Cross-Cultural Exchanges on the Silk Roads
Long-Distance Travel in the Ancient World

- Lack of security / police enforcement outside of established settlements
- Changed in classical period
  - Improvement of infrastructure
  - Development of empires
Trade Networks Develop

- Dramatic increase in trade due to Greek colonization
- Maintenance of roads, bridges
- Discovery of Monsoon wind patterns
- Increased tariff revenues used to maintain open routes
Trade in the Hellenistic World

- Bactria/India
  - Spices, pepper, cosmetics, gems, pearls
- Persia, Egypt
  - Grain
- Mediterranean
  - Wine, oil, jewelry, art
- Development of professional merchant class
- Development of infrastructure to support trade
The Silk Roads

- Named for principal commodity from China
- Dependent on imperial stability
  - Stable empires allowed merchants, missionaries, and soldiers to travel and increase cross-cultural exchange
- Overland trade routes from China to Roman Empire
- Sea Lanes and Maritime trade as well
The Silk Road was an overland route that linked China to the Mediterranean world via Mesopotamia, Iran, and Central Asia.

There were two periods of heavy use of the Silk Road:

1. 150 B.C.E.–907 C.E.
2. The 13th through 17th centuries C.E.
Geography of the Silk Road

- Silk Road stretched from Xi’an, China to Rome
- It covers a vast area of different climates and geographies
- Taklimakan Desert
  - Occupies much of the routes
  - Temperatures range from 104°F to 122°F in the summer, but can dip to -5°F in the winter
- Travelers also had to contend with mountain ranges, deep ravines, and sandstorms
Trade Route

- **DANGER....CAUTION!**
  - Harsh weather conditions
  - Floods, sandstorms, and winter snows could throw you off the trade routes
  - Robbers, thieves, and bandits!
  - Stole your money, animals, goods
Organization of Long-Distance Trade

- Divided into small segments
- Tariffs and tolls finance local supervision
- Tax income incentives to maintain safety, maintenance of passage
The Trade Route

- There was no one trade route
- The routes resembled a chain linked together by Chinese, Asian, and European merchants
- Trade transacted in short segments
The Silk Roads, 200 BCE-300 CE
The origins of the Silk Road trade may be located in the occasional trading of Central Asian nomads.

Regular, large-scale trade was fostered by the Chinese demand for western products (particularly horses).

Trade was also increased by the Parthian state in northeastern Iran and its control of the markets in Mesopotamia.
In addition to horses, China imported alfalfa, grapes, and a variety of other new crops as well as medicinal products, metals, and precious stones.

China exported peaches and apricots, spices, and manufactured goods including silk, pottery, and paper.
The Impact of the Silk Road Trade

- Turkic nomads, who became the dominant pastoralist group in Central Asia, benefited from the trade.
- Their elites constructed houses, lived settled lives, and became interested in foreign religions including Christianity, Buddhism, and (eventually) Islam.
Cultural Trade: Buddhism and Hinduism

- Merchants carry religious ideas along silk routes
- India through central Asia to east Asia
- Cosmopolitan centers promote development of monasteries to shelter traveling merchants
- Buddhism becomes dominant faith of silk roads, 200 BCE-700 CE
The Spread of Epidemic Disease

- Role of trade routes in spread of pathogens
- Limited data, but trends in demographics reasonably clear
- Smallpox, measles, bubonic plague
- Effect: Economic slowdown, move to regional self-sufficiency
Importance of the Silk Road

- Empires expand their wealth
  - Han Dynasty prospers by controlling silk trade
  - All kingdoms require merchants to pay a tax to trade in their lands

- Improved transportation
  - Building of new roads, bridges, ports, canals

- Leads to the development of sea routes
  - Avoid the “middleman” 🆕 lower prices for buyers
  - Safer than land routes as you can avoid bandits

- CULTURAL DIFFUSION
  - People exposed to new ideas, cultures, beliefs, and people