



The International Conference on Science and Cultures along the Silk Road – Texts, Images, and Objects Held in Hefei and Xi'an

The International Conference on Science and Cultures along the Silk Road - Texts, Images, and Objects was successfully held on 24-28 June 2024 in Hefei and Xi'an. Over 80 researchers and specialists from China, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, the United States, Japan, and Malaysia gathered to present and discuss the cultural, scientific, and technological exchanges along the Silk Roads and their social and historical impacts.

The Silk Roads served not only as trade routes for goods but also as a channel for the emergence of new ideas, culture, and knowledge. The production and dissemination of texts, images, and objects along the Silk Roads left a significant mark on the evolution of art, science, religion, and culture in both East and West. It stands as proof of how interconnected human civilizations were and highlights the lasting impact of cultural interchange.

The conference comprised two sessions, one at the University of Science and Technology of China (USTC) in Hefei, and the other at Shaanxi Normal University (SNNU) in Xi'an. The Hefei session primarily focused on the science and technology exchanges, while the Xi'an session emphasized exchanges in art and culture along the ancient Silk Roads.





In the Hefei Session, the opening ceremony was chaired by Professor SHI Yunli, Executive Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at USTC. Professor ZHU Canping, Special Assistant to the President of USTC, and Professor LI Qingxin, Chair of the China Society for Maritime History Studies (CSMHS), delivered welcome addresses expressing their hopes for further exploration of discoveries based on historical materials.

Professor CHEN Fahu, Chair of the Association for Trans-Eurasia Exchange and Silk Road Civilization Development (ATES), presented a keynote speech on the latest progress in the research of interaction between Silk Road civilization and environmental changes, highlighting the importance of interdisciplinary and cross-regional collaboration for a comprehensive study of the Silk Road in the future. During the Hefei Session, 18 oral presentations were delivered in 6 panels.

CHINA · Xi'an

The opening ceremony of the Xi'an session was chaired by Professor SHA Wutian, Director of the Silk Road History and Culture Research Centre at SNNU. Professor DONG Zhibao, Vice President of SNNU, Professor SHI Yunli from USTC, Professor PANG Yani, Deputy Director of the Shaanxi History Museum, and Professor LI Bingzhong, Dean of the School of History and Civilization at SNNU, gave welcome speeches to greet all participants in Xi'an, the starting point of the overland Silk Road. They believe this conference will enhance the international cooperation between Xi'an and other cities/countries.

Professor GE Chengyong from the China Academy of Cultural Heritage gave his keynote presentation entitled "A Study on the Exotic People Riding White Elephant Candlestick Art in Tang Dynasty from the Perspective of Asian Buddhism" and Professor RONG Xinjiang from Peking University talked about the "Struggle for Calendar among Persian, Chinese, and Sogdian Astrologers in the Middle and Late Tang Dynasty", both of the keynote talks showcased the intensive exchanges between the East and West during the Tang Dynasty. A total of 21 oral talks were presented across 5 panels in the Xi'an session.



Expert Interview on Silk Road Research



Christopher Cullen is Emeritus Director of the Needham Research Institute (Cambridge, UK). He has published work on the history of astronomy and mathematics in China, and is currently working on controversies on astronomy in Beijing in the middle to late 17th century, jointly with Professor Catherine Jami.

China is a fascinating and huge culture with a long history, if I can get into China, it is a really big escape into a new world for me.

The ideal student is the kind for me who really understands some science, but realizes that studying the history of that site, how did we get there? Because there is never our final destination.

We have discovered this wonderful way of discovering true things that are true for someone, from England, true for somebody from China, true for somebody from India, we can all agree on it. That is something the human race has never had before.



Nicholas Sims-Williams specializes in the Eastern Middle Iranian languages, taking an equal interest in the languages themselves and in their Central Asian setting with its stimulating mixture of languages and cultures. He has been at SOAS University of London since 1976, becoming Research Professor in 2004 and Emeritus in 2015.

I am interested in the languages themselves and how they related to one another, but also in the texts, in those languages and what they tell us about the people, about the religions, about the daily life, about the history, and so on of those regions.

I always say that the most important thing, when you're deciding what to study is to study something you're really interested in. Because if you're going to devote many hours, many days, weeks, months, years to studying a topic. So the most important thing is that you're gonna spend a lot of effort and time on studying something. Don't devote it to something that you don't really think is interesting. And what is interesting for one person is not interesting to another.



Fabrizia Baldissera, retired Associate Professor of Sanskrit Language and Literature, Florence University. From 1976 to 1981, she was a CNR researcher in Sanskrit, Milan University. From 1981 until 2020, she taught at Milan, Venice, Naples, and Florence Universities. In 2023, she was a recipient of the Bhandarkar-Infosys fellowship, Pune. In April, 2024, she was invited as visiting Professor at IIAS, Shimla, India.

Thinking about the silk road and the impact is it had in the past. I think there was a multiple way of interacting with people of different culture. Backgrounds, not only are different cultures, but there were high people, low people. People that came from very important places, people that came that were there, and just saw the pilgrims and the merchants passing through, and their life was changed by this sort of interaction from east to west, from west to east. It was very interesting, not only for the exchange of merchandise, but especially ideas.

All kinds of religious ideas made people much more open to novelties, much more open to the fact that not everybody thought in the same way that not all rules had to be

Expert Interview on Silk Road Research



Erica Hunter is Affiliated Researcher at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (FAMES), University of Cambridge. Until her retirement in 2020, she was Senior Lecturer in Eastern Christianity, Dept. of History, Religions and Philosophies, SOAS). Her research interests principally focus on the Syriac material from Turfan.

Silk road demonstrates the fact of communication between various parts of Asia, extending right to Europe, but we have a network of trade through various countries, bringing products and ideas.

We all explore in our different areas, but it is only by talking with each other and writing and communicating and influence each other that we get a broader picture. It's very easy to become very focused in one's own country and area. But the world is much larger. All countries are influenced in their culture by other influences and And they also influence other countries.

You have to work hard. You have to be dedicated. It takes a lot of courage to develop areas. You have to be passionate and truly love your field.



Mariya Marinova is an Assistant Professor in Chinese Studies at Sofia University, Bulgaria. Her primary research areas encompass Chinese linguistics, prehistory and ancient history of China, as well as Silk Road archaeology. She is a Board Member of the Bulgarian Association of Sinologists and a member of the European Association for Chinese Studies and the European Association for Asian Art and Archaeology.

Why are funeral customs important? Because they not only reflect the way of life of the residents at that time, but also the water clothing and tools they used. It also reflects their thoughts and beliefs. So I think this field is very promising and interesting.

I personally find that the present Chinese diplomacy has something in common with the ancient diplomatic tools, such as the thought of Confucius. There are also some unique similarities with the practices adopted by the emperors in the Qin and Han Dynasties.

If I can choose the university in Xinjiang to cooperate with the front-line archaeologists there, I am very willing to do so. And I think there were some sites and archaeological relics that had not been found and excavated at that time.



Nasha Rodziadi Khaw is Senior Lecturer from the Centre for Global Archaeological Research, Universiti Sains Malaysia. He received his B.Sc. (Hons) and M.A from Universiti Sains Malaysia and PhD from the University of Peshawar, Pakistan. His research interest includes epigraphy-palaeography, historical archaeology, and archaeology of the Bujang Valley.

In order to join archeology, you have to make sure that you are really passionate inside the field. You need to be interested to study ancient human activities, and you must know what you want to do. You must to know what you want to do researching. For those who are interested, you need to do a lots of reading. You need to understand what you want to do, and then you can join the field. But the most important thing is that passion is the most important thing to do what you're passionate in. But if you're passionate in archaeology, get go for it.

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