

History 4603F
Silk Roads and Spice Routes: Ancient and Medieval Asia and
World Contacts
Fall 2025

Instructor: **Dr. Carl Young**

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Office: **Department of History, Lawson Hall 2225**

Office Hours: **Tuesdays and Wednesdays 1:00 PM-2:00 PM or by appointment**

This is a **draft** outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

Course Description

This course will investigate the economic, political, religious, cultural, and technological impact of long distance land and sea trade between Asia and other world regions in ancient and medieval times up to around 1500.

Prerequisite(s): Registration in third year or above, any module.

Course Syllabus

This course will investigate the economic, political, religious, cultural, and technological impact of long distance land and sea trade between Asia and other world regions in ancient and medieval times up to around 1500.

Contacts between different world regions are not a new phenomenon. They have occurred since pre-historic times. Although these early contacts cannot be called globalisation, they connected regions that were a long distance from one another, in spite of obstacles of time and transportation technology. Most of the contacts between Asia and other world regions involved trade in luxuries such as precious metals, silk, and spices both by land and by sea. Along with trade goods, ideas and technologies were also exchanged, a lot of which continue to exercise an influence up to the present day.

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

- be aware of the ancient origins of exchanges between Asia and other world regions
- understand the interaction of long-distance interregional trade with cultural, religious, and technological exchange and the historical impact of these interactions
- Analyze primary and secondary sources on select topics involving contacts between Asia and other world regions in ancient and medieval times through both oral discussion and written work

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- Present findings and views from readings through oral presentations
- Synthesise primary and secondary sources to produce a research paper

Methods of Evaluation

Term Paper (15-20 pages)	35%
2 Article Analyses (10% each; 3-5 pages each)	20%
Book Review (5-7 pages)	20%
Oral Presentation	10%
Participation	<u>15%</u>
	100%

The term paper will be a research paper on a topic of your choice in the history of contacts within Asia and out to other world regions in ancient and medieval times. Suggested topics will be handed out early in the beginning of the semester. The suggested length of the papers will be approximately 15-20 pages. The paper will be due on **Nov. 25**.

The two article analyses will be based around the readings for each class. During the semester, students will choose any **2** of the articles indicated with a “**” on the reading list and write a 4-6 page paper each on the articles. These papers are **due on the day of the relevant seminar in which the particular reading is assigned. This assignment will not normally be accepted late. The last chance to hand in a 1st article analysis, for articles between Sept. 16 and Oct. 21, is Oct. 21. The last chance to hand in a 2nd article analysis, for articles between Oct. 28 and Dec. 9, is Dec. 9.** This assignment is more than merely a summary. The main purpose of the paper is to bring forth the main issues of the article or series of documents, discuss how the author(s) bring forth their point of view, and also analyze the effectiveness of the readings in conveying information and opinion, as well as their contribution to the topic under discussion in the particular seminar.

The book review will be based on **one** of the four books assigned for the course that are eligible (the book *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, Merchants, and Intellectuals* is not eligible and the readings from this book will qualify as readings for the article analysis). As with the article analyses, this is more than a summary of the book. Like the article analyses, the review will bring out the main themes and ideas of the book, the author’s point of view and how the book helps to better understand the themes covered in the course. The book review will be 5-8 pages and will be due on **Nov. 11**.

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Students will also be required to do **1** oral presentation in the course of the semester. These will be based on the articles and documents assigned as readings for the seminar. A sign-up sheet will be passed around in the beginning of the semester. This will involve a brief 10-15 minute presentation on the reading in question, which will include a brief summary of the reading and the launching of questions for discussion.

This is a seminar course and the success of the seminar depends a lot on keeping up with the readings, attendance in class, and participation in discussion. It is for this reason that 15% of the course mark depends on seminar participation. Roll call will be taken in each class and students will be given marks for participation in the discussions. Students will be marked on a scale of 1 to 5 for each class and at the end of the semester, the marks will be added together to give an overall participation mark.

If you should have any questions pertaining to the structure or content of the course, please do not hesitate to contact me during my office hours, or by phone or e-mail to make an appointment.

Make-up tests, midterms, and exams can only be approved by Academic Advising. Please see https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for department procedures and requirements involving make-up tests and exams.

Absences and Late Assignments:

The book review and the term paper will be accepted late. However, there will be a penalty of 2% a day that will be applied for every day the assignments are late, including weekends and holidays. The article analyses will not normally be accepted late, since there is flexibility as to when to hand them in. I normally request both an electronic copy of your assignment, submitted on OWL, and a paper copy submitted to myself in class, during my office hours, or through the History department office (please see below). Penalties stop on receipt of the first version (either electronic or paper) that has been received. However, I will normally only start marking your assignment when I have both versions of your assignment. If you have missed class, try and get notes from another member of the class. The Powerpoints for the lectures will also be posted after they have been presented.

If you do hand in your assignment late, please hand in your paper copy to the wooden drop-off box outside the History Department office at Lawson Hall. The staff will pick up the assignment and stamp it with a date and time and put it in my mailbox. This provides greater security and clarity for the handing in of the assignment. Please avoid shoving the paper under my office door if at all possible, because it could get lost.

In case of family emergency, illness, or other circumstances, penalties can be removed from assignments after approval from academic advising. In these circumstances, please get in contact with your home faculty or college's academic advising office and submit the required forms and documentation. The office will then get in touch with me and give me recommendations for accommodation.

Students have the right to file **one assignment per course per semester** with academic advising without supporting documentation. In this case, normally an extension will be given for 2-3 days, after which lateness penalties will begin.

Some students have access to flexibility in assignment deadlines through Accessible Education. This allows for extensions on assignments for a few days without having to go through academic advising. Please come and consult with me to work out a new assignment deadline if you have this accommodation and you are exercising this option. Flexibility in assignment deadlines does not mean extending assignment submission over weeks or months. This is to avoid stress in the end of the semester with an accumulation of assignments for submission. If more time is needed than a few days, academic advising will need to be consulted.

All written work (regardless of accommodations) must be submitted by the end of classes for winter semester, which is **Dec. 9, 2025**. Any petition for extension beyond this date will require approval from the academic advising office with supporting documentation.

Attendance at the seminar sessions and participating in discussion is an important part of the course. However, if you do miss a seminar class, after advice from academic advising, I will either request a 1-2 page response paper on the readings for the relevant week to make up for your participation mark for that week or I will waive the participation mark for that week. This flexibility should be the exception rather than the rule for your seminar participation mark.

Please consult the following for more in-depth information on department, faculty, and university policies on absences and late submissions.

- Social Science Academic Advising on [Absence & Academic Consideration](#)
- the university's policies on [Academic Consideration for Medical Illness](#) and
- the Department of History's own [Undergraduate Policies and Statements](#)]

Course Materials

James A. Millward, *The Silk Road: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)(approximately \$13.50)

Xinru Liu, *The Silk Roads: A Brief History with Documents*, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012)(approximately \$40.00)

Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Pre-modern Patterns of Globalization (2nd edition)*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010)(approximately \$30.00)

Lynda Norene Shaffer, *Maritime Southeast Asia to 1500*, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996)(approximately \$80.00)

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Michal Biran, Jonathan Brack, & Francesca Fiaschetti, *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, Merchants, and Intellectuals*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020)(approximately \$38.00)

Selected articles and book excerpts to be posted on the class OWL site]

Course Schedule and Readings

Readings with a ‘**’ are eligible for the article analysis assignments

Sept. 9—Introduction

Sept. 16—Not Just Silk, Not Just a Road

James A. Millward, *The Silk Road: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 1-110

“Introduction” in Xinru Liu, *The Silk Roads: A Brief History in Documents*, p. 1-33

Sept. 23—Ancient Worlds: Greeks, Romans and Han Chinese and the Silk Road

** Fergus Millar, “Looking East from the Classical World: Colonialism, Culture, and Trade from Alexander the Great to Shapur I”, *The International History Review*, Vol. XX, No.3 (Sept. 1998), p. 507-531 (available on OWL)

** Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, “Provincializing Rome: The Indian Ocean Trade Network and Roman Imperialism”, *Journal of World History*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (March 2011), p. 27-54 (available on OWL)

“China’s Trade on the Western Frontier” and “Rome’s Trade to the East” in Xinru Liu, *The Silk Roads: A Brief History in Documents*, p. 37-83

Sept. 30—National Day for Truth and Reconciliation—No class

Oct. 7—Middle Men: Central Asians, Persians, and Southeast Asians and Trade by Land and Sea

** Xinru Liu, “Migration and Settlement of the Yuezhi-Kushan: Interaction and Interdependence of Nomadic and Sedentary Societies”, *Journal of World History*, Vol 12, No. 2 (2001), p. 261-292 (available on OWL)

** Jenny Rose, “The Sogdians: Prime Movers between Boundaries”, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (2010), p. 410-419 (available on OWL)

** Touraj Daryaee, “The Persian Gulf Trade in Late Antiquity”, *Journal of World History*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2003), p. 1-16 (available on OWL)

“Introduction” and “In the Time of Funan” in Lynda Norene Shaffer, *Maritime Southeast Asia to 1500*, p. 1-36

Oct. 14 —Religion and the Silk Road (I)

Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Pre-modern Patterns of Globalization*, p. 1-104

** Tansun Sen, “Buddhism in the Maritime Crossings” in Dorothy C. Wong and Gustav Heldt, *China and Beyond in the Mediaeval Period: Cultural and Inter-Regional Connections*, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2014), p. 39-63 (available on OWL)

“The Kushan Empire and the Influence of Buddhism” and “The Oasis Towns of Central Asia and the Spread of Buddhism” in Xinru Liu, *The Silk Roads: A Brief History in Documents*, p. 84-119

Oct. 21—Religion and the Silk Road (II)

** “Contact” in Johan Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2010) p. 9-55 (available on OWL)

** Xinru Liu, “A Silk Road Legacy: The Spread of Buddhism and Islam”, *Journal of World History*, Vol. 22, no. 1, p. 55-81 (available on OWL)

** “Christianity and Silk Trade” in Xinru Liu, *Silk and Religion: An Exploration of Material Life and the Thought of People, AD 600-1200* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 113-129 (available on OWL)

*******Last chance to hand in 1st Article Analysis—Oct. 21*******

Oct. 28—Tang China and the Silk Road (I)

** “The Outer World” in Mark Edward Lewis, *China’s Cosmopolitan Empire: The Tang Dynasty*, (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 145-178 (available on OWL)

** “The Cosmopolitan Terminus of the Silk Road” in Valerie Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 141-166 (available on OWL)

Nov. 3-9—Fall Reading Week—No classes

Nov. 11—Tang China and the Silk Road (II) (those who sign up for presentations on Nov. 11 will have their book reviews due on Nov. 18)

“The Byzantine Empire and Silks in Royal Purple” and “The Tang Empire and Foreign Traders and Priests” in Xinru Liu, *The Silk Roads: A Brief History in Documents*, p.120-151

** Angela Schottenhammer, “China’s Gate to the Indian Ocean: Iranian and Arab Long-Distance Traders”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 76, Nos. 1 & 2 (2016), p. 135-179 (available on OWL)

** Charlotte von Verschuer, *Across the Perilous Sea: Japanese Trade with China and Korea from the Seventh to the Sixteenth Centuries*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell East Asia Series, 2006), p. 1-22 (available on OWL)

“Srivijaya” and “Central Java” in Lynda Norene Shaffer, *Maritime Southeast Asia to 1500*, p. 37-74

*******Book Review due—Nov. 11*******

Nov. 18 — The Mongol Empire and the Silk Road (I)

“Introduction” in Michal Biran, Jonathan Brack, & Francesca Fiaschetti, *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, Merchants, and Intellectuals*, p. 1-24

** “Nature and Institutions of the Mongol Empire” in David Morgan, *The Mongols (2nd Edition)*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 74-98 (available on OWL)

** “Guo Kan” and “Baiju” in Michal Biran, Jonathan Brack, & Francesca Fiaschetti, *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, Merchants, and Intellectuals*, p. 27-57

** “Baldwin of Hainaut” and “Jamal al-Din al-Tibi” in Michal Biran, Jonathan Brack, & Francesca Fiaschetti, *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, Merchants, and Intellectuals*, p. 160-193

“Trade Networks from the Mediterranean to the South China Sea” in Xinru Liu, *The Silk Roads: A Brief History in Documents*, p. 152-169

Nov. 25--The Mongol Empire and the Silk Road (II) (those who sign up for presentations on Nov. 25 will have their term papers due on Dec. 2)

“East Java” and “Singasari and Majapahit” in Lynda Norene Shaffer, *Maritime Southeast Asia to 1500*, p. 75-98

“Ecumenical Mischief” in Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Pre-modern Patterns of Globalization*, p.105-126

** “Qutulun”, “Taydula”, and “Padshah Khatun” in Michal Biran, Jonathan Brack, & Francesca Fiaschetti, *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, Merchants, and Intellectuals*, p. 64-82, 194-212, 270-289

** “Rashid al-Din” and “Isa Kelemichi” in Michal Biran, Jonathan Brack, & Francesca Fiaschetti, *Along the Silk Roads in Mongol Eurasia: Generals, Merchants, and Intellectuals*, p. 215-237, 255-269

** “The Worlds of Marco Polo” in Jonathan Spence, *The Chan’s Great Continent: China in Western Minds*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), p. 1-18 (available on OWL)

*******Term Paper due—Nov. 25*******

Dec. 2—Turning from Land to Sea after the Mongols

** Geoff Wade, “Engaging the South: Ming China and Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 51, no. 4 (2008), p. 578-638 (available on OWL)

** “The Emergence of a Hybrid Muslim Culture” in Howard Federspiel, *Sultans, Shamans, and Saints: Islam and Muslims in Southeast Asia*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), p. 22-59 (available on OWL)

“The Establishment of Muslim Mataram” in Lynda Norene Shaffer, *Maritime Southeast Asia to 1500*, p. 99-104

Dec. 9—The Legacy of the Silk Road

James A. Milliward, *The Silk Road: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 110-121

Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Pre-modern Patterns of Globalization*, p. 127-139

** Nadège Rolland, “China’s Belt and Road Initiative: Underwhelming or Game Changer”, *The Washington Quarterly* 40:1 (2017), p. 127-142 (available on OWL)

** Alvaro Mendez, Francisco Javier Forcadell, and Kateryna Horiachko, “Russia-Ukraine Crisis: China’s Belt Road Initiative at the Crossroads”, *Asian Business and Management*, Vol. 21 (4) (2022), p. 488-496

and

Vladimir Prebilič and Vid Jereb, “Implications of the War in Ukraine on the Belt and Road Initiative”, *Journal of Geography, Politics, and Society*, Vol. 12 (2)(2022), p. 1-7

*******Last chance to hand in 2nd Article Analysis—Dec. 9*******]

Additional Statements

Communication policies: E-mail is generally the easiest way to contact me for short questions. I will endeavour to answer within the day, although there may be delays on weekends and holidays in particular. You can also ask short questions during the class lecture breaks. For longer enquiries, please drop by during my office hours at my office. If you are unable to come to my normal office hours, please contact me to set up an alternative appointment, either in person or through Zoom. For general class announcements, I use the “Announcements” feature on OWL, so please check frequently on OWL to keep track of latest class developments.

Use of generative artificial intelligence (AI):

You may use generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, in this course for activities such as researching and refining your ideas, or drafting an outline to organize your thoughts—but not for generating prose. All writing submitted in this course must be your own. If in doubt, please ask me for clarification and advice.

Please review the Department of History’s shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at: https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.

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