prof. Richard Foltz also emphasizes that the Silk Road was not merely a trade route but was a dynamic corridor of human migration and cultural exchange. His research has looked at the central role of Iranian peoples (Sogdians, Parthians, and Persians) as they moved through the Central Asian region, facilitating the movement of goods, ideas, and religions.

The separate regional spheres along the Silk Road are reflected in fascinating research on genetic diversity within human populations, A study of Central Asian populations along the ancient Silk Road revealed a significant east-west genetic division (Mezzavilla et al.). Central Asian neighbors turn out to be less related than we might think. The western Central Asian



Estimates of dates of migration events

Figure from Mezzavilla et al.

populations were genetically closer to Europe and the Near East than to their Central Asian neighbors just to their east. Similarly, eastern Central Asian populations show a stronger connection to East and Central-South Asia than to their western neighbors. The study offers a detailed map of admixture patterns, highlighting both historical connectivity and regional diversity across Eurasia. The pockets of regional distinctions suggests there was no great sweep of populations across the vastness of Eurasia, and gives a glimpse into a new way of understanding migration and hu-

man movement along the Silk Road.

It is essential to note the important role that Middle Eastern cities played as hubs in mediating the spread of Chinese and Indian innovations in thought and material culture into Europe (Suša). “Civilizations were not isolated, but interrelated and connected by the dynamism of cultural flows, migrations, wars, and trade exchanges” (Suša). Middle Eastern urban networks were vital in connecting these two different worlds together and contributing to the cultural flow that enabled the interrelation of various civilizations.

Further evidence of the impact of migration along the Silk Roads was found in a recent archaeological study that examined the cultural and military impacts of nomadic migrations along the Silk Road, focusing on the Yuezhi tribe’s movement between the 2nd century BC and 2nd century AD. Using findings such as armor, art, and coinage, scholars can reconstruct the interactions between nomads and settled civilizations, showing specifically how these migrations significantly shaped Central Asian culture, warfare, and trade net-



Statue of Admiral Zheng He in the Malaysian Chinese Museum in Seri Kembangan, Selangor.

works. The study emphasizes the fusion of material culture and ethnic identity along key Silk Road corridors (Abdullaev).

Similar research by Halawa and Ma notes how the Silk Road migration of Muslim artisans and merchants from Arab, Persian, Turkish, and Central Asian backgrounds to China beginning in the 7th century led to the formation of the Hui nationality, China's second-largest minority group. They recount how this historical migration and settlement in the Yellow River Valley, and the subsequent cultural integration with the Han Chinese, made significant contributions to Chinese civilization (Halawa and Ma).

The great Ming Dynasty Admiral Zheng He was Hui Muslim and a direct descendant of Kublai Khan's famed administrator, Shams al-Din, who was a Persian from Bukhara and a Sayyid (a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad). The Admiral's father and grandfather both used the title 'haji,' indicating they had made the pilgrimage to Mecca. Between 1405 and 1433 Zheng He's epic seven expeditions extended to Southeast Asia, India, Arabia, and even East Africa. He returned with many gifts and artifacts from the West, including a Somali giraffe that became a source of wonder back home in the royal court. Zheng He died and was buried at sea off the Malabar Coast of India, but his cenotaph in Nanjing contains his sword and regalia, and is inscribed in Arabic (Ying-sheng). He is commemorated by the Ông Bôn Temple in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, the Cakra Donya Bell in the Aceh Museum in Banda Aceh, the Sam Poo Kong Temple in Semarang, Java, Indonesia, and many other sites, including a memorial unveiled in Oman in 2023.

In another remarkable study using the

latest technology to uncover an ancient secret, Prof. Michael D. Frachetti and his colleagues concluded that the Silk Road's seemingly most challenging highland routes were actually taking advantage of the long-established seasonal migration of nomadic herders. Combining satellite analysis, human geography, archaeology, and GIS modeling, their research seems to explain about 74% of known high-elevation Silk Road sites. "This model demonstrates that these rugged mountains were not huge barriers that forced regional communities into isolation, but acted as channels for economic and political forms of participation that supported long-standing



Nomadic herdsman moves sheep along a foothill path in Uzbekistan

Photo by Prof. Michael Frachetti

connections between neighboring communities” (Everding). Amazingly, the ecological practices of migrating nomads thought far removed from “civilization” may have been critical in shaping the trade networks that changed the world!

The impact of the Silk Roads’ was not merely historical; its influence has rippled across time and can very much be seen in today’s modern era. Scholar Tim Winters claims that “[t]he Silk Road is thus a quintessentially modern concept, one that projects the concerns, anxieties, and ambitions of the contemporary onto the past” (Winters). The romantic appeal of such a long-lost route of trade that connected Europe to Asia allows for the commercialization of the Silk Road in the modern day, making it an “ever-popular framing for tourism, restaurants, and cookbooks” (Winters). The concept of the Silk Roads has been utilized by various international organizations such as UNESCO and other world governments to facilitate peace and cultural understanding amongst countries. These institutions promote the Silk Roads as a symbol of shared history and cooper-

ation, encouraging countries to mirror the coexistence of the Silk Road-era civilizations.

Winters even give hope that the concept of the Silk Roads is not solely in the past or even just of the present. The Silk Roads have transitioned into a future-oriented political and economic framework. Such can be seen through China's Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to connect China with other countries through infrastructure projects that will further expand to other countries.

The impact of the Silk Roads still echoes in modern society, and suggests a vision of the future, illustrating its long-lasting and profound impacts on the shape of the world. Understanding how the global exchange of goods, ideas, religions, and cultures spread largely through more limited regional migration and nomadic movement increases our understanding of the interconnectedness of the world - in the past, present, and into the future.

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The Role of Silk Roads in Migration and Globalization



Dr. Lorenzo Pubblici

The routes commonly known as the Silk Roads were actually a complex network of caravan and maritime pathways that connected distant geographical regions since ancient times. This connectivity was primarily physical but also encompassed cultural and, to a lesser extent, political and economic dimensions. During the early Middle Ages, Europe was a relatively poor and sparsely populated pe-

riphery, still in the process of developing a new civilization as the new millennium approached. Despite this, Europe retained access to the innovations and wealth originating from Asia. Even the disruptions caused by Islamic expansion failed to interrupt the extensive connections established by the Silk Roads. Over the centuries, merchants, missionaries, diplomats, and various travellers journeyed thousands of kilometers to explore new worlds and civilizations that had only existed in their imaginations. The Silk Roads served as a common space and a meeting point for cultures that would otherwise never have had the opportunity to communicate with one another.

Thus, the Silk Roads, a vast network of trade routes connecting East Asia to the Mediterranean, were more than just conduits for silk and spices—they were the world's first great highways of migration, cultural exchange, and globalization. From the 2nd century BCE to the 15th century CE, these routes facilitated the movement of people, ideas, religions, and technologies across Eurasia, shaping civilizations

from China to Rome. The Central Asian routes facilitated significant migrations of merchants, scholars, soldiers, and refugees. They accelerated a process of interconnections (predating modern globalization) by promoting the spread of religions, technologies, and economic systems. Ultimately, these routes laid the groundwork for contemporary globalization, shaping modern trade, diplomacy, and cultural interconnectedness.

The most visible migrants along the Silk Roads were merchants who established trade diasporas in significant cities such as Samarkand, Kashgar, and Constantinople. Since the 4th century, the Sogdians, originating from modern-day Uzbekistan, have played a dominant role in Central Asian trade, establishing settlements in both China and India. Their proficiency in multiple languages positioned them as vital intermediaries in these burgeoning trade networks.

Jewish merchants connected Europe to China, dealing in silk, spices, and slaves. Their networks extended from modern France to the Tang Dynasty's China. After

the Mongol conquests of the 13th century, Italian merchants established outposts in Crimea (e.g., Caffa, Soldaia), and the Azov Region (e.g., Tana, Porto Pisano), facilitating Europe's access to Asian goods. These communities created cosmopolitan hubs where languages, customs, and religions mixed.

Beyond commerce, the Silk Roads facilitated the slave trade, with Turkic and Mongol raids supplying slaves to the Islamic world and Europe. For instance, the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt heavily depended on Kipchak Turkic slaves. Political upheavals, such as the An Lushan Rebellion in China, led to the displacement of scholars, who subsequently carried their knowledge westward. Notable envoys like Marco Polo in the 13th century and Ibn Battuta in the 14th travelled vast distances, documenting the diverse societies of Eurasia. Under the so-called Pax Mongolica (13th–14th centuries), the Mongols secured trade routes, encouraging mass migrations. Armenian merchants, Uighur administrators, Turkistani and Chinese artisans, Persian and Chinese scientists, moved across Eurasia,

creating a unified economic zone from Hungary to Korea.

The Silk Roads functioned as a spiritual highway, facilitating the spread of Buddhism from India to China via Gandhara, as well as to Southeast Asia. Christianity also traversed these routes; by the 7th century, Nestorian Christians had arrived in Xi'an, China, following the Council of Ephesus. Furthermore, Muslim traders introduced Islam to areas such as Indonesia and West Africa. Additionally, Manichaeism—a syncretic faith combining elements of Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Buddhism—spread from Persia to China. Unlike the swift expansion of religions like Islam through conquest, Buddhism's growth was gradual, organic, and closely linked to the commercial and cultural exchanges along the Silk Roads. While Ashoka's missionaries had carried Buddhist teachings to Central Asia since the 3rd century BCE, it was the ongoing movement of traders—many of whom were Buddhists themselves—that allowed the religion to flourish in key oasis towns. These merchants established rest stops that

also served as shrines, which eventually evolved into fully developed monasteries, acting as both spiritual centres and safe havens for travellers.

From this point of view, the Kushan Empire (1st–3rd century CE), straddling northern India and Central Asia, played a pivotal role. Their control over key Silk Road trade routes allowed Buddhism to flourish in cities like Balkh and Gandhara, where it mingled with Greek, Persian, and local traditions. The Gandharan Buddhist art, with its Hellenistic influences, emerged from this fusion—proof of how the Silk Road didn't just transmit Buddhism but transformed it.

Buddhist monks often travelled alongside traders, relying on their caravans for protection across harsh terrains. Some, like the 7th-century pilgrim Xuanzang, left detailed accounts of their journeys, describing thriving Buddhist communities in places like Kucha and Turfan (in modern Xinjiang). These monks didn't just passively travel—they actively translated texts, debated doctrines, and established monastic networks that turned Silk Road

cities into Buddhist learning hubs. The oasis towns of the Tarim Basin (e.g., Khotan, Dunhuang) became critical waystations where Buddhism adapted to local cultures. The Mogao Caves near Dunhuang, filled with thousands of Buddhist manuscripts and artworks, stand as a testament to this exchange. Many of these texts were written in multiple languages—Sanskrit, Prakrit, Sogdian, Khotanese, and later Chinese—showing how Buddhism evolved as it moved eastward.

The same routes that spread Buddhism also brought its decline in Central Asia. From the 8th century onward, the expansion of Islam, carried by Arab and later Turkic dynasties, gradually replaced Buddhism in regions like Sogdiana and Bactria. The Mongol conquests (13th century) briefly revived some connections, but by then, Buddhism's heartland along the Silk Road had faded.

Manichaeism was a faith born at the crossroads of empires. Drawing from Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Buddhism, it presented itself as a universal religion—perfectly suited for the cosmopolitan

world of the Silk Roads. Mani (fl. 3rd century) himself is said to have dispatched missionaries eastward, and by the 6th century, Manichaean communities had appeared in Samarkand, Turfan, and even China. The religion thrived in Central Asia, where its dualistic teachings—the eternal struggle between light and darkness—resonated with local traditions. In the oasis cities of the Tarim Basin, Manichaean texts were translated into Sogdian, Uyghur, and Chinese, and their vivid, illuminated manuscripts (found in the ruins of Turfan) reveal a faith deeply intertwined with Silk Road art. For a time, Manichaeism even gained imperial favour in China: during the Tang Dynasty (7th-10th century), it was briefly recognized as an official religion, though later persecuted as “foreign” and driven underground. Yet, its greatest legacy might be its adaptability. In Central Asia, Manichaeism absorbed Buddhist and Zoroastrian imagery, while in China, it took on Daoist-like elements. By the time of the Uyghur Khaganate (8th–9th century), Manichaeism had become a state religion, showing how a faith could rise and fall

with the political tides of the Silk Roads.

Nestorian Christianity—a branch of the faith considered heretical in the Byzantine Empire—found an unexpected refuge along the Silk Roads. After being expelled following the Council of Ephesus in 431 due to their belief in the distinct human and divine natures of Christ, the Nestorians turned their attention eastward. The tolerance of animistic, pagan communities first, and Persian and later Mongol rulers allowed them to thrive. By the 6th century, Nestorian communities had established themselves in Persia, Mesopotamia, and beyond, with missionaries following trade routes into Central Asia. In Western Mongolia, the Naimans were predominantly Nestorian. A remarkable stele unearthed in Xi'an, dating to 781, recounts the arrival of the faith in China during the Tang dynasty, where it was known as Jingjiao. This inscription, presented in both Chinese and Syriac, illustrates the religion's adaptability—Nestorian texts utilized Buddhist and Daoist terminology to clarify Christian concepts, a strategy that helped it secure temporary imperial patronage.

In Central Asia, the Nestorians thrived among the Sogdians, the great merchant intermediaries of the Silk Road. Sogdian traders carried their faith deep into China and Mongolia, and by the time of the Mongol Empire, Nestorianism had reached the courts of the Khans. Some of Chinggis Khan's descendants, like the Kerait tribe, were Nestorian Christians, and the great traveler Rabban Bar Sauma, a Nestorian monk born in Beijing, even journeyed to Europe as an envoy of the Ilkhanate.

Both Manichaeism and Nestorianism benefited from the Silk Roads' pluralism. In the caravanserais and market towns where Zoroastrians, Buddhists, and Muslims mingled, new ideas found receptive audiences. Their success lay in linguistic adaptation (translating scriptures into local tongues) and cultural synthesis (borrowing symbols from dominant faiths).

Yet, their decline was also tied to the Silk Roads' shifting fortunes. The rise of Islam in Central Asia marginalized Manichaeism, while in China, anti-foreign backlashes (like the Tang persecution of "foreign cults") weakened both faiths. By the 14th

century, Nestorianism had largely vanished, surviving only in pockets like Kerala's St. Thomas Christians. Manichaeism, though extinct as a living tradition, left echoes in Buddhist and Islamic heterodox movements.

From the moment the first nomadic horsemen bridged the steppes of Central Asia to the modern corridors of China's Belt and Road Initiative, the Silk Road has never been just a route—it has been a shaper of empires, a catalyst for revolutions, and the world's most enduring network of exchange. Its importance stretches far beyond the silks and spices that gave it its name; it was, and remains, a stage where trade, politics, and culture collide.

The Silk Road's origins lie in the unspoken agreements between traders who dared to cross the treacherous deserts and mountains separating China, India, Persia, and the Mediterranean. By the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), China's demand for Central Asian horses and Rome's appetite for silk had turned these scattered trails into a lucrative, state-sponsored network. The Parthians and Kushans grew rich as

middlemen, controlling key segments of the route, while cities like Samarkand, Palmyra, and Chang'an became melting pots of languages, faiths, and goods.

But the Silk Road was never just about commerce—it was diplomacy by other means. When the Han envoy Zhang Qian ventured into the Western Regions (Xinjiang) in the 2nd century BCE, he was not merely exploring trade opportunities; he was seeking allies against the Xiongnu nomads. Similarly, Rome's attempts to bypass Parthian silk monopolies led to direct but failed embassies to China. The Road was a chessboard where empires jostled for influence, using merchants as pawns and tariffs as weapons.

As the Roman and Han empires declined, the Silk Road persisted, becoming dominated by emerging players such as the Sogdians, and later the Turks and Arabs, who spread Islam eastward. The Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE) reestablished China's openness to the world, welcoming Persian traders, Nestorian monks, and Muslim envoys in its capital. Concurrently, the Abbasid Caliphate transformed Baghdad

into a center of Silk Road wealth, where Chinese paper, Indian spices, and African ivory converged. However, the Silk Road also served as a conduit for devastation—the Black Death, which likely originated in Central Asia (with the Chu valley being a probable source, though a more eastern origin is plausible), spread along these trade routes, ravaging Eurasia. Under Genghis Khan and his successors, the Mongol Empire temporarily unified the Silk Road within a single political and economic framework, fostering an unprecedented era of safe passage. During Mongol rule, particularly following the empire's fragmentation into four khanates around 1260, Eurasia became a common space for long-range trade, with regional economies interconnecting. Unfortunately, this period of prosperity was short-lived. By the latter half of the 14th century, trade routes were closing, conflicts were escalating, and new political dynamics began to emerge.

As European sea routes expanded in the 15th century, the significance of the overland Silk Road diminished. The Ottomans' dominance over vital land passages

prompted Europe to explore alternative routes to Asia, catalyzing the voyages of Columbus and Vasco da Gama. For centuries, the caravan cities of Central Asia fell into obscurity, their historical splendor concealed beneath the sands of time.

Yet the idea of the Silk Road never died. In the 19th century, imperial powers like Britain and Russia fought the “Great Game” for influence over Central Asia, seeing it as the key to dominating Eurasia. The Trans-Siberian Railway and British colonial roads in India were, in a way, modern reincarnations of the ancient trade routes.

Today, the Silk Road is back—not as a dusty trail of camels, but as a geopolitical strategy. China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, is the most ambitious revival yet, investing trillions in ports, railways, and pipelines from Southeast Asia to East Africa. Like the Han and Tang dynasties, China is using infrastructure to extend its political influence, creating dependencies and alliances.

From the first exchanges of silk for horses to today’s pipelines and fiber-optic ca-

bles, the Silk Road has always been about knowledge, wealth, and power. It was the original globalization, proving that no civilization thrives in isolation. Empires rose and fell by their ability to control it, and even now, in an age of satellites and cryptocurrencies, who controls the trade routes still shapes the world.

The Silk Road was the world's first great engine of globalization, a vast network that did more than move goods—it moved people, ideas, and thus cultures, shaping civilizations from antiquity to today. Migrations along its routes—whether of Sogdian merchants, Buddhist monks, or Turkic nomads—created a cross-continental exchange of knowledge, faith, and technology, blending distant societies into an interconnected world.

From the spread of religions, the transmission of papermaking, gunpowder, and even pandemics, the Silk Road proved that no culture develops in isolation. Today, its legacy lives on in modern trade corridors, diaspora communities, and geopolitical strategies. More than just a historical trade route, the Silk Road was—and remains—

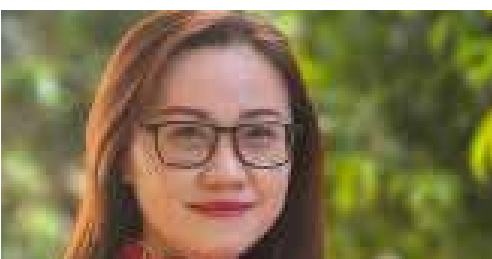
a blueprint for globalization, reminding us that migration and exchange are never something to fear, but the driving forces of human progress.

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From Silk Roads to Migration Routes: Vietnamese Workers in the Global Supply Chains



Dr. Nu Nguyet Anh Nguyen

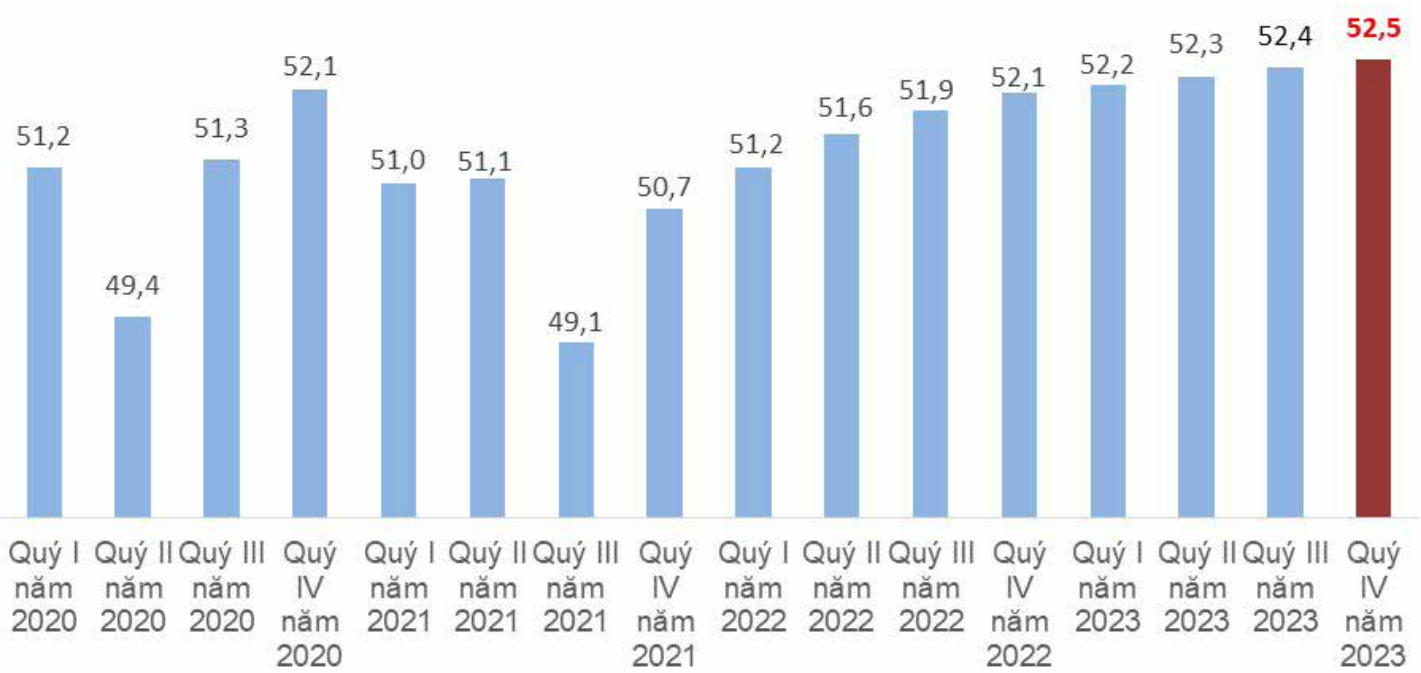


Dr. Xuan Anh Nguyen

1. Introduction

For over 1,500 years, the ancient Silk Road was not only a trade route connecting China to Europe, but also a cultural corridor where goods, people, religion, and ideas spread through deserts, steppes, and small and large cities from east to west (Rossabi, 1999). These routes created an early form of global economy, connecting civilizations and fostering far-reaching cultural intersection (Vichare, 2024). In the context of globalization in the modern world, those routes have been ‘reborn’ in the form of global supply chains – transnational production and distribution networks where migrant workers play a key role.

Vietnam has become one of the largest labor exporting countries in Southeast



Vietnamese labor force aged 15 and over by quarter, 2020 – 2023.
Image by Vietnam National Statistics Office

Asia. The Vietnam National Statistics Office (2023) reports that, out of the country's more than 100 million people in 2023, 52.4 million people are of working age (15 years and older), including 51.3 million people with jobs.

The Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs announced that in 2023, the number of Vietnamese workers working under contracts abroad exceed 155,000 people. Currently, there are about 650,000 Vietnamese workers working in 40 countries and territories around the world, with more than 30 different industries. The three primary markets for Vietnamese workers have historically been Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea (Government News, 2024). In addition to traditional markets, Vietnam is also expanding into new markets such as Germany, Romania, Poland and the Nordic countries, in order to diversify job opportunities and reduce dependence on certain markets. That wide presence not only reflects Vietnam's labor supply capacity, but also shows the country's increasingly prominent position in the globalized economic network – where



Vietnamese workers preparing to travel.

Photo by Government News

the flow of workers has become an integral part of the operation of the international market. This article will explore the role of Vietnamese workers in today's global network, analyzing the political, economic, and social factors that have led to and shaped this migration flow to better understand how modern migration journeys are 'weaving' the globalized roads of the 21st century.

2. Vietnamese Migrants in Global Supply Chains

Since the launch of the Doi Moi economic policy in 1986, Vietnam has oriented labor exports as a long-term socio-economic de-

velopment strategy. Initially, in the 1980s, Vietnam primarily sent workers to Eastern European countries and the former Soviet Union under bilateral agreements. However, after the collapse of the socialist bloc, Vietnam has expanded its labor market to Asian and Middle Eastern countries, and more recently Europe. The Vietnamese government issued Directive 41-CT/TW in 1998, recognizing labor export as a crucial long-term strategy for national development. The Vietnamese government has signed bilateral labor cooperation agreements with some countries along with issuing policies and implementing various programs to support labor exports, including vocational training and financial support. In the context of globalization, Vietnamese workers have become an integral part of global supply chains, especially in sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, healthcare, and construction. With youth, high adaptability, and skills that meet the job requirements, they play a key role in the ‘final stages’ of production and service.

Electronics and auto parts manufacturing industry: In Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, Vietnamese workers constitute a significant proportion of the labor force in electronic components and automobile manufacturing industries. They might work under an internship program or formal work permit schemes, contributing to the production process. However, some reports have shown that many workers pay high brokerage fees, leading to the risk of debt and labor exploitation (Nguyen, 2017).

Agriculture and food processing: Vietnamese workers are also involved in seasonal agricultural jobs in South Korea and Europe, such as harvesting fruits and vegetables and working in food processing plants.

Healthcare: In the face of an aging population, Japan and Germany have actively recruited nurses from Vietnam. Through bilateral cooperation agreements, thousands of Vietnamese workers have been working in elderly care facilities (Peters &

Braeseke, 2016; Vogt, 2018). However, they also face challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences, and high work pressure.

Construction and logistics: In the Middle East, especially in the Gulf countries, Vietnamese workers are involved in large-scale construction projects and logistics activities.

Vietnamese workers are playing an important role in maintaining and developing global supply chains. Vietnamese policies and mechanisms related to labor export aim to expand foreign labor markets, increase the number of workers migrating overseas, and protect the rights of these workers both before and after migration in both sending and receiving countries, although several challenges remain concerning the protection of labor rights during their employment abroad (Bélanger et al., 2010; Dang, 2007).

3. Migration Infrastructure and the Politics of Recruitment

The transnational migration of Vietnam-

ese workers is underpinned by a complex recruitment infrastructure, often conceptualized as the ‘migration infrastructure’. The system includes labor export companies, brokerage centers, vocational and language training institutions, local governments, and even financial institutions that provide pre-exit loans. Although it aims to facilitate the matching of international labor supply and demand, in fact, this infrastructure perpetuates structural inequalities and imposes significant financial burdens on migrant workers.

Vietnam currently operates under a dual institutional model: the State plays a guiding role (such as issuing policies, signing bilateral labor cooperation agreements, etc.), while the private sector – mainly licensed companies – is responsible for implementing, brokering and managing labor contracts. However, the power between the State and enterprises is often asymmetrical. Inadequate regulatory oversight or conflicts of interest may give rise to misconduct, exploitation, or systemic abuse within the recruitment process.

The current geopolitical context makes

this system even more sensitive. As populations in Japan, Germany or South Korea age rapidly, they compete fiercely to attract workers from countries such as Vietnam. Bilateral agreements often come with constraints on the quantity, language, and cost of training – placing a huge burden on both workers and employers. Visa policies also are constantly changing, generally in the direction of greater opening but still highly selective.

As a result, Vietnamese workers are tied to a chain of intermediaries, having to pay brokerage fees of \$4,000-7,000 just to work abroad – a significant amount for rural families. In 2019, South Korea temporarily stopped accepting workers from 40 districts in 10 provinces of Vietnam, where a large number of migrant workers do not return after the expiration of their contracts. The suspension is part of efforts to reduce illegal residency and improve labor management (Việt Nam News, 2019). Japan has also repeatedly warned about the violation of contracts and fraudulent documents of Vietnamese brokers.

Reform of the recruitment system is a

necessary condition to protect workers and maintain national prestige in the international labor market. Such reform requires the establishment of an independent and transparent monitoring mechanism that centers the migrant as a rights-bearing individual, rather than treating them as an ‘export commodity’.

4. Silk Roads Reimagined: Vietnamese Migration and the New Global Order

The ancient Silk Road was once a great trade route connecting the East with the West. In the 21st century, the concept has been reimagined in the form of economic corridors, transnational supply chains, and global initiatives such as China’s Belt and Road Initiative. Vietnam is not only an investment destination, but increasingly becoming a key labor supply for global human resources – from Asia to the Middle East and Europe.

Instead of caravans carrying silk and spices, it is now the influx of migrants – especially low-skilled workers, middle-skilled workers and caregivers – who are quietly resetting the map of globaliza-

tion. Vietnam stands out in this trend as the number of export workers is constantly increasing, especially in the form of ‘supply chain-driven migration’ in which workers relocate to regions experiencing labor shortages within global production and service networks.

Notably, a large proportion of Vietnamese workers are currently migrating in the South-South direction: from a developing country (Vietnam) to emerging Asian countries (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia) or the Middle East (UAE, Saudi Arabia). This trend breaks with the traditional image of ‘South-North’ migration, and reflects the shift of global manufacturing centers from the West to Asia. It is in this flow that Vietnamese workers play the role of labor links in logistics corridors, transnational industrial parks, and the care industry in the context of an aging global population.

5. Conclusion and Reflections

The ‘Silk Road’ of the 21st century is no longer an ancient freight route, but a vital route for millions of migrants, including hundreds of thousands of Vietnam-



2017 SUN maritime expedition from South Korea to Vietnam.

Photo by Euihwan Cho

ese, who are weaving human links for the global system. On the journey of globalization, Vietnamese workers are present at strategic ‘nodes’ of global supply chains – from high-tech production lines in East Asia, to elderly care centers in Europe, or agricultural fields in the Middle East. They are a silent but essential force to maintain the flow of goods, services, and consumption on a worldwide scale. However, because of that silence, their role is easily overlooked, obscured by economic figures and dry macro policies.

To protect and promote that role in a sustainable way, Vietnam needs to continue to reform the migration support system,

especially by making the recruitment process transparent, reducing intermediary costs, enhancing skills training, and promoting international cooperation to protect workers' rights. Redefining migrant workers not just as 'export resources,' but as global citizens with the right to safety, development, and respect is a prerequisite for building a just migration strategy.

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WeGO Secretary General Jeong-kee Kim

WeGO Secretary General Details Cooperation Plans with SUN

By Amali Ranavi Thantrige

SILKROADIA invited Jeong-kee Kim, Secretary General of World Smart Sustainable Cities Organization (WeGO), for a written interview following the ceremony of signing a Memorandum of Understanding with SUN during the 10th GA of SUN in Naples, Italy in November 2024. Kim introduced WeGO as a nationally and internationally dedicated organization to transform cities into smart and sustainable cities. According to Kim, WeGO has regional offices in several Silk Road countries, including Beyoglu (Türkiye), Almaty (Kazakhstan) and Abu Dhabi (UAE). He expressed his hope that the SUN-WeGO partnership will help SUN students engage in the youth programs of WeGO, including the Sustainable City Champions and the Global Youth Award. The Secretary General expressed hope that SUN and WeGO would jointly promote student-led initiatives, co-hosting workshops to enhance youth engagement and create a long-term impact on the development of smart, sustainable cities around the world. Below is the full text of the interview.



Q: Thank you very much for accepting our invitation to speak with *SILKROAD-IA*. To begin, could you please introduce WeGO to our readers?

A: Founded in 2010 by 50 member cities, the World Smart Sustainable Cities Organization (WeGO) is an international association of cities, local governments, smart technology solution providers, as well as national and regional institutions dedicated to transforming cities into smart and sustainable communities through public-private partnerships (PPP). The current

president of WeGO is the Mayor of Seoul, and our Secretariat is based in Seoul, South Korea. WeGO also operates six regional offices located in Abuja (Nigeria), Chengdu (China), Beyoglu (Türkiye), Cuenca (Ecuador), Almaty (Kazakhstan), and Abu Dhabi (UAE), each supporting WeGO's mission within their respective regions.

Q: WeGO and SUN signed a Memorandum of Understanding during the 9th General Assembly of SUN held in Naples, Italy, last November. What inspired WeGO to establish a partnership with SUN?

A: WeGO's partnership with SUN is driven by our shared commitment to empowering youth to address future challenges and foster innovation through collaboration. The MOU outlines key areas of cooperation, such as joint research, knowledge sharing, and student engagement. SUN's academic network offers an ideal platform to reach young professionals, aligning well with WeGO's Sustainable Smart City Champions program, which equips youth to become

future leaders in smart city development. Together, we aim to amplify the impact of both organizations in engaging youth to create smart and sustainable urban environments.

Q: As a leading global partner for promoting smart, sustainable cities and communities, what role do you envision SUN playing in helping WeGO achieve its goals?

A: SUN plays a crucial role in expanding the reach of WeGO's initiatives, particularly in engaging students. Through our MOU, we are eager to collaborate on joint projects, workshops, and seminars focused on smart cities, urban development, and regional engagement. SUN's involvement allows us to connect with a network of young scholars and future leaders, empowering them to actively contribute to the creation of sustainable, smart cities around the world.

Q: SUN has a student body known as US-SUN (United Students of SUN). What op-

portunities can WeGO offer to USSUN and students at SUN member universities?

A: WeGO offers USSUN students the opportunity to participate in our Sustainable Smart City Champions program, which provides access to free online courses and the chance to attend related networking events. Additionally, a key highlight this year is the launch of the Global Youth Award, aimed at recognizing and celebrating young leaders who are actively shaping the future of smart cities and addressing global challenges. As part of this initiative, we are partnering with SUN on the Culture category to identify outstanding cases among its students, and we encourage SUN's students to engage in this exciting opportunity. The winners will be honored at the Global Youth Award Ceremony on October 1st, 2025, during Seoul Smart Life Week (September 29 – October 2, 2025), offering an important platform to showcase the impactful work being done by young professionals worldwide.

Additionally, universities and academ-



ic institutions within the SUN network are encouraged to apply for the Seoul Smart City Prize, the flagship initiative of WeGO in collaboration with the Seoul Metropolitan Government. This initiative is designed to promote an innovative yet inclusive smart city model that prioritizes underprivileged groups in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, driven by information and communication technology. It presents a meaningful opportunity for SUN member universities to showcase their contributions to smart, sustainable, and inclusive urban development. The winners will be announced and recognized during the Seoul Smart City Prize Ceremony on

September 30, 2025.

Q: What plans does WeGO have to further strengthen its partnership with SUN? And what are your expectations of SUN in advancing the shared objectives of both organizations?

A: We plan to strengthen our partnership with SUN by expanding joint projects, co-hosting workshops, and promoting student-led initiatives such as the Sustainable Smart City Champions program and the Global Youth Award. We expect SUN to continue playing a crucial role in engaging students in these activities. Through these collaborative efforts, we aim to create a dynamic global network that drives innovation in smart city development. Additionally, we are exploring opportunities to create synergies between our networks, which may include encouraging more cities and universities along the Silk Road to join our mission.

Q: Could you kindly share some insights into your professional background and your work as the Secretary General of

WeGO?

A: I have had the privilege of holding various leadership roles across government, academia, and international organizations. As the current Secretary General of WeGO, I lead initiatives that promote the development of smart, sustainable cities globally. My career includes serving as the CEO of the Asia-Pacific Local Government Network for Economic and Social Development (CityNet), Consul General in Shanghai, and the 1st Vice Minister Nominee for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Academically, I have served as a Distinguished Chair Professor at Dongguk University and as President of Soongsil Cyber University. I have authored multiple publications on international relations and negotiation. These experiences have shaped my vision for empowering cities and young professionals to lead the transition toward smarter, more sustainable urban environments.



Rabban Sauma; The Monks of Kublai Khan

Source: Human Circus Podcast

The Khan's Holy Messenger:

Rabban Sauma,

the monk who became
ambassador to
Medieval Europe



Elisabetta Ragagnin

Today, *SILKROADIA* has the pleasure to meet Rabban Sauma – the world-wide famous monk belonging to the Church of the East who became one of history’s most unlikely diplomats.

He was born around 1225 in Khanbalīq ‘the city of the Khan’ – present-day Beijing – and embarked on what would become the medieval world’s most extraordinary reverse journey – while Marco Polo was traveling east, Rabban Sauma was heading west, carrying Asia’s voice to European courts. In 1274 – already at an advanced age - together with his young student Markos, he set out from Khanbalīq on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. At that time Rabban Sauma could have never imagined that he would become an ambassador to Europe for the Mongols and that generations to come would read about his adventures. Following perilous routes similar to Marco Polo's, they reached Mongol-ruled Iran, where destiny intervened with stunning force.

Military conflicts blocked their path to Jerusalem, but fate apparently had bigger plans for them. In surprising turn of

events, the younger monk Markos was elected Patriarch of the Church of the East (taking the name Yahballaha III), while Rabban Sauma found himself appointed as the Mongol Khan's personal ambassador to Europe – a nearly 70-year-old monk suddenly thrust onto the world's diplomatic stage.

Dispatched by Ilkhan Arghun, Rabban Sauma embarked on a diplomatic mission that could have changed world history. He met with the Pope, the kings of France and England, attempting to forge European-Mongol alliances that would have reshaped the medieval world.

Though his diplomatic mission ultimately failed, Rabban Sauma achieved something far more lasting: he documented his incredible journey, creating the only known account of medieval Europe written by an Asian observer. His writings offer a mirror image to Marco Polo's accounts – the East looking West with the keen eye of a brilliant, worldly, and surprisingly modern mind.

This remarkable story survived in a single manuscript – the “History of Mar Yah-

ballaha and Rabban Sauma” – hidden for centuries in the remote Hakkari mountains of eastern Turkey until its rediscovery in the late 19th century. This chronicle stands as one of the finest examples of classical Syriac literature and a testament to the Near East’s rich Christian literary tradition.

Rabban Sauma’s adventure reveals a medieval world far more connected than we imagined – a time when a Mongol monk coming from the capital of the Mongol empire could negotiate with European royalty, when civilizations routinely crossed continents, and when the Mongol Empire created history’s first truly global network. His story isn’t just about one man’s extraordinary journey; it’s proof that our interconnected modern world has ancient roots in the steppes of Mongolia and the courts of medieval Europe.

But let’s meet Rabban Sauma on the day he came back to Tabriz, the capital of the Ilkhanids, in present-day northern Iran.

It is a sun-kissed spring morning where nightingales weave their enchanting songs through the air, while a gentle breeze car-

ries the delicate perfume of blooming roses, surrounding everyone with nature's loving touch.

A distinguished assembly awaits within the imperial ger: a magnificently adorned nomadic tent where every silken detail whispers in perfect harmony with nature.

Marco Polo, one of the Great Qa'an Qubilai's most trusted servants, thundered across the vast steppes on his magnificent Baqi stallion – a legendary breed born for speed – racing day and night through dust and starlight to reach the distant Ilkhanid encampments.

In the yurt, the Ilkhan Argun is sitting in the prominent position with his beloved wife Bolgana – belonging to the famous Baya'ut clan. Besides her, there is also Ay-Čiçek, Arghun's grandmother, who is the youngest sister of Sorghaghtani—the mother of Möngke Qa'an, Qubilai Qa'an, Hülegü Khan, and Ariq Böke—and a fervent Christian. There are also the historians Rašīd-al-Dīn, who is extremely curious to hear first-hand information from Europe, as well as Bolad – the wizard of Mongolian history, the person who knows

every single detail of Mongolian history. He just arrived from Khanbalīq as part of Marco Polo's official delegation.

The gathering opens with a höömei concert performed by the Uriangqai singer Ayan and his fusion band, weaving together the haunting throat-song melodies of the Inner Asian steppes, the soul-stirring strains of nomadic instruments, and the delicate verses of Persian poetry – sublime quatrains lovingly crafted for this magical gathering by the master poets Rūmī and Saadi.

The table overflows with every delicacy Rabban Sauma's heart could desire: exquisite Mongolian čayan idegen, the treasured 'white foods' of the steppes, crowned by a precious jade vessel brimming with the most extraordinary koumiss - crafted from the milk of the empire's finest mares.

Marco Polo: Welcome back, beloved Rabban Sauma. Our hearts overflow with joy at your return, like flowers after winter's end. Did the winds carry you gently on your journey? Have you been able to rest well these past days?

Rabban Sauma: My dearest friend, my soul rejoices at the sight of you here. You have blessed me with the most precious gift – your cherished presence. By traveling all this way from distant Khanbaliq, you have spared these weary old bones from an impossible journey, and for this kindness, my heart shall forever sing your praises like a nightingale at dawn.

Marco Polo: Of course, beloved Rabban Sauma! I promised to welcome you back when we parted after that enchanting hunt in Xanadu's golden meadows. A sacred promise, sealed by friendship's bond. How wonderful to see you – the very first soul to journey from Khanbaliq to Europe's distant shores! Perhaps history will remember me as the Venetian Rabban Sauma, or you as the Mongolian Marco Polo... time will tell.

Please, dear Rabban-aqa, feast your heart out. Every beloved dish graces this table – European cuisine may delight the palate, but nothing soothes the soul like the flavors of home.

Rabban Sauma: Thank you, dearest Marco. European cuisine truly enchanted my palate - I discovered that meat can dance with flavors beyond our beloved boiled traditions, though nothing makes my heart sing quite like our tender, slow-simmered delicacies. I've treasured some precious recipes to share with the imperial kitchens in Khanbaliq. Our magnificent Qa'an Qubilai adores culinary adventures, and his master chefs are crafting a Yuan-dynasty cookbook that would bloom with European touches.

Marco Polo: What struck you most during your travels?

Rabban Sauma: I was blessed to witness Christianity's most magnificent cathedrals, each one a poem written in stone. In Constantinople, Hagia Sophia left me breathless: that architectural miracle where the heavens seem to float without earthly support, a sanctuary of pure serenity. And Rome's sacred churches touched my very soul. Besides, walking among the ancient ruins felt like dancing through the pages

of history itself - pure enchantment filled every step of my journey there.

And then there was Europe's breathtaking nature. While crossing the waters between Sicily and the mainland – "the continent," as the islanders so charmingly call it – I witnessed the earth's fiery heart erupting in magnificent volcanic fury. How gloriously powerful nature reveals herself to be!

Marco Polo: Did you have the joy of sharing fellowship and meaningful conversations with fellow monks during your European sojourn?

Rabban Sauma: Yes, indeed, and what a soul-nourishing experience it was! In Belgium, I was blessed to reunite with my dear friend Willy – William of Rubruck. Together we wandered through sacred monasteries, where I spent peaceful nights in prayer with the brothers. In the gentle evenings, we savored their heavenly brew – simply divine nectar! Here, my friend, I've brought you a precious bottle of Affligem – I remember from your Silkroadia

interview how it delights your heart.

Marco Polo: Dear Rabban-aqa, I could listen to your fascinating stories for days and nights. I have an idea: let us collaborate on a book about our respective journeys! I believe our great Qubilai Qa'an, as well as the European kings and dignitaries you encountered, would find such a work tremendously valuable.

Rabban Sauma: Great idea, Marco-degüü minu! Let's start tomorrow morning!

Image

Rabban Sauma, Human Circus Podcast, 2019, Retrieved from <https://humancircuspodcast.com/episodes/category/Rabban+Bar+Sauma>

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Rector Yusuf Abdullaev Photo by SIUT

SIUT Rector Stresses Cross- border Academic Cooperation

Prof. Yusuf Abdullaev says SUN should be a platform of trust, innovation, and joint action.

SILKROADIA invited Rector Yusuf Abdullaev of Samarkand International University of Technology (SIUT) for a written interview to learn about the University, its partnerships with the SUN, and updates on preparation works for the 10th General Assembly of the SUN, for which it will be a co-host. In the interview, Rector Abdullaev emphasized the SIUT's commitment to shaping young people's future with knowledge and skills in this fast-changing digitalized world.

He also discussed the leading role of SIUT as one of the international, English-medium private technological universities in Uzbekistan in providing high quality academic guidance for the country's innovative development. Rector Abdullaev invites all visionary leaders and students of the SUN to the 10th GA of SUN which will be held in Samarkand, a city that for centuries has symbolized intercultural dialogue and knowledge exchange. He called on the SUN community to not just celebrate collective achievements but

also strengthen academic cooperation and shared responsibility to shape the world's future. Below is the full text of the interview

Q: Thank you for accepting our invitation for this written interview with SILKROADIA. To begin, could you kindly introduce yourself and your university to our readers?

A: It is a great honor for me to contribute to SILKROADIA, a publication that eloquently reflects the intellectual and cultural convergence along the Silk Roads.

My name is Yusuf Abdullaev, and I serve as the Rector of Samarkand International University of Technology (SIUT). Drawing on over 60 years of collective academic and diplomatic expertise, I am deeply committed to shaping a future-oriented University that equips young people with the knowledge, creativity, and values needed in a fast-changing technological world.

A qualitatively new step in responding to the challenges of the modern economy was the establishment of Samarkand In-

ternational University of Technology (SIUT) in February 2022. It was created as part of a large-scale national project with the aim of training highly qualified engineers and technology specialists in cooperation with leading international universities, in accordance with global educational standards. SIUT became one of the first international, English-medium private technological universities in the country, focused on educating a new generation of engineers for the New Uzbekistan. The technological profile of the University was determined by the strategic demands of the country's innovation-driven development and the need to modernize its higher education system.

Today, SIUT proudly hosts a world-class faculty of over 50 professors from 18 countries, including renowned scholars from the USA, France, South Korea, China, India, and Canada. Our 11 bachelor's degree programs — all taught in English — are developed in collaboration with leading global universities. The programs integrate curricula from leading institutions in Europe, Asia, and North America.

A foundational moment in the University's development came in December 2021 with the signing of a special agreement between the Colorado School of Mines (USA) and the founder of the University, with the support of SANEG company. This agreement initiated consulting services and the creation of a comprehensive Master Plan for SIUT. The Master Plan, prepared in 2022 with the involvement of leading U.S. professors, outlines a strategy for training specialists in fields such as mining, metallurgy, petroleum chemistry, mechanical engineering, engineering geology, and information technologies.

Our University also offers international double diploma programs, notably through partnerships with Chinese and South Korean institutions under the 2+2 model, and launched the “French School of Business and Management” in 2025 in partnership with academic institutions from the Francophone world. SIUT is more than an academic institution — it is a launchpad for global engagement and technological leadership.

Q: At the 9th General Assembly held in Naples last year, SIUT was selected as the co-host for the 10th GA of SUN. How do you feel about co-hosting this important annual gathering in Samarkand — an iconic hub along the historic Silk Roads? What will be the central theme or key focus areas of this year’s General Assembly?

A: We are deeply honored to co-host the 10th General Assembly of the Silk-Road Universities Network (SUN) in Samarkand — a city that for centuries has symbolized intercultural dialogue and knowledge exchange.

The theme of this year’s General Assembly, “Engineering a Shared Future: Innovation, Sustainability, and Dialogue across Borders,” perfectly aligns with our institutional mission. As a university deeply rooted in technological education, SIUT seeks to act as a bridge between diverse academic traditions, linking East and West through research, talent development, and international collaboration.

Our Assembly will focus on areas that

are critical to the future of higher education and society: climate-conscious technologies, digital transformation, cross-border academic mobility, and the role of universities in peacebuilding. It will also highlight successful case studies — including SIUT’s partnership with the Colorado School of Mines (USA), our newly launched Chinese, Korean and French Institutes at SIUT, and the implementation of “dual education” models that link classroom learning with industrial practice.

Q: Your university is a valued and active member of SUN. What inspired your institution to join the network, and what are the core objectives you hope to achieve through SUN’s collaborative platform?

A: Joining the Silk-Road Universities Network was a natural step for SIUT. As a young university with global ambitions, we recognized SUN’s potential as a catalyst for academic diplomacy, cultural exchange, and innovation-driven cooperation.

Through SUN, we aim to:

- Expand joint academic programs and research with universities across Asia and Europe;
- Increase mobility opportunities for both faculty and students;
- Promote sustainable engineering and peace-oriented education;
- Reposition Samarkand — and SIUT — as a hub of intellectual connectivity in the 21st century.

We have already taken concrete steps in this direction. In addition to SUN, SIUT is now a member of the European Association of Technical Universities (EUT), the Consortium for Global Education (CGE, USA), and the Global Council for Tolerance and Peace (GCTP). These platforms allow us to amplify the impact of our academic initiatives and strengthen ties with like-minded institutions across the globe.

Q: Samarkand symbolizes the spirit of cross-cultural exchange. In your view, how can it contribute to revitalizing the legacy of the Silk Roads — particularly

the values of diversity, inclusiveness, peaceful coexistence, and shared prosperity?

A: Samarkand is not just a historical monument — it is a living laboratory of cultural symbiosis. At SIUT, we take this legacy seriously and build upon it with every international collaboration, every research project, and every multilingual program we launch.

One example is our publication of the first multilingual glossary of engineering terms in five languages — English, Uzbek, Russian, Chinese, and Korean — designed to help students and faculty navigate cross-lingual technical education.

Another is our international student body and faculty, who represent over 20 nationalities and actively contribute to dialogue and knowledge-sharing across cultures.

Through such initiatives, we hope to transform Samarkand from a symbol of historical exchange into a global beacon for sustainable innovation, intercultural respect, and peace-driven higher educa-

tion.

Q: SUN proudly supports its student organization, USSUN – United Students of SUN. What role do you think students can and should play in strengthening SUN and fostering deeper ties among youth and academic communities across Silk Road countries?

A: Students are the beating heart of global networks like SUN. At SIUT, we empower our students not only as learners, but as leaders, co-creators, and ambassadors of intercultural dialogue.

Our students regularly participate in international competitions, joint research projects, and exchange programs — such as those with the Colorado School of Mines and French institutions under our “French School” initiative. They are also engaged in innovative engineering practices through our Center for Creative Engineering and industrial internships at major national enterprises like SANEG and Eriell Group.

The best example of student-driven excellence is the publication of an IGI Global

monograph by SIUT faculty and student co-authors, which explore the ethical applications of machine learning and Python in geospatial analysis. This is not just scholarship — it is impact.

We encourage SUN students to take the lead in building inclusive academic ecosystems through USSUN — by organizing forums, leading sustainability campaigns, and fostering civic tech solutions that respond to global challenges. They are the next generation of Silk Road builders.

Q: What message would you like to convey to the leaders of SUN member universities regarding the upcoming 10th General Assembly and the future direction of SUN as it continues to grow and evolve?

A: To all the visionary leaders of SUN member institutions — we warmly invite you to Samarkand for the 10th General Assembly.

Let this not only be a celebration of our collective achievements, but a declaration of shared responsibility. In a world shaped

by disruption and division, academic cooperation across borders is no longer optional — it is essential.

SUN must continue to evolve as a platform of trust, innovation, and joint action. Let us create new frameworks for student-led entrepreneurship, cross-disciplinary research, and inclusive development. Let us also commit to building capacity in frontier areas such as AI, green energy, and peace engineering.

At SIUT, we are ready to contribute fully — through our international technopolis project set to launch in 2026, through new double diploma agreements, and through an unshakable belief in the transformative power of knowledge. Together, we can engineer a shared future worthy of the Silk Roads' enduring legacy.

Q: Finally, what advice would you offer to students of SUN member universities — both in terms of contributing to the growth of SUN and in preparing for their own personal and professional futures?

A: To the brilliant students of SUN universities: remember that you are the new caravans of the Silk Roads. You carry not silk or spices, but data, code, creativity, and hope. My advice is simple:

1. Think globally, act ethically. Your education is a passport, but your values define your path.
2. Lead through service. The best engineers and scientists are those who listen, care, and lift others as they rise.
3. Stay intellectually curious. Learn across disciplines and cultures. Combine technology with empathy. Embrace complexity.

At SIUT, we are proud to nurture students who excel not only in STEM fields, but also in civic responsibility and global citizenship. Take full advantage of the SUN network. Create impact. Collaborate across borders. And always, lead with vision and heart.

Cinematic Depictions of Epic Moments on the Silk Roads



Cameron Shirvani Steiner

The Silk Road has been a source of fascination for centuries. In recent decades, cinematic depictions of the Silk Road's epic moments have been staged, including some once esoteric episodes such as the discoveries in the Mogao Caves, the voyages of Admiral Zheng He, and the once obscure ballad of Hua Mulan. These stories, based in historical facts though expressed with sometimes substantial creative license, reflect again the rich cultural exchanges arising from the historical events that shaped the Silk Road civilizations and the captured the imagination of

the world. A look at a small selection of exercises in grand epic film and media offers both glimpses into the past and present meditations on the interconnectedness of civilizations and shared human experience.

MYSTERY OF THE CAVES

The Mogao Caves, also known as the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, is a system of 500 temples located 25 km southeast of Dunhuang, an oasis in the Gansu-Xinjiang desert region, at the far western limit of traditional Chinese settlement along the Silk Road. First dug out in 366 CE as places of worship and pilgrimage, caves were continuously built at the site until the 14th century, and are today one the most famous Buddhist sculptural sites in China (UNESCO). The artisans of the caves created brilliant works in architecture, wall and silk painting, sculptures, and stucco (Whitfield et al.). Perhaps most significant of all is the discovery in 1900 of Cave 17, known as the “Library Cave,” which contained an estimated 50,000 total documents, dating



Promotional
image for
Tonkô (1988)

from 406 to the 11th century before the caves were sealed off. These documents included 1,100 bundles of scrolls and over 15,000 paper books and short texts, including a Hebrew selichah (penitential prayer book) (Abrams).

The mystery of these sites naturally leaves room for blanks to be filled, and one such effort was Junya Satō's 1988 historical epic, *The Silk Road* (敦煌, Tonkō in Japanese). The film, based on Yasushi Inoue's 1959 novel *Tun-Huang*, immerses viewers in the sheer scale of the landscape, from

the desolate Taklamakan Desert to the bustling oases cities. Caravans trudge through unforgiving terrain, facing sandstorms, bandits, and the constant threat of dehydration. The vast distances underscore the significance of each encounter and the weight of what was carried along the road.

To briefly highlight the story, the film follows the fictional Zhao Xingde, a Chinese scholar-soldier and one of several students impressed into the forces of Li Yunhao, emperor of the Xi Xia empire. He becomes a favorite of his commander, Zhu Wangli, and while sacking a fortress, he discovers Tsurpia, a Uighur princess. He hides her from the empire, and the two proceed to fall in love. When he's sent away to study Xixian, he leaves Tsurpia in Zhu's care, but returns to find her engaged to Li. Tragedy follows, and he and Zhu enter a pact to take revenge when Li arrives at Dunhuang. The story ends in Dunhuang as Xingde, deprived so many times throughout the film of his destinies, seizes the opportunity to leave his mark by saving a wealth of history in the nearby caves from the ravages of empire. This story, in

poetic storytelling, is the re-discovery of the Mogao Caves and its wondrous hidden libraries.

As far as a review of the actual film, *The Silk Road*, a huge box office success in Japan, probably falls short of its epic ambitions. While the performances of the cast are generally good, if overacted, and the characters acceptably believable, the film is hindered by a script that moves the film too quickly, giving you little time to absorb most scenes in its runtime. As in most epics, the attention to detail in costuming and scene-scape is impressive. The film's battle scenes, especially a nighttime battle of flaming arrows in Dunhuang, nears the grandeur of those great works of Akira Kurosawa or David Lean. Yet, as a work of historical insight, it goes a bit over the top – the real-life epic discovery of a trove of unknown documents gets overwhelmed by the imagined epic of battle and frustrated love.

VOYAGE TO THE WEST

The better known travels of Marco Polo

appear meager next to the voyages of Admiral Zheng He. Born in 1371 in the Yunnan province into a Muslim family as Ma He, his early life took a significant turn when he was captured by Ming dynasty forces (Levathes). Subsequently castrated, he served as a eunuch in the household of Prince Zhu Di, the future Yongle Emperor. Demonstrating keen intellect, unwavering loyalty, and notable military skills, Ma He ascended through the ranks, becoming a trusted advisor, and when Zhu Di took the throne as the Yongle Emperor, Ma He was granted the esteemed name “Zheng.”

Under the sponsorship of the Yongle Emperor, Zheng He spearheaded a series of unprecedented maritime expeditions, widely recognized as the Ming treasure voyages, spanning from 1405 to 1433 (Dreyer). Leading immense fleets, comprising hundreds of vessels and tens of thousands of personnel, the Admiral embarked on voyages that served purposes of diplomacy, trade, and the assertion of Ming influence across the Indian Ocean and beyond. The voyages extended to Southeast Asia, encompassing regions such as Cham-



Promotional
image for Zheng
He Xia Xiyang
(2009)

pa, Java, and Malacca, and then proceeded westward to India, the Persian Gulf, and even the eastern coast of Africa, with well-documented stops in prominent locations like Calicut, Hormuz, and Mogadishu. These ambitious expeditions successfully fostered diplomatic connections, facilitated the exchange of valuable goods and knowledge, and effectively showcased the immense wealth and advanced technological capabilities of the Ming Dynasty to the wider world (Dreyer).

So why is he so unrecognized, at least in the Western world? Perhaps one key reason is that his story has yet to be captured in a major epic film deserving of his world-spanning exploits, one which would cross over into the international box office. The most notable depiction of his adventures is currently found in the 59-episode major limited series, released in China and surrounding east Asian markets in 2009, appropriately titled *Zheng He Xia Xiyang*, or *Zheng He's Voyage to the West*. While the lack of an epic film is disappointing to Zheng He fans, it may be that 59 episodes is more appropriate for the scale of Zheng He's achievements. How could the vast sweep of his story be given justice in the limited time frame of even the most epic feature film? In fact, the producers reportedly planned 95 episodes, and some continuity in their scripts was lost in the reduction (Li, 2009).

The series features some swashbuckling action and lavish film sets, costumes, and location shots, as befits this heroic tale. It even includes a real giraffe to feature the most exotic treasure Zheng He brought

back from the Western Seas. A mixture of shooting on-location and in studios such as the famed Hengdian World Studios were used to capture the historical period, and large replicas were built for the fleet of treasure ships, reaching up to 75-meters-long and 28-meters-wide. The series also spends a significant amount of time on court politics and palace gossip and intrigue, and even the personal melodrama needed to hold the audience for episodic television. Indeed, some observers noted that the real protagonist of the drama is the character Zhu Di, known as the Yongle Emperor of the Ming Dynasty, played by actor Tang Guoqiang, one of the most prolific actors in China for his regular appearances in historical films (Li, 2009). While must-see TV for a huge audience in China and some other markets in East Asia, the series never got much attention in the rest of the world, so we are still waiting for a big Zheng He epic to sweep as much of the world as the great Admiral did himself.

MODERN ADAPTATIONS OF HUA MULAN

The legend of Hua Mulan, a young woman who disguises herself as a man to take her ailing father's place in the army, is one of China's most enduring and beloved folk tales. The earliest written account of Mulan appears in the Ballad of Mulan, a Northern Wei dynasty (386-534 CE) folk song that recounts her years of military service during the Northern Wei's military campaign against the nomadic Rouran, her refusal of official rewards, and her eventual return home. Over centuries, Mulan's story was expanded upon and adapted in various forms, including plays, novels, and operas; Ming dynasty playwright Xu Wei (d.1593) dramatized the tale in *The Heroine Mulan Goes to War in Place of Her Father*, and her tale was expanded and interpolated, including a tragic end found in no other telling, in Chu Renshu's 1675 novel *Romance of the Sui and Tang Dynasties* (Huang).

Hua Mulan's profound impact on Chinese culture stems from her embodiment of traditional Confucian virtues, particularly filial piety (respect for elders and ancestors) and loyalty, and as a powerful



Promotional image for Mulan (2020)

symbol of female strength and independence, challenging gender norms while simultaneously upholding core societal values. Fascination with her tale has ensured many modern adaptations in literature and media, with the most famous of these, as you may well know, being the films of Walt Disney Pictures.

The recent live action version of Mulan did win some praise for its use of a mostly Chinese-based cast and locations, though with some concern about the production teams' insensitivity regarding the complex situation in Xinjiang province. And while it's not wrong for artists to aspire to something more universal in re-telling a culturally specific story, some harsh critics

described the film as a “whitewashed, orientalist take on Chinese culture has left the mainland Chinese audience feeling baffled and disrespected,” and “a low-effort, insincere effort to snatch that sweet, sweet Chinese box office” (Zhao).

In a change from the Disney’s animated version, the live action shows the threat as coming from the Rourans (柔然), the correct group of nomadic people that Mulan would’ve fought. But the film missed a chance to explore what may be the deeper meaning of the Mulan story - Mulan is from the Northern Wei dynasty, which is established by a formerly nomadic Tabgatch, a clan of the Xianbei (鲜卑). The original ballad even refers to Mulan’s emperor as “the Great Khan”. The Rouran and the Tabgatch were both from the Olots/Yelut, one of the four major subgroups of Mongols and shared Donghu ancestors (Zhao). What this means is that the battle was one between cousins who had chosen different ways – Mulan’s Tabgatch were newly sedentary and in their struggle against the still nomadic Rouran we see an actual, historic clash of civilizations, related Central

Asian peoples navigating a turning point in human civilization.

This perspective also sharpens the gender dynamics in the story, even perhaps implied in the original ballad. Mulan's skills on horseback and in fighting were surprising to her Taghbach community, but that people was only recently settled. At the time of the ballad, Mulan's still nomadic female cousins retained substantial freedom to take action, like the real-life woman warrior Khutulun, a great-granddaughter of Genghis Khan made famous in the West by Marco Polo. Among nomads, women had significant social roles requiring independence judgment, responsibility, and, necessarily, social power. "The women were responsible for gear, flocks, biannual migrations between summer and winter camping sites, and deciding of camp placement during military endeavors" (Hoff). An account of Mulan more faithful to the original story may be somewhat more poignant in our present day struggles with gender dynamics.

CONCLUSION

One of our underappreciated modern follies is that we casually underestimate the scale of the past. By this I mean, as citizens of our interconnected, globalized world, we have a tendency to analyze the distant past as people unfathomably separate and distant from one another, contained within their own villages, cities or regions. Even with an awareness of the occasional Marco Polo, or trade route networks like the Silk Road, we often appear to understand them as anomalies to the rule. These films shed light on the underlying historical events and stories, stories that reveal the encounters between peoples and the sharing of ideas on a scale grander than we give the people of history credit for. From collections of art and writing from as far as the Middle East, to great voyages reaching as far as East Africa, to folk legends interpolated through centuries that highlight how a set of people develop distinct paths, this collection of films embodies that mission of discovery so central to the Silk Road Universities Network.

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Maya Devi Temple Photo by Mahima Chaudhary

Lumbini: The Buddha's Sacred Birthplace



Mahima Chaudhary

Located in the tranquil plains of southern Nepal, Lumbini is more than just a place; it represents South Asia's timeless spiritual legacy of peace and introspection. Lumbini is revered as the birthplace of Siddhartha Gautama, who would become

the Buddha, and attracts pilgrims, historians, and inquisitive tourists from all over the world. Visitors are reminded of a tale that started more than 2,600 years ago by the distant echo of chanting monks and the gentle rustling of the Sal trees in this place where time seems to stand still.

The Story of Lumbini

Buddhist legend states that Queen Maya Devi of the Shakya Kingdom rested in Lumbini's garden while traveling to her parents' house in Devadaha. In 623 BCE, while there, she gave birth to Siddhartha Gautama beneath a Sal tree. According to legend, the newborn took seven steps immediately after birth and declared it would be his final reincarnation. Thus, one of the greatest spiritual leaders in history was born in this modest garden.

As a UNESCO World Heritage Site and an acknowledged archaeological treasure, Lumbini's significance extends beyond Buddhist belief. An inscription confirming the location as the birthplace of the Buddha is displayed on the Ashoka Pillar,



Lumbini Monastic zone

Photo by Mahima Chaudhary

which was built by Emperor Ashoka of India in 249 BCE. This ancient monument stands as one of the oldest and most reliable historical documents confirming Lumbini's sacred status.

A Sanctuary of Peace

While strolling through Lumbini today, one is struck by the harmony of devotion and history. The Maya Devi Temple, which enshrines the exact location where Siddhartha Guatama is believed to have been born, is the centerpiece of the holy

complex. Within the temple, archaeologists have discovered ruins that date back to the third century BCE and earlier. The exact location of the birth is thought to be marked by a stone marker under glass.

The Sacred Garden, a space intended for meditation and self-reflection, surrounds the temple. The serene garden is home to the ancient Bodhi tree, the perpetually burning flame of peace, and sacred ponds where Queen Maya is rumored to have taken a bath.

The Monastic Zone, a vast area dedicated to international monasteries, is arguably the most inspirational. Nations such as Thailand, Myanmar, South Korea, China, Germany, and France have constructed temples here, each reflecting their unique architectural styles. This global representation serves as a powerful reminder of how widely and profoundly the Buddha's teachings have been accepted.

Lumbini in the Modern World

Lumbini is not merely a historical relic; it is a living center for education, peace-



Royal Thai Monastery in Lumbini

Photo by Mahima Chaudhary

making, and spiritual growth . This sacred place has been preserved and promoted with support from the Lumbini Development Trust, the United Nations, and other international partners. Lead by Japanese architect Kenzo Tange's Master Plan, the site balances historical preservation with international pilgrimage, envisioning Lumbini as a place of peace and spiritual development. Each year, thousands of people travel to Lumbini not only to pay respects, but to seek healing, solutions, and to learn what it means to be compassionate in a world that is in turmoil. Under the

same skies that once echoed the Buddha's first cries, pilgrims sit in meditation, light butter lamps, and stroll barefoot through the sacred grounds.

Message that Endures

Lumbini serves as a reminder of the strength of simplicity, reflection, and unconditional love in the fast-paced, divided world of today. People from all walks of life are still motivated by the tale of a prince who gave up luxury in order to pursue enlightenment.

Lumbini is more than just a site; it holds a profound truth: that everyone has the capacity for awakening, that truth is reachable, and that peace is achievable.

Source

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Lisbon tram. Photo by Yu-jeong Lee

Noite de Fado: Saudade Flows Through the Hills of Lisbon



Yu-jeong Lee

The vintage yellow tram, aged alongside Lisbon itself, is one of Portugal's most iconic symbols. Despite its age, it remains an essential part of the city, carrying countless people through Lisbon's steep and narrow alleys. Tram number 28 took me to a charming street where I was greeted with a breathtaking view of Lisbon.

That night, under the glow of orange streetlights and soft moonlight, I wandered along the Portuguese cobblestones. Just then, a bright sign above a large wooden door caught my eye: "O Corrido, Casa de Fado."

Have you ever heard the sound of longing wrapped in melody?

Fado is a traditional music genre that means "fate" in Portuguese. The Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Portugal describes Fado as follows: "It is a Portuguese word meaning 'fate' in English, and is a general term for sad, rhythmic Portuguese



View of Lisbon.

Photo by Yu-jeong Lee

songs sung by singers in black costumes to the accompaniment of a guitar, with themes such as unrequited love, sadness, and longing (saudade).”

Fado contains a unique Portuguese emotion called ‘saudade’ a longing, loss,



"O Corrido, Casa de Fado."

Photo by Yu-jeong Lee

and sadness that is difficult to express in words. Just as 'gagok' (가곡), 'pansori' (판소리), and 'arirang' (아리랑) contain the Korean emotion of 'han' (한).

The Fado style originated from the lives of the lower class communities in Lisbon in the 19th century and continues to represent the soul of the Portuguese people to



Fado performance.

Photo by Yu-jeong Lee

this day.

In 2011, Fado was listed as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, not simply in recognition of its musical beauty, but for its cultural significance. Fado is the way Portuguese people endure and express hardships, containing the country's history and identity. Recently, young artists have reinterpreted Fado, blending tradition and modernity. Like Korean pansori (판소리), Fado is an art that channels the pain of life into song, comforting the hearts of those who have lived difficult lives.

Fado, Soul of Lisbon

The performance took place in a warm, in-



Fado performance .

Photo by Dream sheep

imate Fado house in Lisbon. Three female singers and one male singer took the stage with deep emotion. You could see how they connected with and felt the music as they sang with their eyes closed and expressions quietly intense; it felt as if each melody was drawn from a deeply held memory.

As the Fado performance began, the audience fell into a hushed silence, their attention fully captured by the music. They held their breath and closed their eyes, surrendering themselves to the emotions woven into every note. It became clear



Guitarra for Fado.

Photos by Yu-jeong Lee

that Fado is not just something to be heard, but a feeling to be deeply experienced within the heart.

To truly appreciate the soulful beauty of Fado, we invite you to experience a live performance through the video linked be-

low. Listen closely and let the music carry you into the heartfelt emotions that define this unique Portuguese art form.

With just a Portuguese guitar and the voice of a Fado singer, this music resonates deeply in the heart. But it is not the singer alone who brings the emotion to life. The guitarists play an essential role in shaping the soul of Fado. That night, one performer on a Portuguese guitarra and one classical guitarist added a delicate tension and beauty to each song, making the voices sound even more sorrowful and moving. The Portuguese guitar, with its bright yet melancholic tone, weaved emotion into



Beatriz Felício - Fadista (beatrizfelicio781@gmail.com)

every note, almost like a second voice beside the singer. The guitarist showed us a pick that he had personally modified to fit his own hand, specifically for his playing style, and gave an explanation about the unique instrument.

After the performance, I was able to have a short interview with Fadista (Fado singer), Beatriz Felício.

“Why do you sing fado and what does fado mean to you?”

“Fado is truly important to me. It is my lifestyle, and singing fado is a way I see and understand my life. When I need to express something to others, I often find it hard to explain with words. But when I sing, I can fully convey my feelings and emotions. I don’t need anything else besides singing fado. I have been singing fado since I was six years old, and now at 26, I have spent 20 years living with this music. Each day is different. I never perform the same song the same way. Fado is special and deeply meaningful to me.”

I interviewed several Portuguese attend-

ees to find out what Fado means to them. For many, Fado is more than just music. It is a profound expression of their culture, emotions, and identity, deeply woven into their daily lives.

Martim Schöler, a Portuguese student, reflected thoughtfully on the place of fado.

Q: “What is your opinion about fado?”

A: “These days, many young people are drawn to genres like POP, K-POP, FUNK, HIP-POP, which are vibrant and expressive in their own ways,” he said. “But fado is different. It carries stories and emotions that run deep in the heart. It’s a music of longing, memory, and identity that stays with you long after the last note fades.”

His words captured the timeless power of fado to connect generations through shared feelings and cultural heritage.

Nuno Carvalho, a Portuguese pilot with a deep love for his country’s traditions, shared his thoughts on fado during an interview after the performance.

Q: What does fado mean to you person-

ally as a Portuguese?

A: Fado, to me, represents Portuguese culture through its music. It is something unique to the Portuguese people, and I am proud, as a Portuguese, to represent this culture, music, and even the poetry that fado conveys to its listeners

Q: Are you familiar with the emotion of ‘saudade’? If so, do you feel it through Fado music?

A: Yes, ‘saudade’ is an expression that exists only in Portuguese and is untranslatable into any other language. It is a unique word that conveys many feelings, emotions, and memories. Fado carries this message through the lyrics of its music, as they are deeply emotional. It is a ‘saudade’ that comes from the music itself, not necessarily from a memory we have personally experienced.

Q: How would you like people around the world to understand and appreciate Portuguese Fado?

A: I believe that Fado is very difficult to explain to someone who doesn't understand what it is, because it is a very unique and particular type of music. It cannot be compared to any other genre, which makes describing it in words or by reference extremely challenging. The best way to describe Fado is simply to listen to it. Come to Portugal, listen to Fado, and you'll understand what I mean.

Conclusion

The Fado performance captivated not only Portuguese locals but also many foreign visitors. Even those unfamiliar with the language were drawn in by the raw emotion and haunting melodies. It was clear that Fado's universal themes of longing and nostalgia transcend cultural boundaries, touching the hearts of all who listen.

Before that night, I thought I knew what Fado was. We do not need to understand all the Portuguese lyrics, but when they sing with a heartfelt whisper, we can feel that the 'saudade' reaching beyond language and into the soul.

Close your eyes and feel the Fado in your heart.

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Flower of Saffron Image from Swisse Wellness

Iran's Red Gold: Saffron's Journey Along the Silk Roads



Min-ju Sung

The Spice of Crimson Gold

Saffron is a special spice that has been loved by people for thousands of years, and its beautiful red color, unique fragrance, and incredible rarity earned it the nickname of 'Red Gold.' In the Middle East, especially in Iran, saffron has long played a role in royal and religious traditions and

remains a staple in national cuisines.

The high price of saffron comes from its difficult production process. It takes about 150,000 flowers to obtain just one kilogram of spice, and the entire process from harvesting to drying is done entirely by hand. Moreover, the harvest period lasts only two weeks per year, making production extremely limited. Because of its rarity and labor-intensive production methods, it is traded for thousands of dollars per kilogram and was once considered more valuable than gold.

Saffron is more than just a spice. Traveling along the Silk Road thousands of years ago, this precious ingredient served as food, medicine, dye, and a symbol of trade.

Echoes of Saffron Along the Silk Road

- The Birth and Iranian Heritage of Saffron

Saffron was cultivated as early as 3,000 BC and widely used as a spice, medicine, cosmetic, and dye during the Achaemenid Empire in ancient Persia, present-day Iran. It is said that royal kitchens used up to one kilogram of saffron per day. The Old Per-



Saffron harvest

Photo by Fatemeh Bahrami

sian term ‘Zaferan’ is considered the earliest recorded reference to saffron in the culinary and medical fields. In The Canon of Medicine by Avicenna, a master of medieval medicine, saffron is mentioned as a digestive and analgesic, and its long-standing medical efficacy is discussed in detail.

Currently, Iran accounts for approximately 90% of the world’s saffron production, exporting over 250 tons annually to more than 40 countries. Iranian saffron, especially from Khorasan and Isfahan, is considered the best quality. However, during international distribution, it is often mislabeled or repackaged, disguising its true origin.

Saffron still occupies an important place



Saffron harvest

Photo by sabah.com.tr

in the daily lives of Iranians today. Beyond saffron tea, Iran preserves its unique cultural traditions through various traditional dishes such as the saffron rice pudding ('sholeh zard'), the rice dish 'Tahchin,' full of saffron flavor, and chicken skewers ('joojeh kabab') flavored with saffron and lemon.

Beyond its practical uses, saffron also holds deep symbolic significance in Persian literature. It often represents joy, beauty, sunlight, and golden radiance, frequently appearing in classical poetry and storytelling as a metaphor for happiness and the brilliance of life.



‘Sholeh Zard,’ traditional Persian saffron rice pudding

Image from Unicorns in the Kitchen

- *Red Gold on the Move*

Originating in Iran, saffron spread along the Silk Road to Central Asia, China, India, and the Mediterranean, becoming a prized trade item. Its light weight and great worth made it a high value commodity for small merchants, like silk and jewels, symboliz-



Silk Road Trade Routes

Image from Iran Paradise

ing the Silk Road's history and culture.

The trade in saffron had an importance far beyond simple economic exchange. In ancient Greece, Hippocrates wrote in *On the Sacred Disease* that saffron was beneficial for eyesight and digestion, and in Rome, Dioscorides described in *De Materia Medica* saffron's remarkable effects, including calming the mood, stimulating the appetite, and soothing the stomach. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, saffron became a true symbol of aristocracy in Europe. The upper classes of Spain, Italy, and France considered it an essential spice for fine cooking, beauty, and religious ceremonies. Thus, the demand for

saffron steadily increased throughout Europe.

- Rooted in Ritual, Thriving in Markets

Saffron became more than a simple trade item and became a medium for spreading culture, rituals, and knowledge along the Silk Road. Each region has embraced saffron in its own unique way, incorporating it into cultural life, including cooking, medicine, religion, and art.

From prehistoric times to the rituals of Hinduism and Ayurveda in India, as well as Islamic medicine, saffron has been recognized as a valuable medicinal herb known for its anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and analgesic properties. In medieval Europe, its value grew so high that it provoked the “Saffron Wars,” fueled by smuggling, speculation, and trading as it was thought to treat the Black Death. Saffron was far more than just a simple medicine and food ingredient; it was also a powerful political and social symbol.

Saffron also holds important historical significance as one of the oldest natural dyes. In Buddhism, the saffron-dyed robes



Dyeing with Saffron

Image from Qof Food

of monks became a profound religious symbol, while in ancient Persia, it was widely used for temple murals and fabric dyeing.

Even in modern times, saffron remains an important medium connecting culture and economy. Khorasan in Iran, Kashmir in India, and Xi'an in China continue to serve as the major centers of saffron production. In Iran, saffron has become a key export product, contributing significantly to the agriculture GDP and providing jobs to thousands of people. Today, it is valued not only as an economic asset but also as a living piece of cultural heritage that continues to carry the spirit of the Silk Road.

A Legacy of Connection

Thousands of years ago, saffron first appeared on the rugged cliffs of the Zagros Mountains and then spread to all corners of the ancient world along the Silk Road. From the Mediterranean to India, China, and the Middle East, it became deeply embedded into the cultures of each region. Over time, saffron has become a cultural symbol, leaving a lasting imprint on the daily lives and traditions of diverse civilizations.

To this day, saffron stands as a living legacy of the Silk Road, representing shared wisdom, cultural exchange, and economic solidarity across borders. Ultimately, saffron is more than just a noble red spice; it is a treasure more valuable than gold, a cultural thread that has long connected people and civilizations.

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The Ancient Qanat System: Lifelines of the Silk Road



Nafisa Haj Abedi

Throughout history, the Silk Road has served not only as a conduit for trade between East and West, but also as a medium of technological exchange, cultural integration, and civilizational endurance. One of the most critical yet underappreciated infrastructures that made the Silk Road viable through harsh terrains and arid climates was the ancient Iranian Qanat system.

A Qanat is a traditional subterranean aqueduct, designed to transport groundwater from deep aquifers to the surface through a series of gently sloping tunnels. This engineering marvel, believed to have



Qanats of Bam

Photo by S.H. Rashedi

originated in ancient Persia over 2,500 years ago, allowed settlements and agriculture to flourish in areas where rainfall was scarce and surface water was unreliable.

The system consisted of a vertical well dug deep into an aquifer, connecting to a horizontal tunnel that brought water to the surface through the force of gravity. Vertical shafts were placed at intervals to enable for ventilation, access, and removal of excavated soil. The outcome was a sus-

tainable, energy-efficient method of water delivery requiring no pumps or fuel—only careful design and maintenance.

The Birthplace of Innovation

Archaeological and historical records indicate that Qanats were first developed in the arid plateaus of Iran, particularly in regions such as Yazd and Kerman. By the time of the Achaemenid Empire (6th century BCE), the Qanat had already become widespread, with systems supporting cities, agriculture, and royal infrastructure projects.

Darius the Great is often credited with promoting the development of Qanats throughout the empire. Inscriptions such as the Behistun Inscription and accounts from classical historians suggest that Persian engineers were highly regarded across the ancient world for their mastery of water management. These systems quickly became a hallmark of Iranian civilization and spread across the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia.

The Silk Road was not a single highway



Mozd Abad Qanat

Photo by ICQHS Archive

but a vast web of interconnected trade routes stretching from China to the Mediterranean. Large stretches of this network passed through arid and semi-arid regions where water scarcity posed a significant challenge for merchants, pilgrims, schol-

ars, and armies.

Qanats played a vital role in overcoming this challenge. By supplying reliable, year-round access to fresh water, they enabled the establishment of caravanserais, marketplaces, and permanent settlements at strategic intervals along trade routes. Cities like Nishapur, Ray, and Merv grew into thriving cultural and commercial hubs, largely because of their access to Qanat water.

Caravan routes were carefully chosen to pass through areas where Qanats were present. In turn, the presence of travelers and merchants incentivized the expansion and maintenance of these systems. In this way, the Qanat and the Silk Road were symbiotically linked: one enabled life and trade in the desert, while the other brought prosperity and purpose to remote communities.

Facilitating Migration and Cultural Exchange

Though the Qanat was a local innovation, its impact was profoundly global. As mer-

chants and travelers moved along the Silk Road, they carried more than goods—they carried ideas, techniques, and knowledge. The Qanat system became one such transferable technology.

The Turpan Basin in western China, for instance, is home to an intricate system of underground canals known as Karez, which bear striking resemblance to Persian Qanats. Though the precise origin is debated, many historians and hydrologists believe that the technology reached China via Iran during the early centuries of the Common Era.

This transfer of technology illustrates the way in which infrastructure underpinned not only economic exchange but also the migration of ideas and innovations. Qanats enabled people to settle in harsh environments, supported the growth of new communities, and fostered cross-cultural interaction, thereby contributing to early processes of globalization.

An Environmentally Sustainable System

Long before the concepts of environmental



Mozd Abad Qanat

Photo by ICQHS Archive

stewardship and sustainable development entered mainstream discourse, the Qanat stood as a model of ecological harmony. Because the system used gravity rather than mechanical force, it required no energy input once constructed. Furthermore, since the water was drawn gently from aquifers, over-extraction was naturally limited, preserving the balance of local ecosystems.

Unlike modern wells, which can rapidly deplete groundwater through motorized pumping, Qanats maintained a slow, steady discharge that last for centuries if

properly maintained.

In fact, some Qanats in Iran, such as those in Gonabad, have been in continuous operation for over 2,000 years.

Political and Social Dimensions

The construction and maintenance of Qanats were not only technical but reflected deeply social and political factors. Their management often involved complex systems of ownership, labor sharing, and dispute resolution. Local communities established water rights, rotating schedules for irrigation, and maintenance duties.

Historical sources from the Sasanian era reveal that the state often took responsibility for Qanat construction and regulation. Under Islamic rule, waqf (charitable endowment) foundations were sometimes used to finance the digging and upkeep of Qanats, especially when they served public needs like drinking water or irrigation.

Furthermore, the act of digging a Qanat was considered so virtuous that it was praised in religious texts and oral traditions. In Zoroastrianism, water was sa-

cred, and providing it to others was seen as a path to spiritual reward. Even in later Islamic societies, digging a Qanat was believed to be a charitable act whose benefits extended to future generations.

A Decline with Modernization

With the rise of modern technologies such as motorized pumps, deep wells, and pressurized irrigation systems, the use of Qanats began to decline in the 20th century. Urbanization, land reform, and changes in water law further reduced their viability in many areas.

Today, while thousands of Qanats remain across Iran, only a fraction are still active. Many have been abandoned due to neglect, changing economic conditions, or damage from nearby construction. The loss of these systems is more than a technical issue—it represents the erosion of a cultural and environmental heritage that once sustained entire civilizations.

Global Recognition and Revival Efforts

In 2016, UNESCO recognized 11 Persian Qanats as World Heritage Sites, acknowledging their outstanding value as cultural and scientific achievements. These include Qanats in Yazd, Zarch, and Gonabad. The designation has sparked renewed interest in the conservation and preservation of these sites, with efforts by local communities, NGOs, and the Iranian government to revive, document, and maintain these systems.

Beyond Iran, scholars and engineers in water-scarce regions—from Morocco to Afghanistan—are looking again at Qanats as a low-cost, low-impact alternative to modern systems. In a world grappling with climate change, desertification, and water scarcity, ancient wisdom may yet hold vital answers.

Conclusion: Lifelines Beyond Time

The Iranian Qanat system is far more than an ancient irrigation method. It is a symbol of human ingenuity, sustainability, and resilience. Its influence on the Silk Road is a testament to how infrastructure enables

cultural and economic integration across vast geographies.

As we continue to seek sustainable solutions to 21st-century challenges, revisiting systems like the Qanat offers more than historical curiosity; it offers practical inspiration. These ancient lifelines sustained the flow of goods, people, and ideas for millennia. The story of Qanats is a reminder that progress and tradition need not be at odds, and that in looking backward, we may just find the way forward.

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A scene of the Lunuganga Estate Photo by Rethinking the Future (2024)

TRAVEL

Lunuganga Estate: A Fascinating Architectural Garden in Sri Lanka



Amali Ranavi Thantrige

The Lunuganga Estate in Sri Lanka is a fascinating architectural marvel. Known as one of the most profound Asian gardens of the 20th century, it stands as evidence of masterful architectural skills of

Geoffrey Bawa (1919-2003) one of the most well-recognised Asian architects of the 20th century. Transforming an abandoned rubber estate with a bungalow into an architectural masterpiece of the modern era definitely could not happen overnight. But this decades-long project embodies “tropical modernism” as a design style that combines architectural traditions found along the Silk Roads and provides an inspiration for the reflections in this essay.

Lunuganga - meaning ‘salt river’ in Sinhala language - and the striking natural location of this beautiful garden gave it this name. Bawa’s garden, located near the coastal town of Bentota (Southern Province) in Sri Lanka, transcends the conventional idea of a garden through its combination of architecture, local plants, and respect for nature. Born in Sri Lanka to parents of mixed local and immigrant heritage, Bawa as an architect was well-known for his stunning building designs. Some examples of his work include the Sri Lanka Parliament at Sri Jayawardenapura Kotte, and the epic Kandalama Hotel near the Sigiriya World Heritage Site in

Sri Lanka. He was known as someone who understood the nature of tropical weather so that his designs merged indoor and outdoor spaces so that his buildings naturally accommodated warm weather.

Lunuganga Estate is acknowledged as a harmonious blend of nature and architecture, representing Bawa's philosophy of integrating landscapes and buildings. Some major architectural values of this place include:

Spatial Fluidity

The Estate includes open verandas, courtyards, and interconnected spaces, allowing for effortless transitions between indoors and outdoors.

Material Authenticity

As mentioned above this was an abandoned rubber plant when Bawa purchased it. When he decided to design a place that heals minds and bodies, he made sure to use local materials to ensure that the place remained rooted in Sri Lankan heritage. He used materials such as coral stone, timber, and clay tiles.

Landscape Integration

Normally, people tend to think of a garden location as outside a structure. However, Bawa's garden is not outside. As explained in the web journal *Rethinking the Future*, Bawa's design starts inside with a view that brings the outside into the interior space. His design of Lunuganga shows how he considers the 'view' to the outside as an important part of interior design. Because Lunuganga is built in a tropical lagoon, it includes views of water on two sides. The design also incorporates "a series of outdoor rooms that offer a different experience in each corner," so that "[t]he estate's gardens serve as an extension of the architecture, blurring the boundaries between built form and nature" (*Rethinking the Future*). Overall, the Estate's terraced gardens, water features, and pavilions create a dynamic interplay between nature and architecture.

Sensory Engagement

Moreover, Bawa designed Lunuganga carefully with interactions of light, shadow, and other natural elements. Although

this was a feature of the exterior of Bawa's house, this has become a main attraction for visitors. It is wonderful to see how Bawa designed these matching conditions to enhance the sensory experience of visitors seven decades after the project was launched.

A unique element of the garden is that it reflects not only Sri Lankan historical architecture but it also shows elements from garden design around the world such as Italian Renaissance, English landscape design, and even some features from Japanese garden art. Also, Lunuganga has a great collection of classical statues and sculptures, as well as many valuable trees.

Another significant feature of Lunuganga is that despite being rooted in Sri Lanka, it still shares architectural values with Silk Road cities that embraced courtyard-style planning, water features, and material authenticity. Some of these Silk Road design elements include:

Persian Gardens (Iran)

One of Lunuganga's features, the use of reflective water surfaces can be found in

Persian garden aesthetics. For example, Lunuganga's water garden resonates well with the Fin Garden in Kashan, which emphasizes the elements such as water channels and enclosed courtyards.

Mughal Architecture (India)

Studies show that Bawa's designs in pavilions and shaded walkways reflect some of the traditions of Mughal architecture. For example, Lunuganga's structures aesthetically echo the Shalimar Bagh in Kashmir and Humayun's Tomb in Delhi.

Ottoman Courtyard House (Turkey)

Another place that shows the relations between Silk Road architecture and Lunuganga architecture is traditional Ottoman houses that can be seen in cities like Istanbul and Bursa. Lunuganga uses natural ventilation and passive cooling techniques seen in older Ottoman houses.

A Fusion of Cultures and Timeless Beauty

Overall, the Lunuganga Estate is more than

just a garden with plants - it is an architectural marvel that connects and forms a dialogue between past and present, tradition and innovation. It is surprising to see that Geoffrey Bawa's architecture harmonizes modern-style built structures with nature while also displaying the ancient wisdom found in Silk Road architecture, where architecture is considered as an experience rather than just a building. Indeed, Bawa's approach was neither imitation of Silk Road architecture nor replication - it was a thoughtful reinterpretation of timeless values and methods but also adapted to Sri Lanka's tropical cultural landscape.

Despite being in a small town in Sri Lanka, Lunuganga unique architectural design and harmonization with Silk Roads elements continues to inspire architects, artists, and visitors from around the world, reminding us of the power of architecture in shaping surroundings and cross-cultural identities. This makes the Lunuganga Estate a modern Silk Road of its own, in many ways offering a space for everyone to experience a combination of history, nature, and architectural design that is both

deeply rooted locally but resonant universally. Indeed, it provides a good escape from the summer weather for everyone who loves to not only enjoy nature but also architectural values and stories enriched by the exchange of ideas across centuries.

Source

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Gimhae: Korea's Hidden Silk Road City

- A City of Heritage and Coexistence



Artifacts of cultural exchange Photo by Min-song Kim



Min-song Kim

When it comes to an ancient Silk Road City in Korea, people typically think of Gyeongju, the capital of Silla, which was an ancient Korean kingdom that actively engaged in Silk Road trade through

maritime routes. Although overshadowed by the prominence of Gyeongju as a representative Silk Road city, there stands a smaller and lesser known yet historically significant city in South Korea: Gimhae.

Gimhae: a City Rooted in the Legacy of Gaya, a Kingdom of Iron and Innovation

Gimhae is a small city located in the southeastern part of South Korea, near the city of Busan. The origins of Gimhae trace back to the ancient Gaya Confederacy, which was founded in the region and laid the historical and cultural foundation for the city.

Long before Korea's major dynasties rose to prominence, the southern region of the peninsula was home to an important confederation known as Gaya. Flourishing from the 1st to 6th centuries CE, Gaya was not a single kingdom, but a group of small yet powerful kingdoms that had developed their own unique culture, language, and economy.

Renowned for its highly developed iron-working technology, Gaya became a hub of both technological innovation and

regional influence. Its iron goods - swords, armor, and tools - were widely sought after, activating trade networks that reached across the sea to Japan, and inland toward other Korean kingdoms and even parts of China. However, despite its significant influence, Gaya gradually lost power due to rising tensions with neighboring kingdoms. Gaya was ultimately absorbed by Silla in 562 CE, resulting in the disappearance of its political and cultural identity into the expanding Silla kingdom.

Today, Gaya's legacy lives on through the archaeological sites and royal burial mounds of prominent kings found in Gimhae.

The city has made dedicated efforts to preserve and promote this rich historical heritage through the restoration of ancient sites, expansion of museum exhibitions, and through their efforts to host cultural festivals celebrating Gaya's identity. Through these initiatives, Gimhae continues to grow as a cultural heritage city where the past and present coexist, inviting visitors to experience history not as something distant, but as a living, evolving

part of daily life.

Gimhae, a City of Diversity and Coexistence

Diversity, dynamism, and openness are some of the key characteristics explaining the enduring legacy of Gaya and the identity of Gimhae.

From its early days, Gaya has shown a remarkable spirit of cross-cultural exchange, actively engaging in maritime trade with neighboring regions. Archaeological findings from sites such as the Dae-seong-dong Ancient Tombs and the Bonghwang-dong palace area in Gimhae show that the kingdom had prospered due to its advantageous location for maritime trade. Gaya's extensive trade networks are reflected in the foreign artifacts discovered in royal tombs, such as Chinese bronze cauldrons from the Jin Dynasty, jade and shells from Japan and Okinawa, nomadic horse gear from northern tribes, and even Roman glass. The recovery of an ancient wooden ship and oar provides further evidence of its maritime prowess and the in-



Artifacts of cultural exchange

Photos by Min-song Kim



infrastructure that facilitated its external interactions.

Adding to this legacy is the legendary story of Heo Hwang-ok, a princess from the distant Ayuta Kingdom, which many people believe to be in modern-day India. According to historical records, her parents - the king and queen of Ayuta - were

said to have been given a divine order to send their daughter across the sea to marry King Suro, the man who founded Geumgwan Gaya. She traveled by boat to the Korean Peninsula in 48 CE and ascended to the throne, marking an early and remarkable example of cross-cultural cooperation and blending cultures. This story, along with tangible evidence from archaeological excavations, highlights Gaya's openness to the outside world and its role as a site of cross-cultural communication. Evidently, Gaya was a thriving participant in an ancient network of maritime trade, establishing the early foundations for the global connections that would later be recognized as the Silk Roads.

This spirit of diversity, dynamism, and openness is not only rooted in Gaya's ancient legacy - it continues to shape the character of modern-day Gimhae. One prominent example is Asian Street in Dongseong-dong, a vibrant cultural hub that represents Gimhae's growing international community. Home to a diverse population, including migrants from countries such as Nepal, Vietnam, China, and Uzbek-

istan, the neighborhood offers a rich tapestry of languages, cuisines, and cultural practices. From colorful street murals to multicultural grocery stores and restaurants, Asian Street is a living example of Gimhae's dedication to embracing different cultures. Just as Gaya did in the past when it connected regions across oceans, Gimhae today promotes human interaction and coexistence, showing how important the values of inclusion and cultural coexistence are to the city's identity.

Explore the Spirit of Gaya: Historic Sites and Cultural Experiences in Gimhae

The city's historical landmarks and yearly festivals serve as striking examples of this continuing legacy of cross-cultural interaction.

Tomb of King Suro and Tomb of Queen Heo Hwang-ok

These two burial sites honor the legendary founder of Geumgwan Gaya and his Indian-born queen, Heo Hwang-ok. The tombs serve as enduring reminders of Gimhae's



Artifacts of cultural exchange

Photos by Min-song Kim

rich historical heritage and its early involvement in international relations, serving as potent symbols of ancient international alliance. The tomb area, which is surrounded by peaceful gardens and educational displays, invites visitors to reflect on the union that once bridged distant



Daeseong-dong Ancient Tombs

Photos by Min-song Kim



kingdoms across the sea.

Daeseong-dong Ancient Tombs (Gaya Tumuli)

Located near the heart of the city, the Daeseong-dong Ancient Tombs are among

the most significant archaeological finds in Korea. These royal burial mounds reveal the wealth, artistry, and far-reaching trade of the Gaya Confederacy, with excavated items such as Chinese bronze ware, Japanese ornaments, and nomadic horse equipment. Due to these items, the site offers a vivid picture of Gaya as a cosmopolitan society thriving on exchange and innovation.

Heo Hwang-ok Cultural Festival

This annual festival in Gimhae honors Queen Heo Hwang-ok's maritime journey from India to Korea. The festival typically takes place in October, featuring various cultural performances, reenactments, and exhibitions that highlight the historical and cultural ties between Korea and India. The festival not only revives the ancient tale of love and diplomacy but also highlights Gimhae's historical role in fostering international interaction. For the most accurate and up-to-date information on the festival's schedule and events, it's recommended to visit the official Gimhae City Tourism Portal or contact the Gimhae Cul-



Heo Hwang-ok Cultural Festival

Photo by eNews Today

tural Foundation closer to the event.

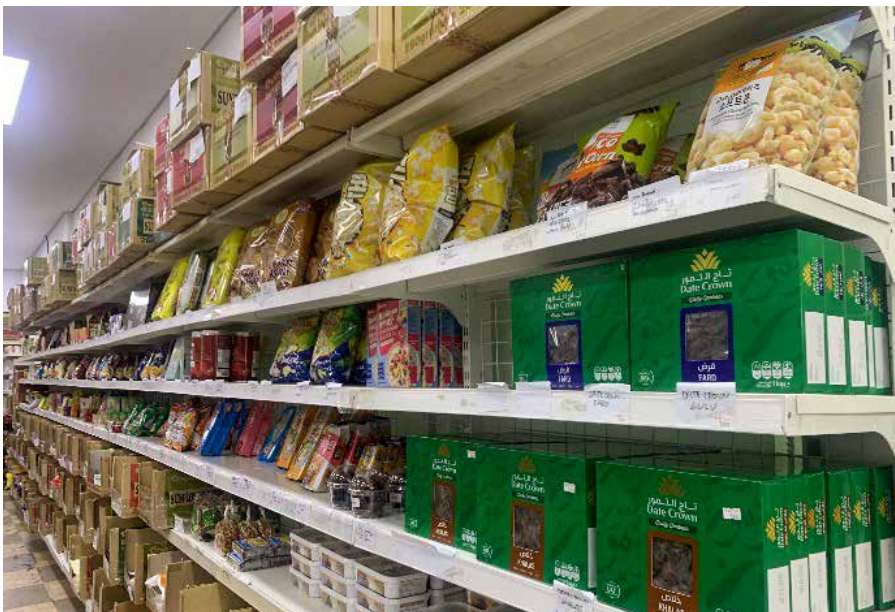
Located in Dongseong-dong, Asian Street is a multicultural hub that reflects Gimhae's spirit of diversity, dynamism, and openness. Home to residents from countries like Nepal, Vietnam, Uzbekistan, China, and more, the area features ethnic restaurants, grocery stores, and vibrant street art that shows the cultural richness of the community. Visitors can enjoy authentic Asian cuisine and experience daily life in a neighborhood influenced by cultural exchange. As a modern reflection of Gimhae's ancient ties to the Silk Roads, Asian Street offers a glimpse into the city's continuing role as a bridge between cul-



Asian Street in Dongseong-dong

tures.

To make your journey through Gimhae even more engaging, the city offers a special interactive program called the “Happy City Gimhae Stamp Tour”. This unique experience invites visitors to explore key landmarks - like the Tomb of King Suro, Daeseong-dong Ancient Tombs, and Asian Street - while collecting stamps at hidden checkpoints located throughout the city’s most iconic attractions. Participants can pick up a stamp booklet, visit designated sites to collect stamps, complete fun missions, and then receive a souvenir gift as a keepsake of their adventure. Please make

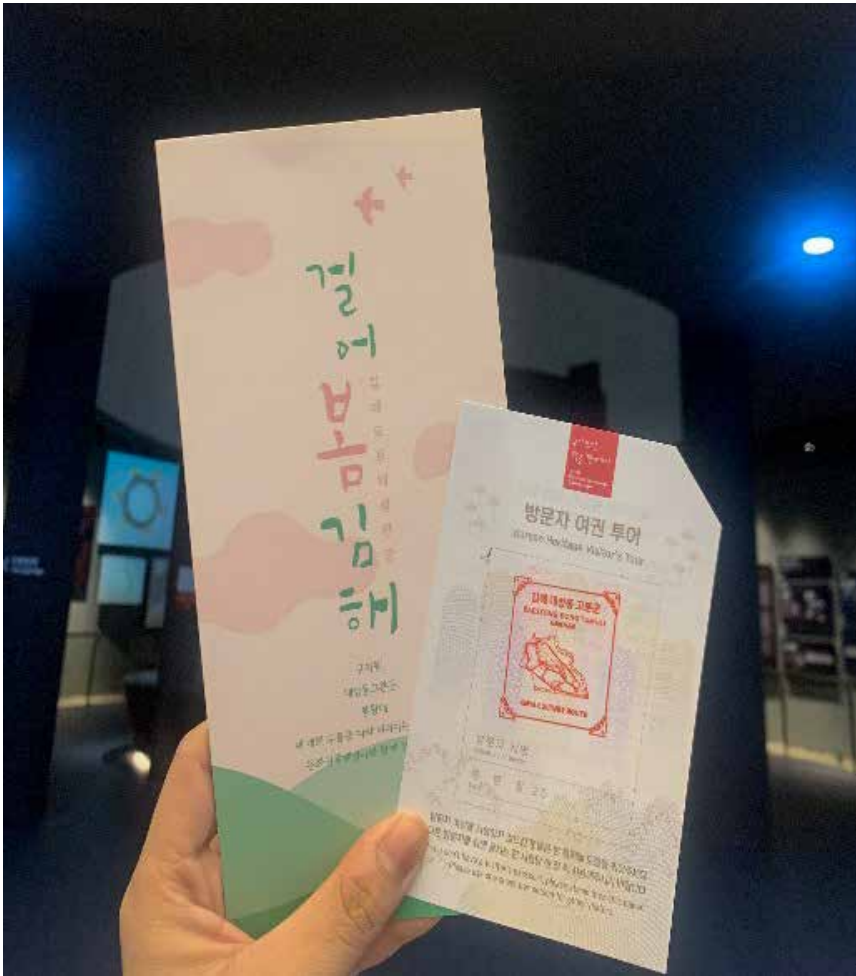


Scenes from Asian Street

Photos by Min-song Kim



enduring memories through this stamp tour and learn about Gimhae’s unique fusion of history, culture, and local beauty.



**The Happy City
Gimhae Stamp Tour**
Photos by Min-song Kim



The Spirit Continues: Gimhae as Korea’s Contemporary Silk Road City

In many ways, Gimhae today is more than a historic city; it is a contemporary Silk Road city where the ancient spirit of exchange



**Educational
materials on
Gaya's heritage**

Photo by Min-song Kim

and integration continues to thrive. Rooted in the values of diversity, dynamism, and openness, Gimhae continues the legacy of Gaya through vibrant cultural practices and inclusive community-building. The city exemplifies the timeless values of connection across borders and generations, from the legendary journey of Queen Heo Hwang-ok to the multicultural life of Asian Street, and from heritage festivals to historic royal tombs.

In addition to preserving its history,

Gimhae is also actively shaping its future by providing programs like the Happy City Stamp Tour, supporting ongoing historical studies and archaeological excavations, making institutions like the National Museum of Gimhae more accessible to citizens, and developing engaging educational initiatives that encourage people to connect with Gaya's story. Gimhae, which is located at the easternmost tip of the Silk Roads, is where the great corridor that once connected the East and West takes on a new form, transforming historical exchange into living cultural discourse. Through its commitment to preserving the heritage, activating diversity, and intercultural understanding, Gimhae redefines what it means to be a Silk Road city in the 21st century.

Sources

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Constanța: More Than Just a Port City on the Black Sea



Hyeong-hoo Kim

Located in southeastern Romania along the Black Sea coast, Constanța is more than just a port city. Since ancient times, it has served as a strategic hub and vital gateway to the “Small Silk Road,” where Eastern and Western trade and culture intersected. Beneath its modern reputation as a tourist destination lies a rich and mul-

Constanța waterfront Romanian Tourist Office



tilayered history of civilizations and cultural exchanges.

Ancient Beginnings: The Birth of Tomis and Traces of Rome

The history of Constanța begins in the 6th century BCE when ancient Greek colonists founded the city of Tomis along the Black Sea coast. From its early days, Tomis prospered through active trade with Asia Minor and mainland Greece. In the 1st century CE, the city came under Roman rule and developed into a major military and administrative center. One of Constanța's most symbolic historical moments is linked to the Roman poet Ovid, who was exiled to Tomis. Ovid spent his final years there, and his legacy is reflected in a cultural landmark of the city.

Tomis later fell under the rule of the Byzantine, Bulgarian, and Ottoman Empires, continually transforming amid the geopolitical interests of the East and West. The current name, "Constanța," is believed to derive from Constantia, the sister of 4th century CE Roman Emperor Constantine

the Great, symbolizing the profound influence of politics and the shifting empires throughout history.

The Silk Road and Constanța: A Maritime Trade Hub Linking East and West

While the traditional Silk Road is often associated with the overland routes stretching from China through Central Asia to Europe, the maritime routes were equally significant. The Black Sea served as a crucial link in this network, and Constanța emerged as a key logistics hub connecting Eastern Europe, Asia Minor, and the Middle East.

During the later Middle Ages, Constanța actively engaged in trade with Anatolia and the Islamic world, acting as a passageway for Central Asian textiles, spices, and ceramics into Europe.

The port of Constanța was not merely a stop on a trading route but was a melting pot of various ethnicities, religions, and cultures. As a result, the city showcases a blend of architectural styles, ranging from Roman ruins to early Christian churches

and Islamic mosques.

Archaeological Sites and Artifacts: Tangible Traces of History

Today, scattered ruins and relics throughout Constanța attest to its illustrious past. In Piața Ovidiu, a square located in the heart of the city, stands a statue honoring Ovidius. Nearby is the National History and Archaeology Museum (Muzeul de Istorie Națională și Arheologie), which houses a rich collection of ancient artifacts including pottery, trade goods, coins, and Roman mosaics—demonstrating the international character of ancient Constanța.

Another notable site is the Roman Mosaic Edifice (Edificiul Roman cu Mozaic), a massive structure built around the 4th century. It was once directly connected to the harbor, emphasizing its central role in commerce and urban life. The elaborate and well-preserved mosaic patterns offer vivid insight into Roman artistry and daily life.

Cultural Influences and Modern-Day Constanța

Constanța has absorbed cultural influences over centuries, resulting in a unique identity. The layers of Roman, Greek, Byzantine, Ottoman, and modern Romanian cultures have deeply impacted the city's unique identity. Thanks to its position by the Black Sea and its cosmopolitan legacy, Constanța remains one of Romania's most culturally diverse cities.

Constanța continues to attract many visitors as Romania's largest port city and a thriving tourist destination. The legacy of the ancient Silk Road is not just a historical artifact—it forms the foundation for the city's ongoing significance and cultural diversity in the present day.

Source

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SUN NEWS

SUN Expands its Horizons: Welcomes New Members, Gears Up for the 10th General Assembly in Samarkand

SUN Welcomes New Member Universities

The Silk-Road Universities Network (SUN) officially accepted five universities from Algeria, Jordan and Montenegro as its new members at its Ninth General Assembly held in Naples, Italy, last November. The new members represent the continued broadening of SUN's geographic reach and reaffirm its mission of academic collaboration, peace-building, and intercultural exchanges along the historic Silk Roads.

University of Donja Gorica (UDG), Montenegro

Founded in 2007 and located in the capital city of Podgorica, the University of Donja Gorica (UDG) stands today as the largest private university in Montenegro. Under the leadership of Rector Dr. Veselin Vukotić, UDG has earned a reputation for its interdisciplinary curriculum and strong entrepreneurial ethos. The University is deeply committed to fostering innovation and cultivating global partnerships, while remaining firmly rooted in the regional development goals of Southeast Europe.



Photo courtesy of [udg_montenegro](#))

Mu'tah University, Jordan

Situated in Karak Governorate and established in 1981, Mu'tah University is one of Jordan's leading public institutions. Guided by its current President Dr. Salameh Al Naimat, the University operates under a unique dual academic

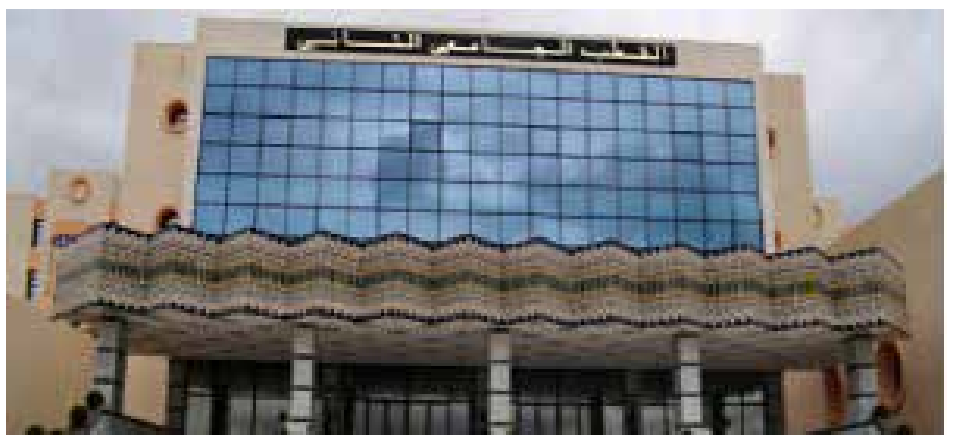


Images courtesy of Mu'tah University

structure that integrates both civil and military education systems. Offering a broad spectrum of programs across the sciences, humanities, law, and engineering, Mu'tah University has long been dedicated to advancing academic excellence, community development, and international collaboration.

University of Abou Bekr Belkaïd Tlemcen, Algeria

Located in the historic city of Tlemcen in northwestern Algeria, the University of Abou Bekr Belkaïd is a major public institution serving nearly 49,000 students. Under the leadership of Rector and Professor Mourad Meghachou, the University offers a wide range of



Images courtesy of University of Abou Bekr Belkaïd Tlemcen

academic programs across the sciences, humanities, and various professional fields. It has become increasingly active in building international partnerships and continues to invest in intercultural education and collaborative research, positioning itself as a key academic hub in the Maghreb region.

Ferhat Abbas University Sétif 1, Algeria

Situated in the city of Sétif in northeastern Algeria, Sherif-1 University Ferhat Abbas has been a pillar of higher education since its founding in 1978. Led by Rector and Professor Mouhamed Elhadi Latreche, the University is distinguished by its strong research orientation, currently operating 47 laboratories across various disciplines. With a student body representing over 20 nationalities, the University is a vibrant center of academic exchange and intercultural engagement, fostering a truly inclusive learning environment.



Images courtesy of Sétif 1 Ferhat Abbas University

University of Science and Technology Houari Boumediene (USTHB), Algeria

Located just outside Algiers in Bab Ezzouar, the University of Science and Technology Houari Boumediene (USTHB) stands as one of Algeria's premier institutions for science and engineering. Since its establishment in 1974, the University has grown into a center of academic excellence. It is now led by Rector and Professor Djamel Eddine Akretche. USTHB operates an impressive network of 73 research laboratories, conducting cutting-edge work in fields ranging from disaster risk management to biomedical engineering. With a strong emphasis on innovation, entrepreneurship, and applied research, the University plays a key role in advancing Algeria's national development goals and cultivating a new generation of globally minded scientists and engineers.



Images courtesy of USTHB



Opening Ceremony of the 9th General Assembly of SUN held in Naples, Italy, November 2024. Photo by Euihwan Cho

SUN to Hold 10th General Assembly & 9th IASS Conference in Samarkand

This year, SUN marks a major milestone — the 10th anniversary of its founding. In celebration, the 10th General Assembly of SUN will be held from September 29 to October 3 in the key Silk Road city of Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Renowned for its rich cultural legacy and pivotal role along the ancient Silk Roads, Samarkand stands as an ideal location for the milestone event of SUN.

The assembly will be co-hosted by the Canadian University Dubai, SUN's current chair university, in close collaboration with three prominent member universities based in Sa-

markand:

Samarkand International University of Technology

“Silk Road” International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage

Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

The theme of this year’s General Assembly will be ***“Use of Technologies for Peaceful and Sustainable Tourism along the Silk Roads in the Era of Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, and Cyber Security: Challenges and Opportunities.”*** This theme highlights the role of emerging technologies — such as AI, big data, and cybersecurity — in promoting peaceful and sustainable tourism across the Silk Roads. It emphasizes the responsibility and opportunity for universities to lead innovation, protect cultural heritage, and bridge regional cooperation in the digital age.

In celebration of SUN’s 10th anniversary, there will be a number of special events and expanded formats that set it apart from past gatherings. Among the highlights is a guided cultural excursion, offering participants the opportunity to explore Samarkand’s heritage



SUN Board Meeting during the 9th General Assembly of SUN in Naples, Italy. Photo by Euihwan Cho

and connect more deeply with the living legacy of the Silk Roads.

In addition, a series of interactive Roundtable Forums will be introduced for the first time, providing participants with the chance to engage in meaningful conversations and discussions on global challenges and opportunities in academia. The forums will cover four key areas: Cultural Heritage Forum, Joint Research Collaboration Forum, Climate and Environmental Studies Forum, and Silk Road Language & Literature Forum. These roundtables aim to foster collaborative spirit among member institutions and spark new cross-border initiatives involving both faculty and students.

Running concurrently with the General Assembly will be the 9th International Associa-



**Farewell Party of the 9th General Assembly of SUN
in Naples, Italy.** Photo by Euihwan Cho

tion for Silk-Road Studies (IASS). This academic conference will bring together scholars and researchers from the member universities to present their research on history, culture, politics, and regional economies, aiming to revive the Silk Road spirit of peace, coexistence, and co-prosperity.

All the representatives of member universities are warmly invited to take part in SUN's celebratory and future-shaping event. Each University may register official delegates, including up to two student representatives. The registration deadline is June 30, 2025, though it may be adjusted depending on circumstances.

More information and registration is available at www.sun-silkroadia.org

As SUN steps into its second decade, its ex-

panding network and enriched initiatives mark the beginning of a new chapter in international collaboration, academic innovation, and cultural exchange. The addition of five new member universities — from Jordan, Montenegro, and Algeria — not only reflects SUN's growing global outreach but also reinforces its commitment to fostering diversity and regional inclusion. The upcoming 10th General Assembly in Samarkand will celebrate the 10 years of remarkable progress while laying the foundation for future partnerships inspired by the enduring values of the Silk Roads—dialogue, connection, and shared prosperity.

USSUN NEWS

UUSSUN-HUFS

Model UN Conference on the Silk Road Region's Refugee Crisis

From March to May 2025, USSUN-HUFS (Hankuk University of Foreign Studies) organized seminars and projects based on the concept of UNDP (United Nations Development Program). By fulfilling the function of the UNDP, USSUN-HUFS addressed issues of poverty, inequality among countries, and climate change in the Silk Road region, and proposed sustainable solutions.

One of the main events was a Model United Nations (MUN) conference with the theme: "Looking for Long-Term Solutions to the Refugee Crisis Caused by Poverty and Development Imbalances."

The RS team of USSUN-HUFS organized and directed the event, serving as the chair



Photo by USSUN-HUFS

committee and supervising the activities. Other students represented Germany, Mexico, the United States, Bangladesh, Sudan, Yemen, Turkey, France, and Australia as country delegates. Every delegate shared their country's position on the refugee crisis and offered long-term solutions.

During both formal and informal sessions, participants engaged in active debate. Students standing in as delegates from Yemen and Sudan highlighted the urgency of their domestic refugee crises and appealed to major powers for increased assistance. Students representing from Mexico, Bangladesh, and Türkiye emphasized the burden of accepting refugees from neighboring regions and called for international support. They also expressed



Photo by USSUN-HUFS

a willingness to collaborate with developed nations to build global partnerships to reduce poverty and inequality.

To promote long-term collaboration between developed and developing countries, students representing developed nations - led by the United States - agreed to create a Global Development Partnership Platform.

The following important points were included in the joint resolution that was drafted at the end of the conference and chaired by the MUN U.S. delegate:

1) Recognizing the Structural Causes of the Refugee Crisis

MUN delegates acknowledged that the root causes of the refugee crisis extend beyond war and persecution, pointing to deep-

rooted issues such as poverty, development disparities, and geopolitical proxy conflicts. They emphasized the need for long-term structural solutions rather than temporary relief, especially for countries under pressure to uphold human rights while managing limited resources.

2) U.S.-led Proposal: Building a Global Development Partnership

The U.S. proposed redistributing private capital to underdeveloped countries, supporting infrastructure development and launching a global cooperation platform. This included ideas for improving agricultural technologies, ensuring food independence, and enhancing social infrastructure in high-need areas like Yemen and Sudan—envisioning a “world without refugees.”

3) Understanding the Refugee Crisis's Structural Roots

In addition to war and persecution, MUN delegates recognized that poverty, inequality in development, and geopolitical proxy wars are among the underlying causes of the refugee crisis. For nations which are under pressure to protect human rights while managing scarce resources, delegates

underlined the need for long-term structural solutions as opposed to short-term relief.

4) U.S.-led Idea: Establishing an International Development Alliance

The MUN delegates representing the United States suggested establishing a platform for international cooperation, assisting in developing infrastructure and redistributing private capital to developing nations.

To envision a “world without refugees,” this proposal suggested or advancing agricultural technologies, guaranteeing food independence, and strengthening social infrastructure in regions with significant needs, such as Yemen and Sudan.

5) National Contributions and Global Solidarity

- MUN delegates representing France proposed a framework within the EU to distribute refugee support across three key sectors—clothing, food, and housing—and to scale future cooperation based on contribution levels.

- MUN delegates representing Germany emphasized the need to ensure social rights for refugees through access to higher education and vocational training.

- MUN delegates representing developing

countries such as Bangladesh and Mexico stressed the importance of self-reliant, development-oriented strategies over one-time aid.

6) Global Solidarity and National Contributions

- MUN delegates representing France suggested a framework for the EU that would scale future collaboration according to contribution levels and allocate refugee assistance among three important sectors: housing, food, and clothing.
- MUN delegates representing Germany underlined the importance of providing refugees with access to higher education and vocational training in order to protect their social rights.
- Developing nations like Mexico and Bangladesh emphasized the value of development-focused, self-sustaining plans over one-time assistance.

7) A Dedication That Goes Beyond Resettlement

Post-resettlement assistance was also taken into account in the resolution. In order to support the construction of critical infrastructure in public safety, sanitation, healthcare, and education, it called for



Photo by USSUN-HUFS



Please refer to the QR code below to check the full version of the resolution.

increased support from international organizations such as UNHCR and IOM. To ease refugee reception systems and lessen civil unrest, some country delegations also suggested military assistance and conditional transfers of development rights.

Campaign Booth on Global Inequality and Climate Issues: The “USSUN-HUFS STAMP TOUR”

The “STAMP TOUR” campaign booth, the most recent project by USSUN-HUFS, was created to increase public awareness of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and its ultimate objectives, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The campaign specifically called attention to labor rights abuses brought on by unfair trade practices and marine pollution in Silk Road nations, urging participants to consider these problems and suggest workable solutions.

There were four interactive areas in the booth:

Photo by USSUN-HUFS



1) SDGs OX Test

Participants learned about the UNDP's and the SDGs' primary missions through an entertaining true-or-false quiz.

2) Fishing Game for Marine Waste

In order to emphasize how urgent it is to reduce ocean pollution, participants removed plastic waste items from a fish tank, such as straws and bottle caps, while avoiding toy marine animals.

3) The Fair Trade Toss Game

This booth described the portion of banana harvest profits that go to workers to increase awareness of fair trade. The low pay workers frequently receive under exploitative conditions was demonstrated through a ball toss game.

4) Action Pledge for SDGs Roulette

To further emphasize the importance of individual action, participants wrote down their personal action plans on sticky notes after spinning a roulette wheel to receive an SDG goal.

Promoting Ethical and Eco-Friendly Consumption

What made this campaign especially impactful



Photo by USSUN-HUFS

was the distribution of eco-friendly, upcycled, and fair-trade products—sourced from socially responsible companies—as prizes. These weren't just gifts, but educational tools that demonstrated the power of “ethical consumption” in promoting sustainable development.

Participants received items such as:

- Upcycled keychains
- Fair-trade coffee and mugs
- Eco-friendly bamboo toothbrushes

This thoughtful approach underscored the message that conscious consumer choices can drive real change—transforming consumption into a form of activism.



Photo by USSUN-HUFS

A Global Citizenship Experience

Through this campaign, USSUN-HUFS members realized that the SDGs are not distant ideals, but achievable goals that begin with small, everyday actions. It was a powerful reminder of their responsibility and solidarity as global citizens, inspiring them to take active roles in shaping a more just and sustainable world.

About United Students of Silk-Road Universities Network (USSUN)

Empowering Students to Build a Peaceful and Prosperous Silk Road

In a world increasingly shaped by uncertainty,

division, and urgent global challenges, the role of young people has never been more important. USSUN (United Students of Silk-Road Universities Network) is an international student-led organization that embodies this sense of urgency and possibility. As the official student association of SUN (Silk-Road Universities Network), USSUN brings together passionate, forward-thinking students from member universities across the Silk Road region and beyond.

Unlike conventional student bodies, USSUN is not a passive group. It is a dynamic platform where students take the lead. Members are actively engaged in proposing, designing, and implementing their own initiatives, rooted in the values of intercultural dialogue, peace-building, and heritage preservation.

The beauty of USSUN lies in its diversity. Students recognize cultural, religious, and intellectual diversity not as obstacles, but as sources of celebration and mutual learning. Together, they aim to sow the seeds of peace and prosperity through understanding and cooperation.

If your university is not yet part of USSUN, now is the time to join this growing network. This is not merely a student organization. It is a collaborative movement, a space for young leaders who are ready to connect ideas, share

dreams, and take action for a better future.

Many student-led events and international competitions are organized regularly under the guidance of the SUN Secretariat, such as the WRICOS (Writing Contest) and PHOCOS (Photo Contest). For more information on USSUN's activities and upcoming opportunities, you can explore the official website here: USSUN Activities – sun-silkroadia.org

If you are interested in learning more about USSUN or wish to propose a chapter at your university, feel free to contact us at secretariat@sun0822.org

Your university could be the next to lead this global network. Let's write the next chapter of the Silk Road together, as students.

NEWS FROM **MEMBER UNIVERSITIES**

University of Coimbra, Portugal

UC is the leading national institution in most areas evaluated in 'THE World University Rankings by Subject'

The University of Coimbra (UC) has once again stood out in the prestigious THE World University Rankings by Subject, which annually ranks the world's top higher education institutions across various scientific fields. UC has been recognised as the best national university in 6 of the 11 subject areas assessed in the 2025 edition, published on the 22nd of January by the Times Higher Education (THE), up from five areas in the previous edition.

The ranking highlights the University of Coimbra as one of the top 125 universities in the world for Law (ranked 101-125) and also places it among the top 200 globally in Arts and Humanities (ranked 151-175). In addition to these two categories, where UC stands out as a leading national institution, it also shares national leadership in Psychology (ranked



University of Coimbra Photo by Ana Bartolomeu

201-250), Social Sciences (ranked 251-300), Life Sciences (ranked 301-400), and Physical Sciences (ranked 401-500).

Year of the Snake celebrated at the Confucius Institute of the University of Coimbra, with the presence of the Chinese Ambassador to Portugal

In 2025, the Confucius Institute of the University of Coimbra (ICUC) was chosen as the venue for the Spring Festival celebrations in Portugal, with the “Happy Chinese New Year” event promoted by the Chinese Embassy to celebrate the Year of the Snake, a symbol of wisdom, strategy and intuition.

The choice of Coimbra to host the festivities reflects the importance of the City and the University in the relationship between

Portugal and China. The Chinese Ambassador to Portugal, the Honorable Zhao Bentang, stressed that “Coimbra is a long-established, renowned university with a great academic influence in Europe and the world”. Moreover, “it has many cooperation agreements with China, involving universities, academies and research institutions. We have chosen Coimbra to celebrate the Chinese New Year with its citizens.” Ambassador Zhao Bentang also highlighted the international recognition of the Chinese New Year, stating that “this year is special because UNESCO has recently recognised the Spring Festival as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity”. He added that the celebration “does not belong to China alone, but to the world - and that includes Portugal”.

The ICUC had previously participated in Chinese New Year celebrations in 2020, but this



Photo courtesy of University of Coimbra

was the first time it played a central role in the festivities organised by the Chinese Embassy. Dr. João Nuno Calvão da Silva, UC Vice-Rector for External Relations and Alumni, underscored the significance of this distinction: “Typically, the Chinese Embassy would hold events in Lisbon or Porto. Choosing Coimbra to host this celebration, in collaboration with the Chinese community, the Chambers of Commerce and the Chinese League in Portugal, recognises the work that our University has been developing with China and the Macau SAR,” he said.

The festivities included cultural performances, exhibitions, and a reception at the Coimbra City Hall, strengthening the growing connection between Portuguese and Chinese cultures.



Photo courtesy of HUFS

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Republic of Korea

Central Asian Studies Institute and Department of Central Asian Studies hold 'Kazakh Competition' and 'Nauryz' festival

The Institute of Central Asian Studies (Director Young-hoon Son), together with the Department of Central Asian Studies (Head of Department Ji-eun Lee), the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Korea, and the Otandastar Foundation under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, held the 'Asian Regional Kazakh Conference (Kurultai)' and the spring festival 'Nauryz' at the HUFS Global Campus from April 5-6, 2025.

The event drew about 150 people from across Asia, including



Photo courtesy of HUFS

Kazakhstani Ambassador to South Korea Nurgali Arstanov, Chairman of the Otandastar Foundation Daniyar Kadrov, and President of Kazakh Nomad Turlan Zhanyeshenov, as well as Kazakhstanis from Japan, South Korea, Mongolia, and Malaysia.

The academic program held on the first day consisted of two sessions on the topics of culture and economy. In the culture session, presentations on Kazakhstani food, handicrafts, music, and education were given, and in the economic session that followed discussions were held on ways to develop economic cooperation and business between Korea and Kazakhstan.

On April 4, prior to the Kazakh Conference (Kurultai), Mr. Daniyar Kadrov, Chairman of the Otandastar Foundation, visited the HUFS Global Campus to meet with Vice President Kim Yu-gang, and discussed ways to expand cooperation between HUFS and the Kazakh government and institutions. Chairman Kadrov said, “I am glad that Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, the only Kazakh language education institution in Asia, is hosting this



Photo courtesy of HUFs

event, and we will also actively promote the establishment of the Abai Center, which is being promoted by the Kazakh government in the future.”

On April 6 (Sunday), the traditional Kazakh holiday ‘Nauryz’ festival was held in the lawn square in front of the Centennial Hall on the campus. The venue recreated the traditional



Photo courtesy of HUFs

house ('Kiiz Uy') and a Kazakh folk village, with traditional food airlifted from the local area provided. Performances by Kazakh singers and traditional game experiences were also featured, giving participants the opportunity to experience the Central Asian country's local culture firsthand.



Photo courtesy of HUFS

Samarkand International University of Technology, Uzbekistan

SIUT Revives the Silk Road Spirit Through Global Academic Exchange and Cultural Integration

Samarkand International University of Technology (SIUT), located in the heart of the ancient Silk Road city of Samarkand, continues to foster international collaboration, cultural dialogue, and global academic exchange — values deeply rooted in the Silk Road tradition.

Embracing this spirit, SIUT has launched a transformative social initiative that reflects the power of education to unite cultures and expand horizons. For example, on May 2024, SIUT signed a Memorandum of Understanding



Photo courtesy of SIUT

with Gimcheon High School in South Korea — one of the country's most prestigious secondary institutions — to enable talented students from low-income families in the Samarkand region to pursue their education abroad. The initiative was implemented as part of Uzbekistan's national 2030 Strategy and the 2022–2026 State Program for Poverty Reduction.

Following a rigorous selection process, five outstanding school students were awarded full scholarships by the Chairman of SIUT's Board of Trustees, Mr. Bakhtiyor Fazilov. The grants cover tuition, accommodation, and living expenses during their three-year study program in Korea.

This people-centered exchange reflects the enduring legacy of the Silk Road: connecting communities, sharing knowledge, and fostering mutual respect across continents.



Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev meets with French President Emmanuel Macron.

Photo by Press Service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan



Commemorating the French Higher School of Engineering at SIUT with representatives of the Francophonie Organization.

Photo courtesy of SIUT

The five will be the first Uzbek students to join foreign students from countries such as China, Malaysia, and Vietnam at Gimcheon High School, reinforcing SIUT's commitment to inclusive and meaningful global engagement.

In 2025, a significant milestone in international cooperation was reached during the official visit of the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, to Paris, where he met with French President Emmanuel Macron. The visit culminated in the signing of a Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership and several landmark agreements spanning the fields of economy, culture, and education.

As part of this growing bilateral cooperation, SIUT held productive talks with representatives



Seollal celebration at SIUT Photo courtesy of SIUT

of the Francophonie Organization. These discussions paved the way for the creation of a French Higher Engineering School within SIUT, reflecting a shared commitment to cultivating world-class technologists and engineers.

Supported by both the Uzbek and French governments, this initiative exemplifies how modern Silk Road diplomacy can bridge continents through knowledge-sharing and educational innovation. The project aims to fuse European academic excellence with Central Asia's rising potential — reaffirming SIUT's role as a vibrant crossroads for global collaboration.

Recognizing the importance of cultural continuity in globalization, SIUT regularly hosts celebrations of international holidays such as the Korean Lunar New Year (Seollal) festivities. These events allow students from different backgrounds to share their heritage, strengthen



Navro'z Regata in Samarkand. Photos courtesy of SIUT

friendships, and experience global traditions on one campus.

In the spirit of intercultural connection and seasonal renewal, Samarkand International University of Technology annually hosts the “Navro'z Regata” — a unique celebration that blends traditional festivities and environmental



Exhibition opening at Samarkand State Museum of History and Culture Photo courtesy of SIUT

awareness. Held at the rowing canal of the Silk Road Samarkand International Tourist Complex, the Festival brought together thousands local and foreign visitors.

In his welcoming address, SIUT Rector Prof. Yusuf Abdullaev emphasized that such events reflect the University's vision to combine academic learning with global citizenship and civic engagement. By reviving traditions like Nowruz and connecting them to contemporary global values, SIUT encourages students to see themselves as active participants in both heritage and progress. The "Navro'z Regata" embodies the Silk Road legacy of mutual respect, diversity, and exchange.

SIUT's cultural and educational strategy includes a commitment to preserving and reinterpreting the historical legacy of the Silk Road. In December 2024, students of the



Tree planting on SIUT campus to celebrate 'Sikmogil,' Korean Arbor Day. Photo courtesy of SIUT

Chinese Institute of Electric Power (CIEP) at SIUT participated in the opening of the international exhibition “Silk and Silk Roads: from Hangzhou to Samarkand”, held at the Samarkand State Museum of History and Culture.

Organized in collaboration with the China National Silk Museum, the exhibition highlights the enduring artistic and cultural ties between China and Uzbekistan. Through rare textiles, Tang-era embroidery, and contemporary fashion influenced by classical Chinese aesthetics, students explored how silk traveled across civilizations, leaving a profound impact on art, commerce, and identity.

The event was attended by SIUT Rector Prof. Yusuf Abdullaev and CIEP Acting Dean Prof. Wang Xiaohui, who emphasized that silk has always served as more than a luxury — it has been a bridge connecting peoples and traditions. For the “Electric Power Engineering”

students, the experience offered not just aesthetic inspiration but a hands-on exploration of intercultural understanding and shared heritage. This exhibition stands as a powerful reminder that the Silk Road was — and remains — a symbol of exchange and creativity. By involving students in such initiatives, SIUT reinforces its mission to blend academic training with cultural literacy, preparing future engineers and innovators who are conscious of the world's interconnected past and future.

As the Silk Road once connected distant lands through trade and culture, today it also inspires collective efforts for a sustainable future. In April 2025, Korean Institute of Technology and Culture (KITC), hosted a symbolic tree-planting campaign on campus in celebration of Sikmogil — Korea's Arbor Day.

More than 50 fruit tree saplings were planted by students, faculty, and staff, highlighting SIUT's commitment to environmental awareness and intergenerational responsibility. The initiative not only beautified the university landscape but also fostered a shared sense of ecological purpose — uniting participants through action and values. 'Sikmogil' is a vital civic tradition — a day when Koreans across the country plant trees in memory of ancestors and as a pledge to future generations. At SIUT, this tradition found new life, reinforcing bonds between Korean and Uzbek cultures.

For first-year “Digital Economy” student

Nozanin Umarova, the experience was personal: “It’s not just about planting trees — it’s about connecting with Korean culture and feeling proud to create something lasting for our university.” This event took on added meaning in the context of Uzbekistan’s designation of 2025 as the Year of Environmental Protection and Green Economy. It also reflects SIUT’s broader effort to embed sustainability and intercultural dialogue into campus life. By building bridges between cultures, promoting mobility, and fostering inclusive education, SIUT exemplifies how modern universities along the Silk Roads can contribute meaningfully to today’s interconnected world. The University remains committed to empowering students not only with knowledge but with a global mindset rooted in mutual respect and shared history.

The SIUT flag entry at the opening of the SUN General Assembly in Naples, Italy Photo by Euihwan Cho



As a committed member of the Silk-Road Universities Network, SIUT actively participates in SUN's initiatives. Recently, SIUT students took part in the 2024 SUN Essay Contest, where they reflected on the impact of cultural memory and mutual understanding across borders — a continuation of the Silk Road's enduring legacy.

Photographs featured in this entry (except those with specific captions) were taken by SIUT Media Center photographer, **Makhmud Rustamov**.

Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy

From Silk Roads to Diasporic Routes Poetry and Memory at the Festival Crossroads of Civilizations in Venice

In April 2025, the 18th celebration of Incroci di Civiltà — Crossroads of Civilizations, the International Literature Festival of Venice — opened its doors once again. Conceived and organized by Ca' Foscari University of Venice with the support of Fondazione di Venezia, in collaboration with the City of Venice and under the auspices of the Italian Ministry of Culture, the festival reaffirmed its status as one of Europe's leading literary events.

The festival gathered distinguished writers

Poems from the Diaspora: An Armenian Odyssey

Poesie dalla Diaspora: un'odissea armena

Alan Whitehorn

testo inglese a fronte

a cura di
Sona Haroutyunian



Edizioni
Ca' Foscari

Translating Wor(l)ds 6

e-ISSN 2610-914X ISSN 2610-9131

and thinkers from around the world. Panels and events, held at Ca' Foscari and other prestigious Venetian venues, tackled themes of urgent global relevance, showing how literature can powerfully engage with the present.

Ca' Foscari's role extended beyond that of organizer or host: its multilingual and multicultural faculty took an active part in



Panel on “Poets at Incroci: The free word.”

Photo courtesy of Ca' Foscari University

moderating panels, engaging in profound dialogues with the invited authors. The discussions tackled urgent global issues, revealing how literature remains a powerful voice for the present. Over four days, the festival became a platform for reflection, exchange, and intellectual hospitality.

Writers from Afghanistan, Brazil, Croatia, Cuba, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, North Macedonia, Russia, Spain, and Syria participated, alongside authors representing hybrid and diasporic identities such as France–Tunisia, France–Senegal, Sudan–US, and Canada–Armenia. These encounters celebrated a rich mosaic of voices — fitting for a university where more than 40 languages are taught and which has long excelled in Oriental and Area Studies.

It was within this lively intercultural

framework that Canadian–Armenian poet and political scientist Alan Whitehorn found meaningful resonance. His participation offered a moving reflection on the role of poetry in transmitting diasporic memory, while also highlighting Ca' Foscari's longstanding commitment to Armenian Studies — a program founded in 1975 and deeply engaged with Venice's historical friendship with the Armenian people.

This connection stretches back centuries: from the 13th century onward, the Serenissima Republic of Venice established diplomatic ties with the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia. The port of Ayas (Layazzo), once the busiest port in the Armenian Cilicia at the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea, became a crucial link along the Silk Road. It was through Ayas that the famed Venetian traveler Marco Polo entered Asia, immersing himself in a rich culture of textiles and spices that animated the eastern markets. In his *Book of the Marvels of the World* (*Il Milione*), Marco Polo described Armenia as a flourishing land of towns and villages, bustling with trade in silk, spices, and precious goods. Armenian cities such as Ayas (Layazzo) served as vital crossroads, sustaining the commercial and cultural flow between Europe and Asia — embodying the spirit of dialogue and mutual learning symbolized by the ancient Silk Roads. Armenia's role was not limited to commerce: in 1271, King Leon II of Armenia provided

critical support to Marco Polo by dispatching an Armenian galley to carry him from Layazzo to Acre, helping to ensure the success of his journey. Thus, Armenia played a vital role not only in trade but also in diplomacy and cultural exchange.

Furthermore, archaeological discoveries reveal a deeper historical connection: Chinese porcelain has been found in ancient Armenian cities such as Garni, Dvin, and Ani, testifying to Armenia's early ties with China through the Silk Road. As Mr. Fan Yong, former Ambassador of China to Armenia, noted: "More than 1,000 years ago, Chinese people learned that Armenian cochineal insects could extract red dyes, much superior to the original plant-based dyes. These insects were introduced to China, making Chinese silk even more vivid and colorful — a beautiful example of mutual learning between two ancient civilizations."

Today, this spirit of exchange continues with Armenia's participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative, a reminder that the Silk Roads remain vital paths of cooperation and globalization as can be seen also in the following verses of Alan Whitehorn, who presented at the *Incroci di Civiltà* Festival.

ARMENIA: BETWEEN EAST AND WEST I

Armenia,
so rooted in Christian Eastern religion

and now increasingly on Western technology,
khachkars and cell phones.

The land of a unique Indo-European script,
but also with street signs in Cyrillic and
English.

So much history,
such dramatic current events,
so hopeful a future.

Turn the street corner
and shift back or forward a century or two.
Elderly stone carver or middle-aged
e-commerce businessman.

Old widow praying in a church
or high-heeled young lady strutting along
the boulevard.

Armenia on the Silk Road
between East and West,
where caravans meander up and down,
along winding paths through rugged ancient
mountains.

Armenia: between East and West.
Always between.

Returning to the theme of Armenian traces
in Venice, the enduring Armenian presence
has been reflected in numerous initiatives.
Recently, the “Worlds of Marco Polo” exhibition
at the Doge’s Palace devoted an important
section to Armenia, reaffirming its historic

role. The centuries-old ties between Venetians and Armenians also continue through the Mekhitarist Congregation of San Lazzaro Island — a relationship carried forward today through research at the Academia Armena Sancti Lazari and Ca' Foscari, as well as through cultural events at the Biennale, the Venice Film Festival, and numerous public exhibitions.

Within this deeply symbolic context, Alan Whitehorn's participation in the 2025 edition of Incroci di Civiltà found profound meaning. His bilingual English-Italian poetry collection, *Poems from the Diaspora: An Armenian Odyssey*, edited by Sona Haroutyunian, with the participation of the students from Armenian and Translation studies courses, offered both a literary and civic moment — a poetic act of remembrance and resistance that enriched the multicultural soul of the festival.

Ca' Foscari University Professor Sona Haroutyunian introducing poet Alan Whitehorn Photo courtesy of Ca' Foscari University



Published in open access, like all Edizioni Ca' Foscari works, Whitehorn's book reflects a philosophy of free exchange of ideas — a crossroads of cultures aimed at deepening our understanding of the complex diversity of humanity. The volume is freely available online at: <http://doi.org/10.30687/978-88-6969-894-1>.

In an era shaped by migration and displacement, Whitehorn's verses offered an intimate and historically grounded reflection on exile, survival, and the search for justice. His poetry became a vessel for memory and a call to defend human rights — responding to silence and denial with lyrical testimony. Themes explored include genocide survival, diasporic identity, existential journeys to ancestral Armenia, and the ongoing struggles for peace and justice in the South Caucasus.

Held at Auditorium Santa Margherita – Emanuele Severino, the event invited audiences to engage with crucial, often overlooked issues: the lasting impacts of genocide, the quest for belonging, and the intergenerational transmission of memory. These questions, central to Armenian history, resonate with broader human experiences along both ancient and modern Silk Roads:

ARMENIA: BETWEEN EAST AND WEST II

Armenia
between East and West,

between North and South,
along the Silk Road
always between.
Providing a key path
through steep mountains
that divide
peoples and lands.

Hayastan,
a link between
the four points of the compass.
A place to meet and converse
over oriental coffee and pomegranate juice.

Sourj armenien arants shakar, khndrum em.
(Armenian coffee without sugar, please)

Whitehorn's conversation with the public demonstrated literature's power to build bridges between past and present, East and West, academic research and lived experience. Through his poetry, Whitehorn traced a journey — from genocide to words, from exile to testimony — making Venice, with its centuries-old tradition of encounter and cultural crossings, the ideal stage to amplify his voice.

As Festival director Flavio Gregori stated: "We are proud that the festival, born in 2008 on the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has reached maturity and gained national and international recognition. In a time when human relationships seem

increasingly fragmented, continuing dialogue is more important than ever.”

Venice City Councilor for Universities, Paola Mar, likewise emphasized the spirit of the 2025 edition, highlighting the presence of authors with dual nationalities, such as Alan Whitehorn: “They embody the very essence of this festival, which grows and evolves thanks to cultural cross-contamination. This is a tangible sign of the richness that emerges from the exchange between different realities — where collaboration generates the best results, allowing diverse sensitivities and perspectives to meet.”

Thus, Alan Whitehorn’s presence at Incroci di Civiltà was not only a literary moment but a deeply human and political one, reminding us that literature can illuminate hidden histories and shape more compassionate futures. In a city historically formed by migration, trade, and cultural encounters, his voice found a powerful and fitting echo.

Whitehorn’s reflections, rooted in both personal and historical experience, underscored the ongoing relevance of diasporic literature in a world marked by displacement and contested memory. His voice added a vital layer to the festival’s exploration of how literature can resist silence and build bridges across symbolic and real borders.

The ancient Silk Road reminds us that even small nations like Armenia, despite enduring

wars and forced migrations, have played crucial roles in cultural globalization. Diasporic routes — past and present — show how memory, resilience, and creativity transcend borders. Today, as in antiquity, Armenia continues to weave itself into the fabric of global culture — just as it once connected China to the Black Sea and just as contemporary writers like Whitehorn continue to bridge continents, histories, and generations through their art.

The journey from the ancient Silk Roads to today's diasporic networks is thus an ongoing story: one of shared memory, resilience, and the transformative power of cultural exchange.

The festival also reflects Ca' Foscari's commitment to its "Third Mission" (Terza Missione): promoting public engagement, sharing knowledge beyond academia, and fostering dialogue with civil society.

In this sense, Incroci di Civiltà perfectly embodies the spirit of the Silk Road Universities Network: celebrating diversity, encouraging exchange, and offering a vital space to reflect on how stories — especially those born from trauma and resilience — can unite humanity across time and borders.

Now in its 18th edition, *Incroci di Civiltà* stands as a successful and enduring manifestation of this mission.

(Alan Whitehorn poems appear in Poems from the Diaspora: An Armenian Odyssey, ed. by Sona

Haroutyunian, Edizioni Ca'Foscari 2025, pp. 206, 236.)

Nomad Dreams in the Lagoon: A Mongolian Yurt Conquers the Ca' Foscari University of Venice

By Diego La Monaca & Evelin Cernigoj.

To celebrate the 55th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Mongolia and Italy, the Department of Asian and North African Studies at Ca'Foscari University of Venice, in collaboration with the Embassy of Mongolia, hosted a unique celebration that promoted and honored Mongolian language and culture.

Despite the challenges of Venice's weather – the sky was filled with wandering grey clouds in those days – and the complex logistics of transporting yurt components through the city's waterways, our dedicated team successfully assembled a beautiful yurt - *рэп* in Mongolian - a traditional dwelling that has served the nomadic peoples of Eurasia for centuries and remains in use today.

But what is a *рэп*?

It features a circular base constructed from wooden lattice walls that expand in a grid pattern, topped by roof poles that converge at a central crown ring. The frame is covered with

felt insulation and an outer waterproof layer for weather protection. A single decorated door, traditionally oriented southward, completes the structure. Assembly typically requires about 4 hours, while dismantling takes approximately 30 minutes.

And we did it in Venice, yes!

Launched for the first time in 2024, this project was made possible again this year through the generous financial support of the Mongolian Embassy, to whom we extend our heartfelt gratitude, and the dedicated commitment of three key persons: Our professor, Elisabetta Ragagnin, Raima Auyeskhon – researcher at Ca' Foscari University and Paola Giacomini – the yurt's owner, who traditionally spends her summers living in this authentic dwelling. We also acknowledge the enthusiastic participation of all our students, whose engagement made this cultural experience truly meaningful. Among the students there was also Buyintsogt – an Erasmus+ exchange student from the National University of Mongolia – who absolutely loved our Venetian adventure.

From May 20 to May 23, the yurt transformed into an extraordinary cultural hub nestled within the Venetian lagoon (la Serenissima), hosting a diverse array of scholarly events. The program featured lectures exploring the yurt's

history, function, and architectural design, complemented by expert presentations from visiting academicians on interconnected topics including Mongolia's minority languages, the ancient Khitan language, Mongolic etymologies, nomadic pastoralism, anthropological and social issues as well as travel narratives spanning historical and contemporary perspectives - all unified by the millennia-old heritage and shared cultural legacy of the Steppe civilizations. To top it all off, our rector, Professor Tiziana Lippiello also came to visit our yurt.

This initiative brought together students from various academic disciplines and degree programs to collaboratively construct the yurt. The project provided students with a distinctive and unique hands-on learning experience outside their regular curriculum. The event attracted participation beyond the university community, as numerous passersby stopped to admire the distinctive architecture and joined the lectures organized by the faculty. For students enrolled in Mongolian language courses, this represented an invaluable opportunity to immerse themselves more deeply in Mongolian culture and traditions.

Particularly enriching were the interactions with distinguished Mongolian dignitaries, including embassy representatives and members of the Mongolian Parliament. We extend our sincere gratitude to the Honorable Undraa Agvaanluvsan and her

assistant Ankhbayar akh for gracing us with their presence on the opening day, providing students with authentic opportunities to practice their Mongolian language skills with native speakers in a meaningful cultural context.

To capture the lasting impact of this extraordinary experience, we invited several participants to share their reflections on how the project touched their academic journey and personal growth.

Pietro Brunori, a Master's student in Chinese Studies, provided the following reflection:

“This was quite a spontaneous experience - but in the best possible way. It offered an alternative and extremely engaging opportunity to connect with steppe culture. It's not everyday you get to build a yurt, and we approached it almost like a group of friends setting up a badminton net. This informal, non-institutional atmosphere, in my opinion, added real value to the initiative. It was also refreshing to do something hands-on outside our usual academic setting. Moreover, the experience taught us fascinating details about the housing and architectural strategies developed by steppe populations - knowledge that has made me even more excited to dive deeper into Mongolian culture.”

Francesco D'Andrea, a Bachelor's student in Chinese Studies, also shared his perspective. Although he had no previous experience with modern Mongolian, he possessed knowledge of Middle Mongol from taking Professor Elisabetta Ragagnin's Ural-Altaic Philology course. Reflecting on his participation, he remarked:

“Having all the lectures take place inside a real yurt was truly refreshing. We had the opportunity to both construct and experience one of the pillars of Mongolian culture, brought to us through the organizers' collaboration. A warm and multicultural environment emerged - a home, a classroom where participants could engage with various aspects of Mongolian culture and language. The entire process of building the structure felt like an exciting learning adventure that went far beyond a typical academic lecture. Most importantly, however, was the emotional dimension. The tangible nature of the experience gave the lectures, readings, and learning process a new depth—something real and intimate. And all of this unfolded within such a small, simple, yet surprisingly familiar space.”

Jacopo Vincenzini, a Bachelor's student in Japanese Language and Culture Studies who is currently learning Mongolian as his second language, also shared his thoughts on the

event:

“As a student of Japanese language, I enjoyed the opportunity to construct and learn inside a Mongolian yurt (ᠭᠦᠷ). It opened a new perspective on the Mongolian world and its people—a culture I had just begun to explore through the engaging lectures of Professor Elisabetta Ragagnin and other distinguished scholars covering various aspects of Mongolian lifestyle, linguistics, and culture. While Japanese and Mongolian share certain linguistic similarities, it was fascinating to discover the connections between different Asian languages and their interrelated histories.”

Chiara Bazzana, a first-year Master’s student in Chinese studies at Ca’ Foscari University who has also studied Mongolian, shared her thoughts on the experience:

“It was an absolutely unforgettable experience. Immersing myself in such a rich and profound culture - engaging with its environments and traditions firsthand - left an indelible mark on my educational journey. But beyond the academic impact, the opportunity to build this project from the ground up, to lose myself in it day after day, reignited a deep passion within me. It gave me fresh inspiration to continue exploring and studying a culture that, despite being geographically distant, felt remarkably close to my heart. Moments like these remind us why we chose this path of study. They infuse our academic pursuits with



Photo by Federica Troisi

profound meaning, particularly when grounded in cultural exchange and mutual understanding. It's an experience I would embrace again without hesitation."

Ilaria Rossi, a Bachelor's student in Chinese Studies who also attended courses in Ural-Altaic Philology and Mongolian language, shared her experience:

"I participated in setting up the yurt for two years, and it was truly a unique and enjoyable experience. Working as a team was wonderful, and seeing the finished result felt incredibly rewarding. Moreover, attending classes inside the yurt created the sensation - even if just momentarily - of being transported to the vast steppes. I would gladly participate again given the opportunity.

While we collected many more testimonies, space limits prevent us from sharing them all. What truly matters is the lasting impact this



Photo by Federica Troisi

event had on the students' curiosity and their desire to share and continue this experience. We hope to make the yurt- event a yearly tradition at Ca' Foscari, giving future students - and those who missed previous years - the chance to enjoy this unique and enriching experience alongside their academic studies.

When learning a new language - especially one that whispers rather than shouts on the world stage - cultural experiences like this become the spark that ignites lasting passion. These moments don't just inspire students to continue their linguistic journey; they open doors for newcomers who may have never even dreamed such beautiful languages existed, waiting to share their stories.

In conclusion, the heartfelt testimonies of the many students who joined this journey speak volumes: cultural experiences like these don't just teach, they transform. They breathe

life into learning, turning academic study into something deeply personal and profoundly inspiring.

rap: a surprisingly familiar environment

Pietro Brunori, Francesco D'Andrea, Jacopo Vincenzini, Chiara Bazzana and Ilaria Rossi
contributed to this article.

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

The 6th Forum on Human Rights at the Faculty of Law of AUTH University

On March 6 and 7, 2025, the 6th Forum on Human Rights was held at the Faculty of Law of AUTH University. The forum was organized by the Centre for European Legal Culture, an autonomous unit of the University supervised by the Senate itself and closely allied with the Faculty of Law.

This year's forum discussed the pressing issue of immigration and more particularly the newly signed treaty of the European Union regarding Immigration and Asylum.

Many esteemed scientists and experts on legal and administrative field participated, while the central speakers were Mr. Margaritis Schinas, the former vice-president in the

6^ο Φόρουμ Θεσσαλονίκης
για τα Ανθρώπινα Δικαιώματα

Το Ευρωπαϊκό Δίκαιο Μετανάστευσης και Ασύλου μετά το νέο Σύμφωνο

6 & 7 Μαρτίου 2025

6 Μαρτίου Έναρξη: 16:30

7 Μαρτίου Έναρξη: 10:00

αίθουσα 212

2^{ος} όροφος, κτήριο Νομικής,
Πανεπιστημιούπολη ΑΠΘ



Προεδρεύοντες

Παναγιώτης Μαντζούφρας
Καθηγητής Νομικής Σχολής ΑΠΘ

Δημοσθένης Λέντζης
Αναπληρωτής Καθηγητής
Νομικής Σχολής ΑΠΘ

Κωνσταντίνος Χρυσόγονος
Καθηγητής Νομικής Σχολής ΑΠΘ

Κεντρική Εισήγηση

Μαργαρίτης Σχοινάς
πρώην Αντιπρόεδρος της
Ευρωπαϊκής Επιτροπής για την
Πρώιμη του Ευρωπαϊκού
Τρόπου Ζωής (2019-2024)

Εισηγήσεις

Κωνσταντίνος Παπαγεωργίου
Ομότιμος Καθηγητής Νομικής
Σχολής ΕΚΠΑ

Ιωάννης Παπαγεωργίου
Καθηγητής - Πρόεδρος Τμήματος
Πολιτικών Επιστημών ΑΠΘ

Δημήτριος Καιρίδης
Καθηγητής Τμήματος Διεθνών,
Ευρωπαϊκών και Περιφερειακών
Σπουδών Πανεπιστημίου
Βουλκενίς, πρώην Υπουργός
Μετανάστευσης και Ασύλου

Γρηγόρης Τσιούκας
Αναπληρωτής Υπεύθυνος
Θεμελιωδών Δικαιωμάτων,
Ευρωπαϊκός Οργανισμός
Συνοριοφυλακής και Ακτοφυλακής
(FRONTEX)

Καλλιόπη Στεφανάκη
Επικρατής Τμήματος Νομικής
Προστασίας Προσφύγων, Υπαστη
Αρμυστία του ΟΗΕ για τους
Πρόσφυγες, Γραφείο Ελλάδας

Μάριος Καλέας
Διοικητής της Υπηρεσίας Ασύλου

Εύα Τζαβαλά
Συντονίστρια Επιστημονικού
Προσωπικού, Εθνική Επιτροπή για τα
Δικαιώματα του Ανθρώπου

Ηλίας Μάζος
Αντιπρόεδρος Συμβουλίου της
Επικρατείας

Ιωάννα Λαμπίρη
Ειρέτης Δ.Δ.

Μιχαήλ Χριστοδούλου
Νομικός στη Γραμματεία (Registry)
του Ε.Δ.Δ.Α, Υπ. Δ.Δ. Ανώτατης Σχολής
Κοινωνικών Επιστημών του Παρισιού

Μαρία - Ιωάννα Ράντου
Rădăndăne (Εισηγήτρια) στο Γενικό
Δικαστήριο της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης

Παρεμβάσεις

Ελένη Καλαμπάκου
Δ.Δ. Ειδική Επιστήμονας στον
Συνήγορο του Πολίτη

Αγάπη Χουζουράκη
Διηγόρος, Υπεύθυνη Συνηγορίας
στη Ελληνικό Συμβούλιο για τους
Πρόσφυγες (ΕΣΠ)

Πασχάλης Πασχαλίδης
Υπ. Δ.Δ. Δημοσίου Δικαίου, ΜΔΕ,
Διηγόρος

Μαρία Κρότση
Εμπειρογνώμονας ασύλου στον β'
βαθμό δικαιοδοσίας, Διοικητικό
Δικαστήριο Διεθνούς Προστασίας
Κύπρου

Γενικά συμπεράσματα και προτάσεις

Ευγενία Σαχπεκίδου
Ομότιμη καθηγήτρια Νομικής Σχολής
ΑΠΘ

Χορηγοί



Von der Leyen Commission, and Mr. Dimitris Kairidis, the former Minister of Migration and Asylum. On the second day, the coordinator of the scientific personnel of the Greek National Commission for Human Rights, Ms. Eva Tzavala, led a discussion on how this organization can aid in protecting the refugees and immigrants' rights after the treaty on Immigration and Asylum was signed.

More information about the work of the

Centre for European Legal Culture: <https://celc.law.auth.gr/en/mission-vision/>

Visit from Northeastern University, Boston on the topic of “Dialogue: Thessaloniki and Athens. Greece: Genocide, War and Resilience in Greece – A Case Study on the Challenges of the Past and Present.”

The Aristotle University of Thessaloniki is currently organizing together with Northeastern University, Boston, a short-term Study Abroad Summer Program. The program will examine the theme of “Dialogue: Thessaloniki and Athens, Greece: Genocide, War and Resilience in Greece – A Case Study on the Challenges of the Past and Present”. The visit is part of a scientific cooperation agreement, striving for the globalization of knowledge.

Eighteen students and two professors from Northeastern University are set to travel to Thessaloniki for one month to navigate some of the historical landmarks of Greece and engage in a discussion on remembering the past. Some of the educational activities in the city of Thessaloniki will focus on the echoes of genocides and the Holocaust. Guest lectures will be held in order to examine war, migration, expulsion and the rights of refugees.

More information on the short-term study abroad summer program “Dialogue:

Thessaloniki and Athens. Greece: Genocide, War and Resilience in Greece – A Case Study on the Challenges of the Past and Present”: <https://international-relations.auth.gr/en/university/usa-northeastern-university/>

The participation of UNESCO Chair on Education for Human Rights, Democracy and Peace in the postgraduate European Master Program in Human Rights and Democratisation

The European Master’s Program in Human Rights and Democratisation aims to advance human rights and democracy education. Aristotle University of Thessaloniki is one of the fifteen founding Universities of this MA Program and serves as the coordinating University for Greece. It is a high level one-year academic program in the field of human rights and democratisation organized by the Global Campus of Human Rights/Global Campus Europe.

The UNESCO Chair of Aristotle University has participated in the postgraduate program “European Master’s Program in Human Rights and Democratisation” (EMA) since 1998. Founded in 1997, the UNESCO Chair of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki on Education for Human Rights, Democracy and Peace is meant to promote an integrated



Photo courtesy of AUth

system of research, training, information and documentation activities in the field of human rights, peace and democracy at local, sub-regional and regional level.

On February 25, the UNESCO Chair of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki welcomed the postgraduate students of this year's "European Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation" program. The foreign students were oriented to their academic duties and the classes they would attend. They were also given memorabilia to mark their participation in this program. More information about the postgraduate program "European Master in Human Rights and Democratisation": <https://emahumanrights.org/>

Canadian University Dubai, U.A.E.

Canadian University Dubai (CUD) was established to create a bridge across cultures and continents, to bring the world-renowned Canadian education system to the dynamic city of Dubai. Building on these foundations, CUD continues to create global connections through novel academic programs, internationally impactful research, and student-led innovation.

New programs for a sustainable and technology-driven future

CUD is currently introducing a wave of new academic programs at undergraduate, graduate and doctoral levels, to equip students with the knowledge and skills to tackle global challenges around sustainable development and to lead a socially responsible, tech-driven future.

The new Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree will empower senior executives to tackle complex leadership challenges through a combination of academic research and practical application. The program responds to the growing demand for professionals with advanced critical thinking and problem-solving skills, to help businesses foresee and respond to emerging global trends. It will enable professional learners to elevate their career

with the DBA qualification, which is the highest academic credential in the field of business practice.

Renowned as a pioneer in graduate education in the UAE, CUD has crafted an innovative new curriculum for its flagship Master of Business Administration (MBA), developed in response to the transforming business landscape.

Students can choose from focus areas in four in-demand disciplines, including General Management, Finance, Digital Marketing and Talent Management Leadership. Each program incorporates lessons in sustainable practices and features applied consulting and research projects that enable students to embark on industry-based assignments as part of their studies.

Set in the context of global environmental and social challenges, CUD has launched the Master of Science in Design Innovation for Circular Economy, to prepare students to lead the transition towards sustainable innovation, circular economy and growth. Circular economy is a model of production and consumption that aims to minimize waste and maximize the use of resources by keeping materials and products in use for as long as possible. The program explores the intersections of design, business, technology, and governance, enabling graduates to bridge the gap between these disciplines and become key players in shaping a resilient future.

To support the advancement of international healthcare systems, a new Master of Public Health program has been launched to meet the surging global demand for professionals that are equipped to handle the complexities of the health industry. The program teaches a general and comprehensive approach to public health leadership to support recent graduates to transition into the field and current working professionals to advance into leadership roles in the industry.

To address the growing global demand for skilled professionals to lead the transformation of technology, CUD has introduced both undergraduate and graduate programs in Artificial Intelligence. The Bachelor of Applied Computing in Artificial Intelligence program equips students with the skills to succeed in one of the fastest growing industries in the global economy. The Master of Science in Artificial Intelligence seeks to address the accelerating demand for advanced skills in this field, to support global leadership in AI.

To support the global transition to green energy, CUD has introduced a Bachelor of Science in Power and Renewable Energy Engineering. With an emphasis on hands-on learning, the program is based on a market-driven curriculum, covering advanced topics like solar, wind, and fuel cell technology.

Research with global impact

Researchers from CUD have been awarded three separate grants from the Dubai Future Foundation (DFF) Research, Development, and Innovation (RDI) Program to advance the application of health-related technologies. CUD faculty will take leading roles in each of the projects, which will contribute to the development of tools that can improve health outcomes and position the UAE at the forefront of technology-driven healthcare solutions.

The University's Department of Public Health will embark on a pioneering project to establish a Health Technology Assessment (HTA) System in the UAE, to improve evidence-based decision-making in healthcare. Aiming to digitize health systems and promote multi-sectoral and multidisciplinary approaches, the project will integrate AI and web-based platforms, to enable more informed decisions about the value and reimbursement of health technologies.

Meanwhile, the University's School of Engineering, Applied Science and Technology has secured two grants to support projects aimed at advancing technologies that support diagnostic and therapeutic aspects of healthcare. In collaboration with the Abu Dhabi School of Management and the University of Huddersfield (United Kingdom), the team of researchers will pioneer an Explainable Artificial Intelligence system to support the early detection of dementia and to develop an

understanding of its potential progression. The project has the capacity to deliver a major step forward in transforming global dementia care through AI-driven innovation that can deliver earlier diagnosis to improve patient treatment, guide clinical decisions, and offer vital support to families.

The third project will harness the power of Volume Electron Microscopy (VEM) to enhance biological research capabilities. The technology is heralded as a revolutionary advancement in imaging to unravel biological complexity at scale, supporting the progression of research in health sciences. This project aims to develop a fast, robust, and high-precision VEM image processing workflow which can achieve high-throughput and high-resolution large-scale biological 3D structure analysis to effectively bridge the gap between cell biology and tissue biology analysis.

Student-led innovation and entrepreneurship

CUD has recently launched its Incubator Hub for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, to empower student entrepreneurs to build the next generation of start-ups. The hub will incubate ten student businesses per semester, reinforcing the University's status as an avant-garde institution in the MENA region. The launch of the Incubator Hub builds on CUD's

growing portfolio of support structures to advance student entrepreneurship. Since 2023, the University has staged business pitch competitions to coincide with Global Entrepreneurship Week, with students attracting local funding to develop their ideas.

International partnerships for global mobility

CUD was established as a portal to Canadian education and the University is continually expanding its network of partners across Canada, forming alliances with Canadian institutions from the Pacific to the Atlantic coasts. These institutions include the University of New Brunswick, Queen's University, Toronto Metropolitan University, Trent University, UOIT, Brock University, UPEI, Acadia University, Royal Roads University, and Canada West University. These Canadian connections allow students to transfer their credits to partner institutions and complete their studies in Canada.

Many students have gone on to build successful lives and careers in Canada and beyond. For example alumni Saarang Ahuja and Ambareen Golandaz are making their mark in North America's finance industry after fulfilling their ambition to move to Canada to further their professional development. Having both completed courses at the University of Toronto, Golandaz has risen through the ranks with

two of the Big Four accounting firms, while Ahuja is working with a prominent financial institution while also venturing into filmmaking in Hollywood.

Over the years, this mobility has become reciprocal as students have come to Dubai from Canada. Issam Kassabieh was enrolled on a bachelor's program in civil engineering at Waterloo University before transferring to Dubai to pursue his Bachelor of Business Administration in Accounting and Finance at CUD. Less than a decade since his graduation, Kassabieh has combined his passion for communication with his technical expertise to constantly reinvent himself in the region's dynamic financial sector.

In addition to our Canadian alliances, CUD continues to extend its international reach through collaborations with universities across five continents, including member institutions of the Silk Road Universities Network.

Chapman University, U.S.A.

From Conflict to Change: Chapman University's Path to Progress

Chapman University has demonstrated its mission to promote positive change and reflect a deep commitment to global engagement, contributing to justice, and immersive learning through several recent initiatives. For example, Chapman recently hosted Nodel Peace Prize recipient Nadia Murad for a discussion on justice and reparations for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and by partnered with the Center for International Experiential Learning (CIEL) for a transformative educational journey in Vietnam. Each of these activities recognizes challenges individuals historically experience due to conflicts. Though on-campus presentations and experiential learning Chapman seeks to encourage growth both within individual students and in their interactions with others. These paths to progress align with the University's vision of preparing students to contribute to a global society.



**Nobel Peace Prize winner Nadia Murad with
Dean Jennifer Keene** Photo by Chapman University

Nadia Murad Rejoins Chapman to Advocate for Justice and Reparations for Survivors of Sexual Violence

Chapman University recently welcomed back Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Nadia Murad, a noted human rights activist and University Presidential Fellow in Peace Studies, for a powerful talk titled “Towards Justice: Reparations for Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence.”

The event, hosted by the Department of Peace and Justice Studies and Wilkinson College of Arts & Social Sciences, featured a virtual appearance by Esther Dingemans, executive director of the Global Survivors Fund (GSF). Murad and Dingemans founded GSF in 2019, committed to the critical need for survivor-

centered support. They explained how GSF highlights the five elements of reparation: satisfaction, rehabilitation, compensation, guarantees of non-repetition, and restitution. They shared how GSF provides survivors with urgent medical, psychological, social, and livelihood aid while ensuring survivor agency remains central to the healing and justice-building process. As a Yazidi genocide survivor, Murad has dedicated her life to helping survivors of violence worldwide, advocating for the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence, survivor-centered recovery, and rebuilding communities in crisis. Her deep personal resonance with the conversation and commitment to justice transform advocacy into action. “When you work with survivors, you just know it’s going to impact generations,” said Murad, underscoring the lasting power of survivor-focused justice.

For more information, see <https://blogs.chapman.edu/wilkinson/2025/02/27/nadia-murad-calls-for-justice-and-reparations-for-survivors-of-conflict-related-sexual-violence/>

Peacebuilding in Practice: Chapman Students Immerse Themselves in Vietnam’s History and Culture

In January 2025, Chapman University’s MA in International Studies program and the Department of Peace and Justice Studies



Chapman delegation joins students in Vietnam

Photo courtesy of Chapman University

partnered with the Center for International Experiential Learning (CIEL) for a transformative educational journey to Vietnam.

The program engaged graduate and undergraduate students in the country's historical, political, and social movements through pre-travel coursework and immersive experiences. In Vietnam, students visited war memorials, engaged with local historians, community groups focusing on human rights, environmental sustainability, economic advancements, and non-governmental organizations. They also contributed to the Mekong Delta's rural infrastructure and

agricultural development project. These firsthand encounters offered deeper insight into the impact of the Vietnam War, contemporary challenges, and grassroots efforts promoting change. Through daily reflection and discussion, students connected their coursework with real-world complexities across cultures, returning home with a broadened global understanding and more profound commitment to peacebuilding and international perspectives.

For more information, see <https://blogs.chapman.edu/wilkinson/2025/03/11/transformational-learning-wilkinson-students-in-vietnam/>

The Ferrucci Institute for Italian Experience and Research
Presents

SPACE AND CULTURE: AN ITALIAN PERSPECTIVE

SATURDAY, March 15, 2025
10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.
Followed by Reception | Musco Center for the Arts

Join us for a thought-provoking celebration of the Italian contribution to the exploration and engineering of space, viewed in its scientific and humanistic dimensions, featuring panels and talks with astronauts, artists, and leaders in the sector.



An Italian Perspective on Culture in Space

Chapman University's Ferrucci Institute for Italian Experience and Research hosted the event "Space and Culture: An Italian Perspective," which featured presentations and discussions with astronauts, artists, and experts in the sector.

Chapman University Space Archeologist Dr. Justin Walsh provided a brief history of Italy's



Panelists discuss Italian contributions to space exploration.

Photo by Ferrucci Institute

influence on space exploration, including the discoveries of Galileo Galilei and the launching of the San Marco satellite in 1964. Dr. Walsh highlighted Paolo Nespoli, an Italian astronaut and engineer of the European Space Agency who published a book with photographs he had taken while stationed in space. He used Nespoli's photographs to offer new perspectives on space exploration that depicted the complexity and beauty of space rarely seen on Earth.

Italy's vital contributions to space exploration and technology were discussed by a panel of experts, including Fabio Bressan, Vice President at Persico Group (an Italian Manufacturing Company); Jonathan Lunine, Chief Scientist at NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory; Agostino Neri, Program Manager at the European Space Agency; and Nicola Pecile, a pilot at Virgin Galactic.

For more information, see <https://blogs.chapman.edu/wilkinson/2025/03/26/from-our-eyes-an-italian-perspective-exploring-the-significance-of-space-and-culture/>

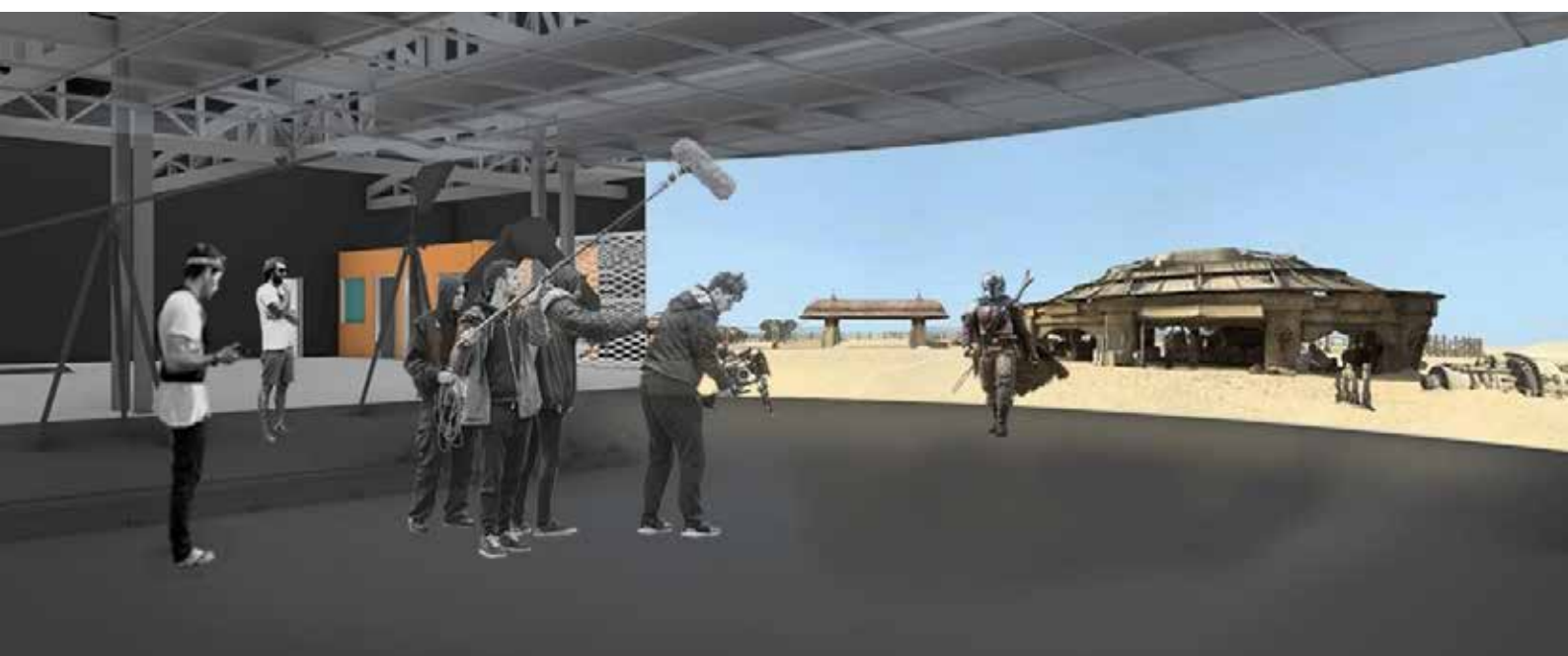
Cutting Edge Innovation in Visual Production

Chapman's noted Dodge College of Film & Media Art, ranked 4th overall in the U.S., will take a further step in the media future with the Dhont Family Innovation Hub – a new production facility with a 180-degree wraparound LED screen, a professional soundstage and a suite of virtual production capabilities that integrate cutting-edge artificial intelligence tools.

It is envisioned as a space where students experiment freely, push boundaries, and develop the technical fluency needed to succeed in an ever-evolving industry. The new

Production using 180-degree wraparound LED screen.

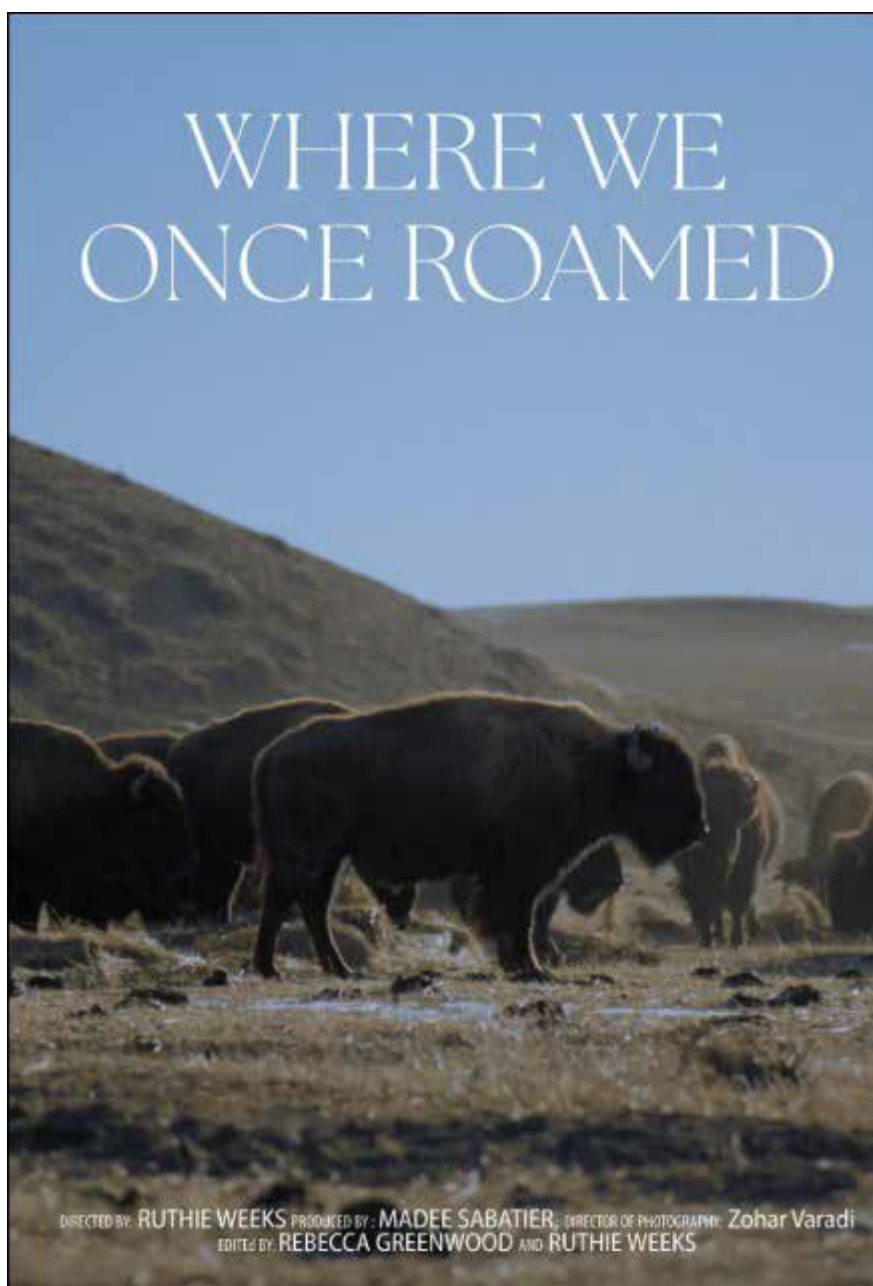
Rendering from Chapman University



state-of-the-art facility will not only redefine cinematic storytelling but also expand global access to documentary filmmaking through the “Community Voices: Global Stories” series, a program that merges social activism with documentary filmmaking. This program enables students to travel across the U.S. and internationally to capture stories that span cultural empathy, creative vision and global citizenship.

Chapman Film Students Earn Prestigious BAFTA Nomination for Documentary on Blackfeet Bison Restoration

Chapman University students Ruthie Weeks ('25), Madee Sabatier ('24), Rebecca Greenwood ('25), and Zohar Varadi ('24) from Chapman's Dodge College of Film and Media Arts, have earned international recognition with one of three finalist films for the 2025 BAFTA Student Award in the Documentary category. Their film, *Where We Once Roamed*, explores the efforts by the Native American Blackfeet Tribe to restore free-roaming bison to their ancestral lands. Told through the voices of Blackfeet Nation members Ethan Running Crane, Ervin Carlson Jr. and Shane Little Bear, the documentary highlights not only a monumental conservation initiative but also the deep cultural and spiritual significance of bison to the Blackfeet people. Filmed in Browning, Montana,



"Where Once We Roamed" poster

Image courtesy of Chapman University

and at Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park in Alberta, Canada, on the lands of the Siksika Nation, part of the Blackfoot Confederacy, the documentary uses compelling storytelling and striking visuals to offer a powerful portrait of ecological restoration and cultural revival.

The documentary was created as part of Community Voices, a social-issue documentary program that has been housed within Dodge College for more than 15 years and funded by the Dhont Family Foundation. Community Voices allows students to tell important stories about pressing global issues while learning the craft of documentary filmmaking. More than 400 students have completed the program,

producing films that have screened worldwide and sparked vital dialogue.

The BAFTA Student Awards, hosted by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts, celebrate emerging talent in Live Action, Animation, Documentary, Games, and Immersive Content. With more than 800 film schools invited to participate annually, the awards represent one of the most competitive and respected international honors for student filmmakers.

Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Navigating globalized education: UTCN Strengthens International Partnerships Support System at APAIE 2025

The Technical University of Cluj-Napoca (TUCN) continues to demonstrate its commitment to respect for diversity, equity and inclusion, multiculturalism and multilingualism, currently hosting international students from countries such as Vietnam, Jordan, Turkey, SUA, Afghanistan, Mongolia, Iran, Greece, Kirgizstan, Indonesia and Italy, to name but a few. They are enrolled in all study cycles, as well as in the Preparatory Year of Romanian Language



Photo courtesy of TUCN

and Culture which allows them to learn the Romanian language and smooths the process of cultural, social and academic integration.

In this context, at the Asia-Pacific Association for International Education (APAIE) conference this year the delegation of the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, in collaboration with Romanian counterparts, welcomed the impactful discussion with the Romanian Ambassador to India, Her Excellency Ms. Sena Latif. The visit provided the TUCN delegation with the opportunity to engage in discussions with the Romanian Embassy and consulates in India about streamlining the visa application process for Indian students. The outcome of these discussions is expected to enhance TUCN's recruitment efforts internationally and foster stronger collaboration with authorities to increase academic mobility opportunities between India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Romania.

With the same objectives of enhancing visibility and diversifying its collaborations, TUCN participated in the Eurasia Higher Education Summit (EURIE) in April 2025. The event fosters cooperation in the region and contributes to networking to promote quality education. TUCN had the occasion to enter into new collaboration agreements with institutions from Türkiye, India, and Bangladesh.

TUCN research collaboration within the European University of Technology (EUt+) – recent results

TUCN is now halfway through the second phase of consolidating its membership in EUt+, a consortium comprising nine universities of technology from the four major geographical regions of Europe. These institutions are uniquely positioned between world-class, research-intensive technological universities and locally focused universities of applied sciences.

In alignment with this mission, TUCN actively supports and promotes diverse research initiatives through a wide network of research units, centers, and communities of specialists and Ph.D. students. Topics such as globalization, migration, and inclusive education are among the areas where their contributions offer valuable insights and a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the forces shaping

the internationalization of higher education. Some of the recent work is the result of fruitful collaboration within the European University of Technology (EUT+) research groups:

● Cauni, F., Pasca, A. and Pop Lia (forthcoming). Inclusive education – Romanian case study. In *Geopolitics of Inclusion: Global Interests and Challenges*, Routledge.

● Morales, L., Rashwan, W., Madi, I., Zherdeva, A., Rocha, O. R. da, Kamphambale, D., Alzankawi, A., Pop, L., Coetzer, J.-H., Peev, I., & Gulmez, M. (2025). Geoeconomic and Geopolitical Challenges and the Future of Education. *Geoeconomics of the Sustainable Development Goals*, 1(12), 187–214. Routledge Publish House.

The Exploring Multilingualism: Language, Technology and Cross-Cultural Connections conference, set to take place on 15–16 January 2026 at the campus of Technological University Dublin, is the latest edition of a recurring international event that rotates among European University of Technology (EUT+) campuses. Organized by TU Dublin Language Studies, the conference will bring together researchers and practitioners to examine the complex intersections of multilingualism, digital innovation, and intercultural communication in today's global landscape. Topics range from AI-

enhanced language learning and translation studies to migration, minority languages, and educational policy. For EUt+ partners such as the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca (TUCN), the event offers a strategic platform to share expertise in multilingual education and language technologies.

TUCN fosters long-standing partnerships and actively expands its international presence through the Erasmus+ program

TUCN boasts a long-standing partnership along the Silk Road Universities Network with Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, where over the past 10 years research and mobility were intertwined in joint supervision (“cotutelle”) end of studies theses at different study levels, serving on examination boards, and exchange of students through mobilities as a consistent tradition. Most recently TUCN

EUt+ workshop at the University of Technology of Troyes

Photo courtesy of TUCN



assistant prof. Alin Mihali returned from NOVA after benefiting from a one-year Research/ Doctoral Studies Grant, as part of the research project Exploratory Project on Automated Mesh Generation for RC Structures and Blast Effects.

According to our partner's feedback: "The expertise of researchers from TUCN has been extremely valuable in significantly improving the quality of the research carried out, contributing to the publication of impactful scientific articles and to the strengthening and development of interdisciplinary synergies essential for future collaborations."

Along the same lines stands the fruitful partnership with Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (South Korea), strengthened through the Erasmus+ K171project (2023-2026). Professor Jeong O. Park, who teaches Romanian and published a testimony of his affection for our culture and country in his piece. "Travel to Romania", visited our University last year, and TUCN looks forward to reciprocating the visit in the near future.

Write for us

SILKROADIA is the official webzine of the Silk-Road Universities Network (SUN). We have more than 800,000 subscribers including professors, researchers, students, presidents, rectors, and chancellors of universities & research institutions located along the land and maritime Silk Roads. We welcome your articles and images on any of the topics related to the Silk Roads. The topics are those mentioned below but not limited to:

Culture on the Silk Roads: religion, local cuisine, artwork, jewelry, toys, pottery, dance, music, musical instruments, traditional / contemporary dress, types of dwelling, festivals, rituals, weddings, funerals, taboos.

Heritage on the Silk Roads: archaeological / historical heritage sites, literature, paintings, statues and sculptures.

Travel on the Silk Roads: natural wonders, markets, hotels, caravan-serais, transportation.

Any interesting and diverse stories about people, places and events in your area, including the life of ordinary people and interview.

*All articles and images shall be original and not infringe upon copyright rules. The working language is English and contributors' contact information must be included.

Please send to sunwebzine@sun0822.org

SILKROADIA seeks student reporters

SILKROADIA is looking for students who are willing to write articles about the Silk Roads and other topics of their interest.

What SUN student reporters do?

- Report Silk Roads-related activities and events in their country
- Report important activities and events in their university
- Work on articles or images as requested by the SUN Secretariat

Qualifications

Students of the member universities of SUN

Must be fluent in English

Must send at least two writing samples in English to **sunwebzine@sun0822.org**

SUN student reporters are usually expected to work for one semester.

What they get

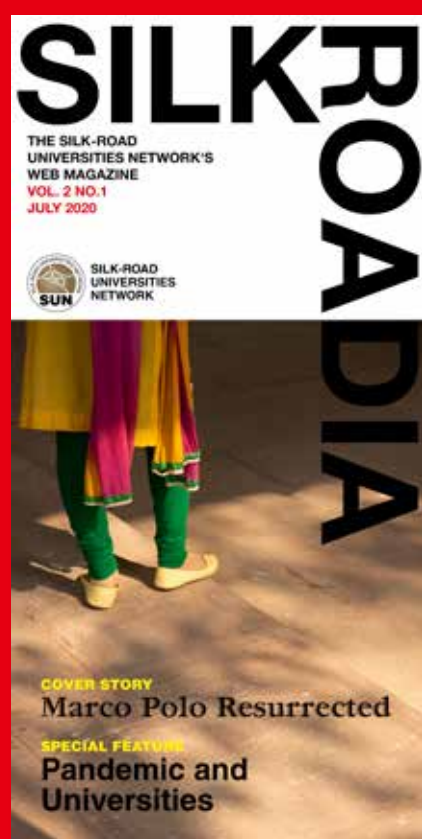
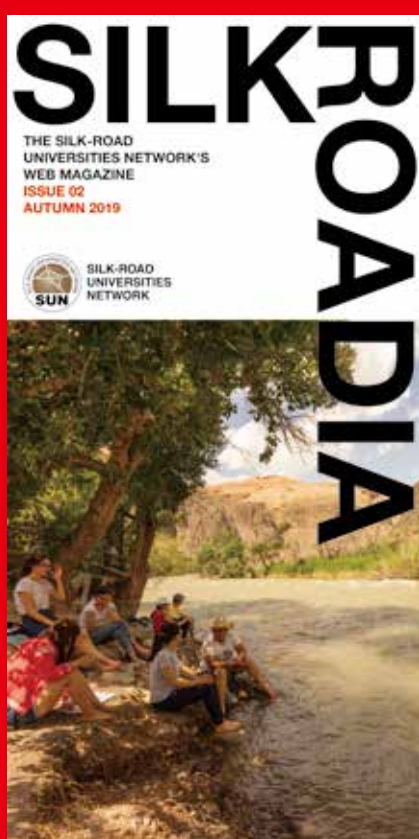
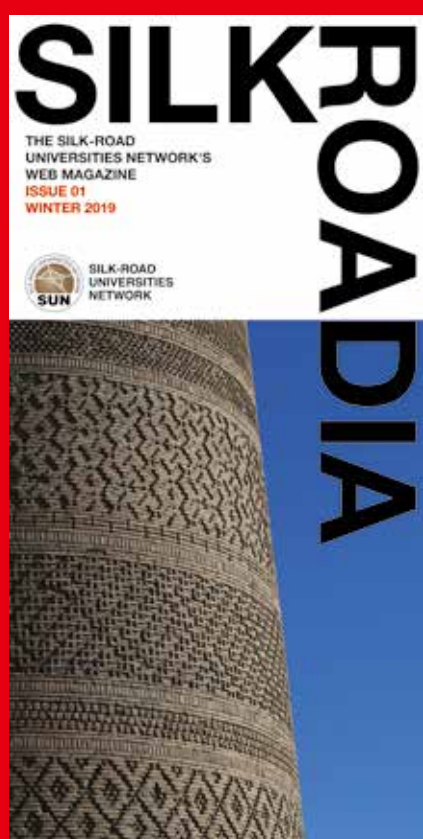
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Receives the official certificate from SUN

The student, who is annually selected as the best reporter by the SUN secretariat, will be invited to attend the annual General Assembly of SUN with full coverage of the air travel and accommodations.

How to apply

Contact us at **sunwebzine@sun0822.org**



Advertise on SILKROADIA

**The official webzine of SUN
to carry advertisements from
next issue**

SILKROADIA, the official webzine of the Silk-Road Universities Network, is a biannual publication which was launched in 2019. All the editions published so far are available at the SUN website.

As the official publication of SUN, ***SILKROADIA*** aims to serve as an effective medium of communications among the SUN Family members and between SUN and the outside world.

In order to fulfill its mission, ***SILKROADIA*** features a variety of interesting, informative and insightful articles and images, most of them provided by professors and students of the SUN member universities and institutes. The contents vary from in-depth academic articles and com-

mentaries authored by experts to easy-to-enjoy stories on heritage and travel on the Silk Roads. We are proud of having published genuinely original contents – like the imaginary interview which highlighted people like Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta, the legendary travelers and adventurers who are identified with the ancient Silk Roads.

Such an abundance of interesting contents on **SILKROADIA** draws a lot of readers from around the world. The webzine already boasts of a regular audience of about 800,000 people, including the faculty members and students of the 82 member universities and institutes in 65 cities of 28 countries along the Silk Roads. This is one of the reasons we began thinking about the potential of **SILKROADIA** as a potential place for advertisements.

Carrying advertisements on **SILKROADIA** has two objectives: First, advertisement revenue will certainly help SUN stand on its own financially, which has become more urgent in the wake of the ceasing of support from the Gyeongsangbuk-do Provincial Government. Second, advertisements on **SILKROADIA** will help the webzine raise its standard to a higher level. Good publications draw good advertisers and a genuinely popular publication cannot go without advertisements.

It is against this backdrop that **SILKROADIA** will carry advertisements from the next issue, which is expected to be published around June 2021. The first potential advertisers could be member universities and institutes of SUN who wish to promote their academic programs, exchange of students and other international programs and events. The advertisement pages of course will be open to those outside SUN, including educational associations, organizations and companies.

Details, including the rates and formats, will be released soon, which will be delivered to member universities and institutes and outside organizations through the official communication channel of the SUN Secretariat and **SILKROADIA**.

We expect active support from SUN members. Thank you.

Ad rates (tentative)

Page size	Price	Submission due
Full page	USD 500	TBA
1/2 page	USD 300	TBA
1/4 page	USD 200	TBA