

The Silk Road



The merchant in the story *The Merchant and the Parrot* would have traveled from Persia to India along an ancient trade route called the Silk Road. During the poet Rumi's lifetime, the Silk Road played a major role in the movement and trade of goods between the Far East (China) and Eastern Europe.

What was the Silk Road?

The Silk Road was a 4,000 mile-long trade route that stretched from China to Eastern Europe. It went along the northern borders of China, India, and Persia and ended up near the Mediterranean Sea in what is now Turkey.

Actually, the Silk Road was not just one route, but many routes. Some were shorter, but more dangerous. Others took longer, but were safer.

Very few merchants made the entire 4,000 mile trip. Goods were traded at many cities and trade posts along the way.

Why was the Silk Road important?

The Silk Road was important because it allowed different kingdoms and empires to trade with one another. It also helped spread new inventions, products and ideas throughout much of the world.

However, not all that was traded along the Silk Road was good. It is thought that the bubonic plague, or Black Death, traveled to Europe from the East along the Silk Road.

Why is it called the Silk Road?

It was called the Silk Road because one of the major products traded was silk cloth from China. People throughout Asia and Europe prized Chinese silk for its softness and luxury.

The Chinese were the ones who discovered how to make silk cloth, and for thousands of years they kept the process of silk manufacture a secret. Because silk cloth could only be gotten only from China, China became known as “the land of silk.”

What other goods did the Chinese trade?

Besides silk, the Chinese also exported (sold) teas, salt, sugar, porcelain (pottery), and spices. In exchange for what they sold, the Chinese would buy things like cotton, ivory, wool, gold, and silver.

Most of the things traded were expensive luxury goods. This was because the trip was a long, rough one and the merchants couldn’t carry very much with them.

How did the merchants travel?

Merchants and tradesmen traveled in large caravans (groups). They would have many guards with them. Traveling in a big group like a caravan helped protect them from bandits.

Camels were used as pack animals. Much of the Silk Road was through dry and harsh land, and camels thrive on tough desert plants. A camel can also carry more weight than a horse or donkey—as much as 300 pounds—and needs less water. A loaded camel can go for as long as 15 days without a drink of water and 3 weeks without food. (Its hump is for storing fat.)

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1. What was the Silk Road?
2. How long was it?
3. Why was it called the Silk Road?
4. Why was the Silk Road important?
5. What deadly disease is believed to have traveled to Europe along the Silk Road?
6. Why do you think the Chinese wanted to keep how silk was made a secret?
7. What goods did the Chinese buy in exchange for the silk they sold?

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8. Why were the things traded along the Silk Road mainly expensive luxury goods?
9. Why do you think that very few merchants made the whole 4,000 mile trip from China to Europe?
10. Why did the merchants travel in caravans?

Why did they travel on camels?

11. What was the author's purpose in writing this essay?
12. What were the two main ideas in last section of the essay? (What important things did the author wanted you to remember?)