HIST 379 | The Silk Road and Pre-Modern Commerce
Fall 2025

Course Description

This course introduces the history of the Silk Road—a complex network of trade routes that connected China with the rest of the Eurasian continent over land and sea—and its role in fostering cultural and material exchanges between the peoples it connected. It will revisit key moments of the Silk Road in pre-modern history to understand how Eurasia was connected through vast networks of traders and caravans. We will situate temporally and geographically the main states, actors, objects, religions, and ideas that have populated the roads, oasis towns, and steppe territories constituting the Silk Road. We will also emphasize the role of nomadic groups in the movements and exchanges along the roads constituting the premodern commerce.

In terms of content, we will first explore how the term "Silk Road" emerged in the late 19th century. We will then have a thematic approach to our object of study. In the "Place and Time" section, we will situate the Silk Road temporally and geographically, with a focus on three main periods: look at the Classical Age of the Silk Road from the 1st to the 3rd century; the medieval Silk Road from the 3rd to the 8th century, and the Mongol Empire era in the 13th and 14th centuries. In the "Ideas and Objects" section, we will bring the focus to the movement of ideas, commodities, and other objects like clothes, musical instruments, and food that traveled across Eurasia. Through the course, we will look at objects, maps, and art; we will read primary documents as well as contemporary scholarship. All readings are in English, no prior knowledge of East or Central Asia is necessary.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a basic understanding of historical contexts, major concepts, theoretical perspectives in the history of premodern Silk Road trading routes across time and place.
2. Identify diverse historical groups, cultures, and commercial interests on Silk Road networks.
3. Compare and contrast the strengths and weaknesses of contending scholarly interpretations of the conflicts and connections along the Silk Road.
4. Produce a focused, historical thesis using appropriate primary sources, historical reasoning, and adequate scholarly evidence.
5. Evaluate how historical knowledge informs and can shape global decisions and responsibilities in today's world.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is one of the highest values that Purdue University holds. Individuals are encouraged to alert university officials to potential breaches of this value by either emailing integrity@purdue.edu or by calling 765-494-8778. While information may be submitted anonymously, the more information is submitted the greater the opportunity for the

university to investigate the concern. More details are available on our course Brightspace under University Policies.

Avoiding Plagiarism
Plagiarism is a special kind of academic dishonesty in which one person steals another person's ideas or words and falsely presents them as the plagiarist's own product. This is most likely to occur in the following ways: (1) using the exact language of someone else without the use of quotation marks and without giving proper credit to the author; (2) presenting the sequence of ideas or arranging the material of someone else even though such is expressed in one's own words, without giving appropriate acknowledgment; (3) submitting a document written by someone else but representing it as one's own. The university policies about plagiarism include penalties ranging from failure of an assignment to expulsion from the university. In this class, anyone who plagiarizes fails the course. For more information, you may check Best Practices to Avoid Plagiarism.

Nondiscrimination Statement
Purdue University is committed to maintaining a community that recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters tolerance, sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among its members; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her potential. In pursuit of its goal of academic excellence, the University seeks to develop and nurture diversity. The University believes that diversity among its many members strengthens the institution, stimulates creativity, promotes the exchange of ideas, and enriches campus life. A hyperlink to Purdue's full Nondiscrimination Policy Statement is included in our course Brightspace under University Policies.

Mental Health/Wellness Statement
If you find yourself beginning to feel some stress, anxiety and/or feeling slightly overwhelmed, try WellTrack. Sign in and find information and tools at your fingertips, available to you at any time.
If you need support and information about options and resources, please contact or see the Office of the Dean of Students. Call 765-494-1747. Hours of operation are M-F, 8 am- 5 pm.
If you find yourself struggling to find a healthy balance between academics, social life, stress, etc., sign up for free one-on-one virtual or in-person sessions with a Purdue Wellness Coach at RecWell. Student coaches can help you navigate through barriers and challenges toward your goals throughout the semester. Sign up is free and can be done on BoilerConnect.
If you're struggling and need mental health services: Purdue University is committed to advancing the mental health and well-being of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of mental health support, services are available. For help, such individuals should contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 765-494-6995 during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or by going to the CAPS office on the second floor of the Purdue University Student Health Center (PUSH)

during business hours. The CAPS website also offers resources specific to situations such as COVID-19.

Basic Needs Security
Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. There is no appointment needed and Student Support Services is available to serve students 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Considering the significant disruptions caused by the current global crisis as it relates to COVID-19, students may submit requests for emergency assistance from the Critical Need Fund.

Emergency Preparation
In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances beyond the instructor's control. Relevant changes to this course will be posted onto the course website or can be obtained by contacting the instructors or TAs via email or phone. You are expected to read your @purdue.edu email on a frequent basis.

Recommended books
Hansen, Valerie. *The Silk Road: A New History with Documents*. [Updated edition]. New York: Oxford University Press. 2017.
Beckwith, Christopher I. *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,. 2009.

Assignments
Attendance and participation:	10%
Weekly reading quizzes:	20%
Short responses:	20%
Mid-term project:	20%
Final Project:	30%

Grading Scale
A = 93.33 – 100%
A - = 90 – 93.32%
B+ = 86.66 – 89.99%
B = 83.33 – 86.65 %
B - = 80 – 83.32 %
C+ = 76.76 – 79.99 %
C = 73.33 – 76.75 %
C - = 70 – 73.32 %
D+ = 66.66 – 69.99 %
D = 63.33 – 66.65 %
D - = 60 – 63.32 %