# MONGOL EMPIRE HISTORY

# <http://www.paralumun.com/mongol.htm>

The **Mongol Empire**, also known as the Mongolian Empire, Mongolyn Ezent Güren; 1206-1405) was the largest contiguous empire in world history and for some time was the most feared in Eurasia. It was the product of Mongol unification and Mongol invasions, which began with Temujin being proclaimed ruler in 1206, eventually sparking the conquests. By 1279, the Mongol Empire covered over up to 22% of Earth's total land area. It held sway over a population of over 100 million people. However, by that time the empire had already fragmented, with the Golden Horde and the Chagatai Khanate being de facto independent and refusing to accept Kublai Khan as Khagan. By the time of Kublai Khan's death, with no accepted Khagan existed, the Mongol Empire had already splitted up into four separate khanates. During the beginning of the 14th century, most of the khanates of the Empire gradually broke off. They went on to be absorbed and defeated.

Genghis Khan, through political manipulation and military might, united the nomadic, previously ever-rivaling Mongol-Turkic tribes under his rule by 1206. He quickly came into conflict with the Jin Dynasty empire of the Jurchens and the Western Xia of the Tanguts in northern China. Under the provocation of the Muslim Khwarezmid Empire, he moved into Central Asia as well, devastating Transoxiana and eastern Persia, then raiding into Kievan Rus' (a predecessor state of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine) and the Caucasus. Before dying, Genghis Khan divided his empire among his sons and immediate family, but as custom made clear, it remained the joint property of the entire imperial family who, along with the Mongol aristocracy, constituted the ruling class.

Major events in the Early Mongol Empire

Eurasia on the eve of the Mongol invasions, c. 1200. Mongol Empire in 1227 at Genghis' death1206: Upon domination of Mongolia, Temüjin from the Orkhon Valley received the title Genghis Khan, thought to mean Oceanic Ruler or Firm, Resolute Ruler.
1207: The Mongols began operations against the Western Xia, which comprised much of northwestern China and parts of Tibet. This campaign lasted until 1210 with the Western Xia ruler submitting to Genghis Khan. During this period, the Uyghur Turks also submitted peacefully to the Mongols and became valued administrators throughout the empire.
1211: Genghis Khan led his armies across the Gobi desert against the Jin Dynasty of northern China.
1218: The Mongols captured Zhetysu and the Tarim Basin, occupying Kashgar.
1218: The execution of Mongol envoys by the Khwarezmian Shah Muhammad set in motion the first Mongol westward thrust.
1219: The Mongols crossed the Jaxartes (Syr Darya) and begin their invasion of Transoxiana.
1219-1221: While the campaign in northern China was still in progress, the Mongols waged a war in central Asia and destroyed the Khwarezmid Empire. One notable feature was that the campaign was launched from several directions at once. In addition, it was notable for special units assigned by Genghis Khan personally to find and kill Ala al-Din Muhammad II, the Khwarazmshah who fled from them, and ultimately ended up hiding on an island in the Caspian Sea.
1223: The Mongols gained a decisive victory at the Battle of the Kalka River, the first engagement between the Mongols and the East Slavic warriors.
1227: Genghis Khan's death; Mongol leaders returned to Mongolia for kuriltai. The empire at this point covered nearly 26 million km², about four times the size of the Roman or Macedonian Empires.
1237: Under the leadership of Batu Khan, the Mongols returned to the West and began their campaign to subjugate Kievan Russia.
1240: Mongols sacked Kiev.
1241: Mongols defeated Hungarians and Croatians at the Battle of Sajo and Poles, Templars and Teutonic Knights at the Battle of Legnica.
1241 and 1242 Mongols under Batu and Khadan invaded Bulgaria and forced them to pay annual tribute as vassal.
1246 Guyuk elected as great khan.

[The History of the Mongol Conquests](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0812217667?ie=UTF8&tag=paralumnewagesea&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0812217667)

The Mongol military organization was simple, but effective. It was based on an old tradition of the steppe, which was a decimal system known in Iranian cultures since Achaemenid Persia, and later: the army was built up from squads of ten men each, called an arban; ten arbans constituted a company of a hundred, called a jaghun; ten jaghuns made a regiment of a thousand called mingghan and ten mingghans would then constitute a regiment of ten thousand (tumen), which is the equivalent of a modern division. Unlike other mobile-only warriors, such as the Xiongnu/Huns or the Vikings, the Mongols were very comfortable in the art of the siege. They were very careful to recruit artisans and military talents from the cities they conquered, and along with a group of experienced Chinese engineers and bombardier corps, they were experts in building the trebuchet, Xuanfeng catapults and other machines to which they can lay siege to fortified positions. These were effectively used in the successful European campaigns under General Subutai. These weapons may be built on the spot using immediate local resources such as nearby trees. Within a battle Mongol forces used extensive coordination of combined arms forces. Though they were famous for their horse archers, their lance forces were equally skilled and just as essential to their success. Mongol forces also used their engineers in battle. They used siege engines and rockets to disrupt enemy formations, confused enemy forces with smoke, and used smoke to isolate portions of an enemy force while destroying that force to prevent their allies from sending aid. The army's discipline distinguished Mongol soldiers from their peers. The forces under the command of the Mongol Empire were generally trained, organized, and equipped for mobility and speed. To maximize mobility, Mongol soldiers were relatively lightly armored compared to many of the armies they faced. In addition, soldiers of the Mongol army functioned independently of supply lines, considerably speeding up army movement. Skillful use of couriers enabled these armies to maintain contact with each other and with their higher leaders. Discipline was inculcated in nerge (traditional hunts), as reported by Juvayni. These hunts were distinct from hunts in other cultures which were the equivalent to small unit actions. Mongol forces would spread out on line, surrounding an entire region and drive all of the game within that area together. The goal was to let none of the animals escape and to slaughter them all. All military campaigns were preceded by careful planning, reconnaissance and gathering of sensitive information relating to the enemy territories and forces. The success, organization and mobility of the Mongol armies permitted them to fight on several fronts at once. All males aged from 15 to 60 and capable of undergoing rigorous training were eligible for conscription into the army, the source of honor in the tribal warrior tradition. Another advantage of the Mongols was their ability to traverse large distances even in debilitatingly cold winters; in particular, frozen rivers led them like highways to large urban conurbations on their banks. In addition to siege engineering, the Mongols were also adept at river-work, crossing the river Sajó in spring flood conditions with thirty thousand cavalry in a single night during the battle of Mohi (April, 1241), defeating the Hungarian king Bela IV. Similarly, in the attack against the Muslim Khwarezmshah, a flotilla of barges was used to prevent escape on the river.

The Mongol Empire was governed by a code of law devised by Genghis, called Yassa, meaning "order" or "decree". A particular canon of this code was that the nobility shared much of the same hardship as the common man. It also imposed severe penalties e.g., the death penalty was decreed if the mounted soldier following another did not pick up something dropped from the mount in front. On the whole, the tight discipline made the Mongol Empire extremely safe and well-run; European travelers were amazed by the organization and strict discipline of the people within the Mongol Empire. Under Yassa, chiefs and generals were selected based on merit, religious tolerance was guaranteed, and thievery and vandalizing of civilian property was strictly forbidden. According to legend, a woman carrying a sack of gold could travel safely from one end of the Empire to another. The empire was governed by a non-democratic parliamentary-style central assembly, called Kurultai, in which the Mongol chiefs met with the Great Khan to discuss domestic and foreign policies. Genghis also demonstrated a rather liberal and tolerant attitude to the beliefs of others, and never persecuted people on religious grounds. This proved to be good military strategy, as when he was at war with Sultan Muhammad of Khwarezm, other Islamic leaders did not join the fight against Genghis it was instead seen as a non-holy war between two individuals. Throughout the empire, trade routes and an extensive postal system (yam) were created. Many merchants, messengers and travelers from China, the Middle East and Europe used the system. Genghis Khan also created a national seal, encouraged the use of a written alphabet in Mongolia, and exempted teachers, lawyers, and artists from taxes, although taxes were heavy on all other subjects of the empire. At the same time, any resistance to Mongol rule was met with massive collective punishment. Cities were destroyed and their inhabitants slaughtered if they defied Mongol orders.

Mongols were highly tolerant of most religions, and typically sponsored several at the same time. At the time of Genghis Khan, virtually every religion had found converts, from Buddhism to Christianity and Manichaeanism to Islam. To avoid strife, Genghis Khan set up an institution that ensured complete religious freedom, though he himself was a shamanist. Under his administration, all religious leaders were exempt from taxation, and from public service. Initially there were few formal places of worship, because of the nomadic lifestyle. However, under Ögedei, several building projects were undertaken in Karakorum. Along with palaces, Ogodei built houses of worship for the Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, and Taoist followers. The dominant religion at that time was Shamanism and Buddhism.

[The Mongol Art of War](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1594160465?ie=UTF8&tag=paralumnewagesea&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1594160465)

Mongols prized their commercial and trade relationships with neighboring economies and this policy they continued during the process of their conquests and during the expansion of their empire. All merchants and ambassadors, having proper documentation and authorization, traveling through their realms were protected. This greatly increased overland trade. During the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, European merchants, numbering hundreds, perhaps thousands, made their way from Europe to the distant land of China Marco Polo is only one of the best known of these. Well-traveled and relatively well-maintained roads linked lands from the Mediterranean basin to China. The Mongol Empire had negligible influence on seaborne trade.

The Mongol Empire had an ingenious and efficient mail system for the time, often referred to by scholars as the Yam, which had lavishly furnished and well guarded relay posts known as örtöö set up all over the Mongol Empire. The yam system would be replicated later in the U.S. in form of the Pony Express. A messenger would typically travel 25 miles (40 km) from one ordu to the next, and he would either receive a fresh, rested horse or relay the mail to the next rider to ensure the speediest possible delivery. The Mongol riders regularly covered 125 miles per day, which is faster than the fastest record set by the Pony Express some 600 years later.

Mongol invasion of Central Asia initially was composed of Genghis Khan's victory and unification over the Mongol central Asian confederations such as Merkits, Mongols, Uighurs that eventually created the Mongol nation and founding of the Mongol Empire. It then continued with invasion of Khwarezmid Empire in Persia.

The Mongol invasion of the Middle East consists of the conquest, by force or voluntary submission, of the areas today known as Iran, Iraq, Syria, and parts of Turkey, with further Mongol raids reaching southwards as far as Gaza into the Palestine region in 1260 and 1300. The major battles were the Battle of Baghdad (1258), when the Mongols sacked the city which for 500 years had been the center of Islamic power; and the Battle of Ain Jalut in 1260, when the Muslim Egyptian Mamluks, with some unusual provisioning assistance from the Christian European Crusaders, were for the first time able to stop the Mongol advance at Ain Jalut, in the northern part of what is today known as the West Bank. Due to a combination of political and geographic factors, such as lack of sufficient grazing room for their horses, the Mongol invasion of the Middle East turned out to be the farthest that the Mongols would ever reach, towards the Mediterranean and Africa.

Mongol invasion of East Asia refers to the Mongols 13th and 14th century conquests under Genghis Khan and his descendants of Mongol invasion of China, Korea, and attempted Mongol invasion of Japan, and it also can include Mongols attempted invasion of Vietnam. The biggest conquest was the total invasion of China in the end.

Mongol invasion of Europe largely constitute of their invasion and conquest of Kievan Rus, much of Russia, invasion of Poland and Hungary among others.

Hulagu, Genghis Khan's grandson and founder of the il-KhanAt first, the Mongol Empire was ruled by Ögedei Khan, Genghis Khan's third son and designated heir, but after his death in 1241, the fractures which would ultimately crack the Empire began to show. Enmity between the grandchildren of Genghis Khan resulted in a five year regency by Ögedei's widow until she finally got her son Guyuk Khan confirmed as Great Khan. But he only ruled two years, and following his death he was on his way to confront his cousin Batu Khan, who had never accepted his authority, another regency followed, until finally a period of stability came with the reign of Mongke Khan, from 1251-1259. The last universally accepted Great Khan was his brother Arigboh (aka. Arigbuga, or Arigbuha), his elder brother Kublai Khan dethroned him with his own supporters after some extensive battles. Kublai Khan ruled from 1260-1294. Despite his recognition as Great Khan, he was unable to keep his brother Hulagu and their cousin Berke from open warfare in 1263, and after Kublai's death there was not an accepted Great Khan, so the Mongol Empire was fragmented for good.

Genghis Khan divided his realm into four Khanates, subdivisions of a single empire under the Great Khan (Khan of Khans). The following Khanates emerged after the regency following Ögedei Khan's death, and became formally independent after Kublai Khan's death:

Blue Horde (under Batu Khan) and White Horde (under Orda Khan) would soon be combined into the Golden Horde, with Batu Khan emerging as Khan.
Il-Khanate - Hulegu Khan
Empire of the Great Khan (China) - Kublai Khan
Mongol homeland (present day Mongolia, including Kharakhorum) - Tolui Khan
Chagatai Khanate - Chagatai Khan.

The empire's expansion continued for a generation or more after Genghis's death in 1227. Under Genghis's successor Ögedei Khan, the speed of expansion reached its peak. Mongol armies pushed into Persia, finished off the Xia and the remnants of the Khwarezmids, and came into conflict with the Song Dynasty of China, starting a war that concluded in 1279 with the conquest of populous China, which then constituted the majority of the world's economic production. In the late 1230s, the Mongols under Batu Khan invaded Russia and Volga Bulgaria, reducing most of its principalities to vassalage, and pressed on into Eastern Europe. In 1241 the Mongols may have been ready to invade Western Europe as well, having defeated the last Polish-German and Hungarian armies at the Battle of Legnica and the Battle of Mohi. Batu Khan and Subutai were preparing to start with a winter campaign against Austria and Germany, and finish with Italy. However news of Ögedei's death spared Western Europe as Batu had to turn his attentions to the election of the next Great Khan. It is often speculated that this was one of the great turning points in history and that Europe may well have fallen to the Mongols had the invasion gone ahead. During the 1250s, Genghis's grandson Hulegu Khan, operating from the Mongol base in Persia, destroyed the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad and destroyed the cult of the Assassins, moving into Palestine towards Egypt. The Great Khan Möngke having died, however, he hastened to return for the election, and the force that remained in Palestine was destroyed by the Mamluks under Saif ad-Din Qutuz in 1261 at Ayn Jalut.

Essentially, only six areas accessible to the Mongols avoided conquest by them -- Indochina, South Asia, Vietnam, Japan, Western Europe and Arabia. Also, two important cities that evaded the Mongol Conquest were Vienna and Jerusalem. Both evaded the conquest because of the death of a Great Khan.

While the Mongolian Empire extended into Poland and threatening present day Austria, the Mongols were not able to push into Western Europe. The most popular explanation was the fact that on 11 December 1241, during pre-emptive operations by Mongol reconnaissance forces inside Austria for the invasion of Vienna, news came that Ogedei Khan died, and bound by Mongol tradition, all Mongol commanders and princes had to report back to the capital of Karakorum to elect a new Khan. It was believed that the Mongol abandonment of the European campaign was only temporary, but in fact, the Mongols had committed no further campaigns into Europe in earnest. Some western historians attribute European survival to Mongol unwillingness to fight in the more densely populated German principalities, where the wetter weather affected their bows. But the same weather did not stop them from devastating Russia or the campaigns against the Southern Song, and Europe was less densely populated than China. The probable answer for the Mongol's stopping after the Mohi River, and the destruction of the Hungarian army, was that they never intended to advance further at that time. Batu Khan had made his Russian conquests safe for the next 10 generations, and when the Great Khan died, he rushed back to Mongolia to put in his claim for power. Upon his return, relations with his cousin Guyuk Khan had deteriorated to the point that open warfare between them came shortly after Guyuk's death. The point is that the Mongols were unable to bring a unified army to bear on either Europe, or Egypt, after 1260. Batu Khan was in fact planning invasion of Europe all the way to the "Great Sea" the Atlantic Ocean, when he died in 1255. His son inherited the Khanate, but also died in a short time, and Batu's brother Berke became Khan of the Kipchak Khanate. He was far more interested in fighting with his cousin Hulagu than invading the remainder of Europe, which was no threat to him.

Another area not conquered by Mongols was Vietnam, which repelled Mongol attacks in 1257/1258, 1284/1285 and 1287/1288. Japan also repelled massive Mongol invasions in 1274 and 1281. Japan's ruler Hojo Tokimune first sent back the emissaries time and time again without audience in Kamakura, and then after the first invasion was so bold as to behead Kubilai's emissaries, twice. In both Japan and Vietnam, Kubilai sent part of the Mongol armies, instead of concentrating on Vietnam first, and then Japan. Furthermore, the splitting of resources left the Mongols with a fleet that was not readily equipped for the storms that plagued the Sea of Japan. A great storm sank the primary invasion fleet and killed most of the Mongol army during the 1281 invasion. Nonetheless, Kublai Khan continued to attempt to gather forces for another invasion while simultaneously attacking Vietnam. The end result was Japan was able to repel Mongol assaults, but Vietnam was not.

Many other countries of Indochina could counter the Mongol invasion, such as the Maoluang Kingdom (or Kingdom of Mong Mao) in Northern Thailand, Shan and Kachin in today's Northern and Northeastern Burma as well as Assam in Eastern India and Southwestern China. Sa Khaan Pha (or Si Ke Fa), king of Maoluang Kingdom, was able to negotiate a treaty after he defeated the Mongols three times during the period of Kublai Khan. He received authority over the land south of the Sang city which is now Kunming in the Yunnan province of the People's Republic of China. Lanna and Sibsongpanna in Northern Thailand, Northern Laos and Southern China, Lan Xang in Laos, Champa in Southern Vietnam and Cambodia, the Siamese kingdoms of Chiang Saen (or Chieng Saeng), Lavo, Haripunjai, Phyao and Sukhotai, and the Khmer empire were never touched by the Mongols due to the treaty. However, the Burmese Pagan dynasty was destroyed in 1287 by Kublai Khan as well as the Northern Vietnamese empire of Viet. The Mongol fleets sent to Khmer, Java, Siam, Srivijaya and Malay Archipelago never won any battles.

South Asia was also able to withstand the advance of the Mongols. At this time, Northern India was under the rule of the Delhi sultanate. Though the Mongols raided into the Punjab and invaded Delhi itself (unsuccessfully), the Sultans--mostly notably Ghiyasuddin Balban--were able to keep them at bay and roll them back.

When Genghis Khan died, a major potential weakness of the system he had set up manifested itself. It took many months to summon the kurultai, as many of its most important members were leading military campaigns thousands of miles from the Mongol heartland. And then it took months more for the kurultai to come to the decision that had been almost inevitable from the start that Genghis's choice as successor, his third son Ögedei, should become Great Khan. Ögedei was a rather passive ruler and personally self-indulgent, but he was intelligent, charming and a good decision-maker whose authority was respected throughout his reign by apparently stronger-willed relatives and generals whom he had inherited from Genghis. After the initial massive campaigns at the beginning of the conquest of Europe, where the Mongol war machine handily defeated the Hungarian and Polish armies, the Hospitallers, the Teutonic Knights, as well as the slaughtering of countless many civilians, Ögedei Khan suddenly died in 1241; just as the Mongol forces under General Subutai were preparing an all out assault on Vienna, Austria. This sudden vacuum of power is seen as the beginning of the events that led to the decline of the Mongol Empire. As customary to Mongol military tradition, all generals and princes, and thus the tumens, had to report back to the capital Karakorum thousands of miles away (the relocation of the capital to Dadu would add to this difficulty under Kublai Khan), for the election of a successor to the throne. Pending a kurultai to elect Ögedei's successor, his widow Toregene Khatun assumed power and proceeded to ensure the election of her son Guyuk by the kurultai. Batu, bitterly disappointed by the postponement of the European campaign, was unwilling to accept Guyuk as Great Khan, but lacked the influence in the kurultai to procure his own election. Therefore, while moving no further west, he simultaneously insisted that the situation in Europe was too precarious for him to come east and that he could not accept the result of any kurultai held in his absence. The resulting stalemate lasted four years. In 1246 Batu eventually agreed to send a representative to the kurultai but never acknowledged the resulting election of Guyuk as Great Khan. Guyuk died in 1248, only two years after his election, on his way west, apparently to force Batu to acknowledge his authority, and his widow Oghul Ghaymish assumed the regency pending the meeting of the kurultai. Batu remained in the west but this time gave his support to his and Guyuk's cousin, Möngke, who was duly elected Great Khan in 1251. Möngke Khan unwittingly provided his brother Kublai, or Qubilai, with a chance to become Khan in 1260, assigning Kublai to a province in North China. Kublai expanded the Mongol empire and became a favorite of Möngke. Later, though, when Kublai began to adopt many Chinese laws and customs, his brother was persuaded by his advisors that Kublai was becoming too sinicized and would be considered treasonous. Möngke kept a closer watch on Kublai from then on but died campaigning against Southern Song China at the Fishing Town in Chongqing. After his older brother's death, Kublai placed himself in the running for a new khan against his younger brother, and, although his younger brother won the election, Kublai defeated him in battle, and Kublai became the last true Great Khan. He proved to be a strong warrior, but his critics still accused him of being too closely tied to Chinese culture. When he moved his headquarters to Beijing, there was an uprising in the old capital that he barely staunched. He focused mostly on foreign alliances, and opened trade routes. He dined with a large court every day, and met with many ambassadors, foreign merchants, and even offered to convert to Christianity if this religion was proved to be correct by 100 priests. By the reign of Kublai Khan, the empire was already in the process of splitting into a number of smaller khanates. After Kublai died in 1294, his heirs failed to maintain the Pax Mongolica and the Silk Road closed. Inter-family rivalry compounded by the complicated politics of succession, which twice paralyzed military operations as far off as Hungary and the borders of Egypt (crippling their chances of success), and the tendencies of some of the khans to drink themselves to death fairly young (causing the aforementioned succession crises), hastened the disintegration of the empire. Another factor which contributed to the disintegration was the difficulty of the potential two-weeks extra transit time of officials and messengers and a general decline of morale when the capital was moved from Karakorum to Dadu, the Yuan name for the modern day city of Beijing by Kublai Khan; as Kublai Khan associated more closely to Chinese culture. Kublai concentrated on the war with the Song Dynasty, assuming the mantle of ruler of China, while the khanates to the west gradually drifted away. The four descendant empires were the Mongol-founded Yuan Dynasty in China, the Chagatai Khanate, the Golden Horde that controlled Central Asia and Russia, and the Ilkhans who ruled Persia from 1256 to 1353. Of the latter, their ruler Ilkhan Ghazan was converted to Islam in 1295 and renounced all allegiance to the Great Khan. He actively supported the expansion of this religion in his empire.

The Mongol expansion throughout the Asian continent from around 1215 to 1360 helped bring political stability and re-establish the Silk Road vis-à-vis Karakorum. The 13th century saw a Franco-Mongol alliance with exchange of ambassadors and even military collaboration in the Holy Land. The Chinese Mongol Rabban Bar Sauma visited the courts of Europe in 1287-1288. With rare exceptions such as Marco Polo or Christian missionaries such as William of Rubruck, few Europeans traveled the entire length of the Silk Road. Instead traders moved products much like a bucket brigade, with luxury goods being traded from one middleman to another, from China to the West, and resulting in extravagant prices for the trade goods. The disintegration of the Mongol Empire led to the collapse of the Silk Road's political unity. Also falling victim were the cultural and economic aspects of its unity. Turkic tribes seized the western end of the Silk Road from the decaying Byzantine Empire, and sowed the seeds of a Turkic culture that would later crystallize into the Ottoman Empire under the Sunni faith. Turkic-Mongol military bands in Iran, after some years of chaos were united under the Saffavid tribe, under whom the modern Iranian nation took shape under the Shiite faith. Meanwhile Mongol princes in Central Asia were content with Sunni orthodoxy with decentralized princedoms of the Chagatay, Timurid and Uzbek houses. In the Kypchak-Tatar zone, Mongol khanates all but crumbled under the assaults of the Black Death and the rising power of Muscovy. In the east end, the Chinese Ming Dynasty overthrew the Mongol yoke and pursued a policy of economic isolationism. Yet another force, the Kalmyk-Oyrats pushed out of the Baikal area in central Siberia, but failed to deliver much impact beyond Turkestan. Some Kalmyk tribes did manage to migrate into the Volga-North Caucasus region, but their impact was limited. After the Mongol Empire, the great political powers along the Silk Road became economically and culturally separated. Accompanying the crystallization of regional states was the decline of nomad power, partly due to the devastation of the Black Death and partly due to the encroachment of sedentary civilizations equipped with gunpowder.

The Mongol Empire was the largest contiguous empire in human history. The 13th and 14th century, when the empire came to power, is often called the "Age of the Mongols". The Mongol armies during that time were extremely well organized. The death toll (by battle, massacre, flooding, and famine) of the Mongol wars of conquest is placed at about 40 million according to some sources. Many ancient sources described Genghis Khan's conquests as wholesale destruction on an unprecedented scale in their certain geographical regions, and therefore probably causing great changes in the demographics of Asia. For example, over much of Central Asia speakers of Iranian languages were replaced by speakers of Turkic languages. The eastern part of the Islamic world experienced the terrifying holocaust of the Mongol invasion, which turned northern and eastern Iran into a desert. Between 1220 and 1260, the total population of Persia may have dropped from 2,500,000 to 250,000 as a result of mass extermination and famine. Non-military achievements of the Mongol Empire include the introduction of a writing system, based on the Uyghur script, that is still used in Inner Mongolia. The Empire unified all the tribes of Mongolia, which made possible the emergence of a Mongol nation and culture. Modern Mongolians are generally proud of the empire and the sense of identity that it gave to them.

Some of the long-term consequences of the Mongol Empire include:
The Mongol empire is traditionally given credit for reuniting China and expanding its frontiers. The language Chagatai, widely spoken among a group of Turks, is named after a son of Genghis Khan. It was once widely spoken, and had a literature, but eventually became extinct in Russia. Moscow rose to prominence during the Mongol-Tatar yoke, some time after Russian rulers were accorded the status of tax collectors for Mongols. The Russian ruler Ivan III overthrew the Mongols completely to form the Russian Tsardom, after the Great stand on the Ugra river proved the Mongols vulnerable, and led to the independence of the Grand Duke of Moscow. Europe’s knowledge of the known world was immensely expanded by the information brought back by ambassadors and merchants. When Columbus sailed in 1492, his missions were to reach Cathay, the land of the Genghis Khan. Some research studies indicate that the Black Death, which devastated Europe in the late 1340s, may have reached from China to Europe along the trade routes of the Mongol Empire. In 1347, the Genoese possession of Caffa, a great trade emporium on the Crimean peninsula, came under siege by an army of Mongol warriors under the command of Janibeg. After a protracted siege during which the Mongol army was reportedly withering from the disease, they decided to use the infected corpses as a biological weapon. The corpses were catapulted over the city walls, infecting the inhabitants. The Genoese traders fled, transferring the plague via their ships into the south of Europe, whence it rapidly spread. The total number of deaths worldwide from the pandemic is estimated at 75 million people, there were an estimated 20 million deaths in Europe alone. It is estimated that between one-quarter and two-thirds of the of Europe's population died from the outbreak of the plague between 1348 and 1350.

One of the more successful tactics employed by the Mongols was to wipe out urban populations that had refused to surrender. In the invasion of Kievan Russia, almost all major cities were destroyed. If they chose to submit, the people were spared and treated as slaves, which meant most of them would be driven to die quickly by hard work, with the exception that war prisoners became part of their army to aid in future conquests. In addition to intimidation tactics, the rapid expansion of the Empire was facilitated by military hardiness (especially during bitterly cold winters), military skill, meritocracy, and discipline. Subutai, in particular among the Mongol Commanders, viewed winter as the best time for war while less hardy people hid from the elements, the Mongols were able to use frozen lakes and rivers as highways for their horsemen, a strategy he used with great effect in Russia. The Mongol Empire is also responsible for many technological achievements that are in wide use today. In addition, they discovered a unique way to increase the population of fish in a given body of water. The Mongol Empire had a lasting impact, unifying large regions, some of which (such as eastern and western Russia and the western parts of China) remain unified today, albeit under different rulership. The Mongols themselves were assimilated into local populations after the fall of the empire, and many of these descendants adopted local religions.

# ANCIENT SILK ROAD

# <http://www.paralumun.com/silk-road.htm>

The **Ancient Silk Road**, or Silk Route, is a series of trade and cultural transmission routes that were central to cultural interaction through regions of the Asian continent connecting East and West by linking traders, merchants, pilgrims, monks, soldiers, nomads and urban dwellers from China to the Mediterranean Sea during various periods of time. The trade route was initiated around 114 BC by the Han Dynasty (114 BC), although earlier trade across the continents had already existed. Geographically, the Silk Road or Silk Route is an interconnected series of ancient trade routes connecting Chang'an (today's Xi'an) in China, with Asia Minor and the Mediterranean, extending over 8,000 km (5,000 miles) on land and sea. Trade on the Silk Road was a significant factor in the development of the great civilizations of China, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, Indian subcontinent, and Rome, and helped to lay the foundations for the modern world. The first person who used the terms "Seidenstraße" and "Seidenstraßen" or "Silk Road(s)" and "Silk Route(s)", was the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877.

As it extends westwards from the commercial centers of North China, the continental Silk Road divides into north and south routes to avoid the Tibetan Plateau. The northern route travels northwest through the Chinese province of Gansu, and splits into three further routes, two of them passing north and south of the Taklamakan Desert (through modern day Kyrgyzstan and Xinjiang) to rejoin at Kashgar; and the other going north of the Tien Shan mountains through Turfan, Talgar and Almaty (in what is now southeast Kazakhstan). All routes join up at Kokand in the Fergana Valley, and the roads continue west across the Karakum Desert towards Merv, joining the northern route briefly. One of these routes turns northwest along the Amu Darya (river) including Bukhara and Samarkand the center of Silk Road trade to the Aral Sea, through ancient civilizations under the present site of Astrakhan, and on to the Crimean peninsula. From there it crosses the Black Sea, Marmara Sea and the Balkans to Venice; another crosses the Caspian Sea and across the Caucasus to the Black Sea in Georgia, thence to Constantinople. The southern route is mainly a single route running through northern India, then the Turkestan Khorasan region into Mesopotamia and Anatolia; having southward spurs enabling the journey to be completed by sea from various points. It runs south through the Sichuan Basin in China and crosses the high mountains into northeast India, probably via the Ancient tea route. It then travels west along the Brahmaputra and Ganges river plains, possibly joining the Grand Trunk Road west of Varanasi. It runs through northern Pakistan and over the Hindu Kush mountains to rejoin the northern route briefly near Merv. It then follows a nearly straight line west through mountainous northern Iran and the northern tip of the Syrian Desert to the Levant. From there, Mediterranean trading ships plied regular routes to Italy, and land routes went either north through Anatolia or south to North Africa. Another branch road travels from Herat through Susa to Charax Spasinu at the head of the Persian Gulf and across to Petra and Alexandria, from whence ships carried the cargoes to Rome and other Mediterranean ports.

The last missing link on the Silk Road was completed in 1994, when the international railway between Almaty in Kazakhstan and Urumqi in Xinjiang opened.

As long as 14 hundred years ago, during the Eastern Han Dynasty in China, the sea route led from the mouth of the Red River near modern Hanoi, all the way through the Malacca Straits to Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka and India, and then on to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. From ports on the Red Sea goods, including silks, were transported overland to the Nile and then down to Alexandria from where they were shipped to Rome and other Mediterranean ports. Another branch of these sea routes led down the East African coast (called Azania by the Greeks and Romans and Zesan by the Chinese) at least as far as the port known to the Romans as Rhapta, which was probably located in the delta of the Rufiji River in modern Tanzania. The Silk Road on the Sea extends from southern China to present day Brunei, Thailand, Malacca, Ceylon, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Iran. In Europe it extends from Israel, Lebanon, Egypt, and Italy in the Mediterranean Sea to Portugal and Sweden.

As the domestication of efficient pack animals and the development of shipping technology both increased the capacity for prehistoric peoples to carry heavier loads over greater distances, cultural exchanges and trade developed rapidly. In addition, grassland provides fertile grazing, water, and easy passage for caravans. The vast grassland steppes of Asia enables merchants to travel immense distances, from the shores of the Pacific to Africa and deep into Europe, without trespassing on agricultural lands and arousing hostility.

[Silk Road: Monks, Warriors & Merchants](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/9622177212?ie=UTF8&tag=paralumnewagesea&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=9622177212)

The ancient peoples of the Sahara imported domesticated animals from Asia between 6000 BC and 4000 BC. Foreign artifacts dating to the 5th millennium BC in the Badarian culture of Egypt indicate contact with distant Syria. In predynastic Egypt, by the 4th millennium BC shipping was well established, and the donkey and possibly the dromedary had been domesticated. Domestication of the Bactrian camel and use of the horse for transport then followed. Also by the beginning of the 4th millennium BC, ancient Egyptians in Maadi were importing pottery as well as construction ideas from Canaan. By the second half of the 4th millennium BC, the gemstone lapis lazuli was being traded from its only known source in the ancient world Badakshan, in what is now northeastern Afghanistan as far as Mesopotamia and Egypt. By the 3rd millennium BC, the lapis lazuli trade was extended to Harappa and Mohenjo-daro in the Indus Valley Civilization of modern day Pakistan and northwestern India. The Indus Valley was also known as Meluhha, the earliest maritime trading partner of the Sumerians and Akkadians in Mesopotamia. Routes along the Persian Royal Road, constructed in the 5th century BC by Darius I of Persia, may have been in use as early as 3500 BC. Charcoal samples found in the tombs of Nekhen, which were dated to the Naqada I and II periods, have been identified as cedar from Lebanon. In 1994 excavators discovered an incised ceramic shard with the serekh sign of Narmer, dating to circa 3000 BC. The ancient harbor constructed in Lothal, India, around 2400 BC may be the oldest sea-faring harbour known.

The Palermo stone mentions King Sneferu of the 4th Dynasty sending ship to import high-quality cedar from Lebanon (see Sneferu). In one scene in the pyramid of Pharaoh Sahure of the Fifth Dynasty, Egyptians are returning with huge cedar trees. Sahure's name is found stamped on a thin piece of gold on a Lebanon chair, and 5th dynasty cartouches were found in Lebanon stone vessels. Other scenes in his temple depict Syrian bears. The Palermo stone also mentions expeditions to Sinai as well as to the diorite quarries northwest of Abu Simbel. The oldest known expedition to the Land of Punt was organized by Sahure, which apparently yielded a quantity of myrrh,along with malachite and electrum. The 12th-Dynasty Pharaoh Senusret III had a "Suez" canal constructed linking the Nile River with the Red Sea for direct trade with Punt. Around 1950 BC, in the reign of Mentuhotep III, an officer named Hennu made one or more voyages to Punt. In the 15th century BC, Nehsi conducted a very famous expedition for Queen Hatshepsut to obtain myrrh; a report of that voyage survives on a relief in Hatshepsut's funerary temple at Deir el-Bahri. Several of her successors, including Thutmoses III, also organized expeditions to Punt.

The expansion of Scythian Iranian cultures stretching from the Hungarian plain and the Carpathians to the Chinese Kansu Corridor and linking Iran, and the Middle East with Northern India and the Punjab, undoubtedly played an important role in the development of the Silk Road. Scythians accompanied the Assyrian Esarhaddon on his invasion of Egypt, and their distinctive triangular arrowheads have been found as far south as Aswan. These nomadic peoples were dependent upon neighbouring settled populations for a number of important technologies, and in addition to raiding vulnerable settlements for these commodities, also encouraged long distance merchants as a source of income through the enforced payment of tariffs. Soghdian Scythian merchants were in later periods to play a vital role in the development of the Silk Road.

From the 2nd millennium BC nephrite jade was being traded from mines in the region of Yarkand and Khotan to China. Significantly, these mines were not very far from the lapis lazuli and spinel ("Balas Ruby") mines in Badakhshan and, although separated by the formidable Pamir Mountains, routes across them were, apparently, in use from very early times.

The Tarim mummies, Chinese mummies of non-Mongoloid, apparently Caucasoid, individuals, have been found in the Tarim Basin, such as in the area of Loulan located along the Silk Road 200 km east of Yingpan, dating to as early as 1600 BC and suggesting very ancient contacts between East and West. It has been suggested that these mummified remains may have been of people related to the Tocharians whose Indo-European language remained in use in the Tarim Basin (modern day Xinjiang) of China until the 8th century. Some remnants of what was probably Chinese silk have been found in Ancient Egypt from 1070 BC. Though the originating source seems sufficiently reliable, silk unfortunately degrades very rapidly and we cannot double-check for accuracy whether it was actually cultivated silk (which would almost certainly have come from China) that was discovered or a type of "wild silk," which might have come from the Mediterranean region or the Middle East. Following contacts of metropolitan China with nomadic western border territories in the 8th century BC, gold was introduced from Central Asia, and Chinese jade carvers began to make imitation designs of the steppes, adopting the Scythian-style animal art of the steppes (descriptions of animals locked in combat). This style is particularly reflected in the rectangular belt plaques made of gold and bronze with alternate versions in jade and steatite.

By the time of Herodotus (c. 475 BC) the Persian Royal Road ran some 2,857 km from the city of Susa on the lower Tigris to the port of Smyrna (modern Izmir in Turkey) on the Aegean Sea. It was maintained and protected by the Achaemenid Empire (c.500-330 BC) and had postal stations and relays at regular intervals. By having fresh horses and riders ready at each relay, royal couriers could carry messages the entire distance in 9 days, though normal travellers took about three months. This Royal Road linked into many other routes. Some of these, such as the routes to India and Central Asia, were also protected by the Achaemenids, encouraging regular contact between India, Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean. There are accounts in Esther of dispatches being sent from Susa to provinces as far out as India and Cush during the reign of Xerxes (485-465 BC).

The first major step in opening the Silk Road between the East and the West came with the expansion of Alexander the Great's empire into Central Asia. In August 329 BC, at the mouth of the Fergana Valley in Tajikistan he founded the city of Alexandria Eschate or "Alexandria The Furthest". This later became a major staging point on the northern Silk Route. In 323 BC, Alexander the Great’s successors, the Ptolemies, took control of Egypt. They actively promoted trade with Mesopotamia, India, and East Africa through their Red Sea ports and over land. This was assisted by a number of intermediaries, especially the Nabataeans and other Arabs. The Greeks remained in Central Asia for the next three centuries, first through the administration of the Seleucid Empire, and then with the establishment of the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom in Bactria. They continued to expand eastward, especially during the reign of Euthydemus (230-200 BC) who extended his control beyond Alexandria Eschate to Sogdiana. There are indications that he may have led expeditions as far as Kashgar in Chinese Turkestan, leading to the first known contacts between China and the West around 200 BC.

The next step came around 130 BC, with the embassies of the Han Dynasty to Central Asia, following the reports of the ambassador Zhang Qian (who was originally sent to obtain an alliance with the Yuezhi against the Xiongnu). The Chinese Emperor Wu Di became interested in developing commercial relationship with the sophisticated urban civilizations of Ferghana, Bactria and Parthia: The Son of Heaven on hearing all this reasoned thus: Ferghana (Dayuan) and the possessions of Bactria (Ta-Hsia) and Parthia (Anxi) are large countries, full of rare things, with a population living in fixed abodes and given to occupations somewhat identical with those of the Chinese people, but with weak armies, and placing great value on the rich produce of China (Hou Hanshu, Later Han History).

[Life along the Silk Road](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0520232143?ie=UTF8&tag=paralumnewagesea&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0520232143)

The Chinese were also strongly attracted by the tall and powerful horses in the possession of the Dayuan (named Heavenly horses), which were of capital importance in fighting the nomadic Xiongnu. The Chinese subsequently sent numerous embassies, around ten every year, to these countries and as far as Seleucid Syria. hus more embassies were dispatched to Anxi Parthia, Yancai who later joined the Alans, Lijian Syria under the Seleucids, Tiaozhi Chaldea, and Tianzhu northwestern India As a rule, rather more than ten such missions went forward in the course of a year, and at the least five or six. The Chinese campaigned in Central Asia on several occasion, and direct encounters between Han troops and Roman legionaries (probably captured or recruited as mercenaries by the Xiong Nu) are recorded, particularly in the 36 BC battle of Sogdiana (Joseph Needham, Sidney Shapiro). The "Silk Road" essentially came into being from the 1st century BC, following these efforts by China to consolidate a road to the Western world and India, both through direct settlements in the area of the Tarim Basin and diplomatic relations with the countries of the Dayuan, Parthians and Bactrians further west. The Han Dynasty Chinese army regularly police the trade route against nomadic bandit forces. Han general Ban Chao led an army of 70,000 mounted infantry and light cavalry troops in the 1st century AD to secure the trade routes, reaching far west across central Asia to the doorstep of Europe, and setting up base on the shores of the Caspian Sea. A maritime "Silk Route" opened up between Chinese-controlled Jiaozhi (centred in modern Vietnam [see map above], near Hanoi) probably by the 1st century. It extended, via ports on the coasts of India and Sri Lanka, all the way to Roman-controlled ports in Egypt and the Nabataean territories on the northeastern coast of the Red Sea.

Soon after the Roman conquest of Egypt in 30 BC, regular communications and trade between India, Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, China, the Middle East, Africa and Europe blossomed on an unprecedented scale. The party of Maës Titianus became the travellers who penetrated farthest east along the Silk Road from the Mediterranean world, probably with the aim of regularizing contacts and reducing the role of middlemen, during one of the lulls in Rome's intermittent wars with Parthia, which repeatedly obstructed movement along the Silk Road. Land and maritime routes were closely linked, and novel products, technologies and ideas began to spread across the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa. Intercontinental trade and communication became regular, organised, and protected by the 'Great Powers.' Intense trade with the Roman Empire followed soon, confirmed by the Roman craze for Chinese silk (supplied through the Parthians), even though the Romans thought silk was obtained from trees. This belief was affirmed by Seneca the Younger in his Phaedra and by Virgil in his Georgics. Notably, Pliny the Elder knew better. The Senate issued, in vain, several edicts to prohibit the wearing of silk, on economic and moral grounds: the importation of Chinese silk caused a huge outflow of gold, and silk clothes were considered to be decadent and immoral: The Hou Hanshu records that the first Roman envoy arrived in China by this maritime route in 166, initiating a series of Roman embassies to China.

The main traders during Antiquity were the Indian and Bactrian Traders, then from the fifth to the eighth c. the Sogdian traders, then the Persian traders. The unification of Central Asia and Northern India within Kushan empire in the first to third centuries reinforced the role of the powerful merchants from Bactria and Taxila. They fostered multi-cultural interaction as indicated by their 2nd century treasure hoards filled with products from the Greco-Roman world, China and India, such as in the archeological site of Begram. The heyday of the Silk Road corresponds to that of the Byzantine Empire in its west end, Sassanid Empire Period to Il Khanate Period in the Nile-Oxus section and Three Kingdoms to Yuan Dynasty in the Sinitic zone in its east end. Trade between East and West also developed on the sea, between Alexandria in Egypt and Guangzhou in China, fostering the expansion of Roman trading posts in India. Historians also talk of a "Porcelain Route" or "Silk Route" across the Indian Ocean. The Silk Road represents an early phenomenon of political and cultural integration due to inter-regional trade. In its heyday, the Silk Road sustained an international culture that strung together groups as diverse as the Magyars, Armenians, and Chinese.

Under its strong integrating dynamics on the one hand and the impacts of change it transmitted on the other, tribal societies previously living in isolation along the Silk Road or pastoralists who were of barbarian cultural development were drawn to the riches and opportunities of the civilizations connected by the Silk Road, taking on the trades of marauders or mercenaries. Many barbarian tribes became skilled warriors able to conquer rich cities and fertile lands, and forge strong military empires. The Sogdians dominated the East-West trade after the 4th century AD up to the 8th century AD, with Suyab and Talas ranking among their main centeres in the north. They were the main caravan merchants of Central Asia. Their commercial interests were protected by the resurgent military power of the Göktürks, whose empire has been described as "the joint enterprise of the Ashina clan and the Soghdians". Their trades with some interruptions continued in 9th century. It is occurred in 10th century within the framework of the Uighur Empire, which until 840 extended all over northern Central Asia and obtained from China enormous deliveries of silk in exchange for horses. At this time caravans of Sogdians traveling to Upper Mongolia are mentioned in Chinese sources. They played an equally important religious and cultural role. Part of the data about eastern Asia provided by Muslim geographers of the 10th century actually goes back to Sogdian data of the period 750-840 and thus shows the survival of links between east and west. However, after the end of the Uighur Empire, Sogdian trade went through a crisis. What mainly issued from Central Asia was the trade of the Samanids, which resumed the northwestern road leading to the Khazars and the Urals and the northeastern one toward the nearby Turkic tribes. The Silk Road gave rise to the clusters of military states of nomadic origins in North China, invited the Nestorian, Manichaean, Buddhist, and later Islamic religions into Central Asia and China, created the influential Khazar Federation and at the end of its glory, brought about the largest continental empire ever: the Mongol Empire, with its political centers strung along the Silk Road (Beijing in North China, Karakorum in central Mongolia, Sarmakhand in Transoxiana, Tabriz in Northern Iran, Astrakhan in lower Volga, Solkhat in Crimea, Kazan in Central Russia, Erzurum in eastern Anatolia), realizing the political unification of zones previously loosely and intermittently connected by material and cultural goods. The Roman Empire, and its demand for sophisticated Asian products, crumbled in the West around the 5th century. In Central Asia, Islam expanded from the 7th century onward, bringing a stop to Chinese westward expansion at the Battle of Talas in 751. Further expansion of the Islamic Turks in Central Asia from the 10th century finished disrupting trade in that part of the world, and Buddhism almost disappeared.

The Mongol expansion throughout the Asian continent from around 1215 to 1360 helped bring political stability and re-establish the Silk Road (via Karakorum). The Chinese Mongol diplomat Rabban Bar Sauma visited the courts of Europe in 1287-1288 and provided a detailed written report back to the Mongols. Around the same time, the Venetian explorer Marco Polo became one of the first Europeans to travel the Silk Road to China, and his tales, documented in Il Milione, opened Western eyes to some of the customs of the Far East. He was not the first to bring back stories, but he was one of the widest-read. He had been preceded by numerous Christian missionaries to the East, such as William of Rubruck, Benedykt Polak, Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, and Andrew of Longjumeau. Later envoys included Odoric of Pordenone, Giovanni de' Marignolli, John of Montecorvino, Niccolò Da Conti, or Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan muslim traveller, who passed through the present day Middle-east and took the Silk Road from Tabriz, between 1325-1354. The 13th century also saw attempts at a Franco-Mongol alliance, with exchange of ambassadors and (failed) attempts at military collaboration in the Holy Land during the later Crusades, though eventually the Mongols in the Ilkhanate, after they had destroyed the Abbasid and Ayyubid dynasties, eventually themselves converted to Islam, and signed the 1323 Treaty of Aleppo with the surviving Muslim power, the Egyptian Mamluks.

However, with the disintegration of the Mongol Empire also came discontinuation of the Silk Road's political, cultural and economic unity. Turkmeni marching lords seized the western part of the Silk Road the decaying Byzantine Empire. After the Mongol Empire, the great political powers along the Silk Road became economically and culturally separated. Accompanying the crystallization of regional states was the decline of nomad power, partly due to the devastation of the Black Death and partly due to the encroachment of sedentary civilizations equipped with gunpowder. The effect of gunpowder and early modernity on Europe was the integration of territorial states and increasing mercantilism; whereas on the Silk Road, gunpowder and early modernity had the opposite impact: the level of integration of the Mongol Empire could not be maintained, and trade declined (though partly due to an increase in European maritime exchanges). The Silk Road stopped serving as a shipping route for silk around 1400.

The disappearance of the Silk Road following the end of the Mongols was one of the main factors that stimulated the Europeans to reach the prosperous Chinese empire through another route, especially by the sea. Tremendous profits were to be obtained for anyone who could achieve a direct trade connection with Asia.

In 1594 Willem Barents left Amsterdam with two ships to search for the Northeast passage north of Siberia, on to eastern Asia. He reached the west coast of Novaya Zemlya, and followed it northward, being finally forced to turn back when confronted with its northern extremity. By the end of the 17th century, the Russians reestablished a land trade route between Europe and China under the name of the Great Siberian Road. The wish to trade directly with China was also the main drive behind the expansion of the Portuguese beyond Africa after 1480, followed by the powers of the Netherlands and Great Britain from the 17th century.

Notably, the Buddhist faith and the Greco-Buddhist culture started to travel eastward along the Silk Road, penetrating in China from around the 1st century BC. The Silk Road transmission of Buddhism to China started in the 1st century CE with a semi-legendary account of an embassy sent to the West by the Chinese Emperor Ming (58 - 75 CE). Extensive contacts however started in the 2nd century CE, probably as a consequence of the expansion of the Kushan empire into the Chinese territory of the Tarim Basin, with the missionnary efforts of a great number of Central Asian Buddhist monks to Chinese lands. The first missionaries and translators of Buddhists scriptures into Chinese were either Parthian, Kushan, Sogdian or Kuchean. From the 4th century onward, Chinese pilgrims also started to travel to India, the origin of Buddhism, by themselves in order to get improved access to the original scriptures, with Fa-hsien's pilgrimage to India (395-414), and later Xuan Zang (629-644). The Silk Road transmission of Buddhism essentially ended around the 7th century with the rise of Islam in Central Asia.

Many artistic influences transited along the Silk Road, especially through the Central Asia, where Hellenistic, Iranian, Indian and Chinese influence were able to intermix. In particular Greco-Buddhist art represent one of the most vivid examples of this interaction.