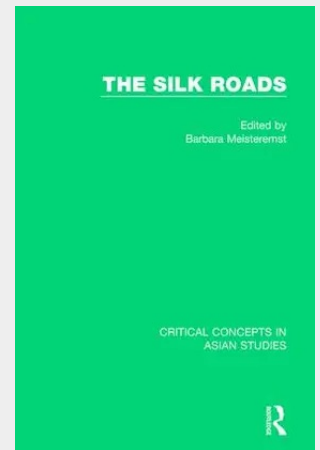


The Silk Roads

The areas covering the Silk Roads, the ancient and modern roads from China to the West, including the region of modern Xinjiang, have an enduring and most diverse history. The impact that the political, cultural, and economic exchange on the Silk Roads had on the world cannot be overestimated; this exchange constitutes the first instance of a globalized world. The earliest discoveries from recent archaeological excavations date back almost 4000 years and explorers in the early 20th century evoked a considerable interest in the history of these regions, and the cultural relics they brought back from the oasis towns of the Taklamakan initiated entirely new research fields. For instance, Buddhist studies received a new impact and languages hitherto unknown entered the field of Western research. Since the 1990s the International Dunhuang Project of the British Library has attempted to unify all manuscripts, artefacts, and other materials collected from the Silk Roads in a database accessible to the public in order to enhance the visibility of these cultural treasures for researchers and the general public alike. Different aspects of Silk Road studies constitute a research focus at academic institutions all over the world: Central Asian Institutes study the history and the present political and economic situation of the countries that were part of the ancient net of economic and cultural relations, and academic projects, such as the Turfan Research Centre of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy, the 'Buddhist Manuscripts from Gandhara' project at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University, Munich, and 'The Early Buddhist Manuscripts Project' of the University of Washington, Seattle are primarily concerned with the edition of the manuscripts found on the Silk Roads. Initiatives for a more comprehensive study of the multilayered history of the Silk Roads have been launched at several academic institutions, for instance, at the Buddhist Centre of the University of California Berkeley. The collection of articles on the Silk Roads intends to cover the most relevant aspects of studies on the Silk Roads mainly under a historical perspective, but including some material regarding the present situation of the area. It will focus on more recent publications, but occasionally older, but significant publications will also be included.



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