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Silk Road: A Culture of Imported Goods

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Today I will not introduce new discoveries, only materials already available, to point out problems in the "Significance of Silk Road in Human Civilization," main theme of this symposium.

Silk Roads are often dealt with from the point of cultural approaches by the academic world and the mass media. Actually, however, the history of Silk Road centered mainly around trade and other economic activities between neighboring countries.

Political and diplomatic negotiations were held to facilitate trade, and cultural exchanges followed trade. Tribes engaged in trade along Silk Road fostered their own cultures, imported other countries' cultures and transferred their own to other countries, thus improving each other's cultures.

CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SILK ROAD COUNTRIES

Many artifacts excavated from sites located on Silk Road revealed cultures of tribes who lived in the immediate areas. Those articles were not necessarily produced where they were found, however, but rather manufactured in other countries, and in many cases imported.

For example, there were vast amounts of gold articles found in Scythian tombs, including casings for bows called gorytus by Scythian people, akinakes swords, ornaments of bracteria; costume trimmings often sewed on garments and gold ornaments. These articles have patterns showing struggles between animals—their favorites—and scenes from their livelihood. In addition, motifs such as sphinx, Cupid, Venus and Athena were found.

(Slide 1) Electrum jug from Chertomlyk, fourth century B. C. Its frieze has patterns of griffins biting cows, and of Scythian people training horses. Below are palmette and birds. Made by a Greek on the Bosphorus.

(Slide 2) Gorytus from Chertomlyk: pattern has Achilles hidden among daughters of the king of Skyros, Lycomedes; Achilles is found by Odysseus, who then takes him to the Trojan War. Made by an Ionian craftsman.

These gold articles are said to have been manufactured by Greeks along the Black Sea coast, serving as examples of how exporters manufactured goods to comply with requirements of their trade partners.

Many golden articles also were excavated recently at Hun (*Xiong-nu*) sites in

Inner Mongolia, including a hemispherical gold crown with hawk and four patterns of wolves biting sheep (Slide 3) and a decorative plate with patterns of four tigers biting cows (Slide 4). These are all believed to have been brought from the West. Found at the Xiong-nu tomb at Noin Ula in Outer Mongolia were a Han Dynasty mirror (Slide 5) and silk fabric (Slide 6).

I now turn to articles found in Afghanistan, where I spent many years working at excavations.

At sites of a Bactrian city at Ai Khanoum in Afghanistan, a French team excavated a marble statue of a philosopher (Slide 9), a statue of a young man (Slide 10), and other articles believed to have been brought from Greece. This team also found a Greek inscription.

At six tombs of Tillya-Tepe in Afghanistan, a team of Soviet archaeologists found an enormous amount of gold articles, some of which obviously show their origins in foreign countries: Golden coins of Roman Emperor Tiberius (Slide 11), silver coins of Parthian Mithridates II (Slide 12), Indian gold coins and a mirror of the Chinese Former-Han period (Slide 13). Most other gold articles excavated there are thought to be products of Bactria, while strong Greek and Roman influence can be seen in many finds, such as collar hooks of clothes describing the marriage of Dionysus and Ariadne (Slide 14), Eros on a dolphin (Slide 15), and collar hooks shaped like a warrior in armor (Slide 16). Scythian and Iranian influence also can be seen in a gold crown (Slide 17), a gold belt (Slide 18) and a short sword with sheath, hinting of Siberian style (Slide 19), while others like a hanging ornament with a pattern of king and dragon show Mongolian influence (Slide 20).

The Begram site, located on the south side of the Hindu Kush mountain range in Afghanistan, was capital of Kapisi, which belonged to Kushans. A French expedition found piles of treasures in a closed room in the palace, such as glassware (Slides 21 and 22), including blown glass, cut glass, colored glass and millifiori plates, generally called Roman glass and made in Sidon or Tyre of Syria or Alexandria in Egypt. Bronze articles were also found, including statues of Egyptian gods, Harpocrates (Slide 23) and Serapis-Heracles (Slide 24), all having been imported from Alexandria. A Minerva-figured steelyard weight (Slide 25) and shield with fish pattern are both thought to be Greco-Roman products. A plaster plaque with high-relief decoration (Slide 26) is a replica of Greek metalware. Together with these articles, a carved ivory statue of an Indian river god, with boxes and chairs (Slide 27), and Chinese lacquerware serve to make up a superb collection of articles of the times. Almost all were brought from other countries and positively prove that this Afghan region served as "a crossroad of civilization".

The same trend can be seen in artifacts excavated along Silk Roads.

Several articles found in the Feng Su-fu tomb (415 A. D.) at Peipiao, Liaoning, show an obvious Western impact. Let me introduce a Chinese example. In the tomb of an aristocratic married couple of Bei-yen Kingdom, established by Hsienpi in Sixteen Countries Period, were found glassware in fish shape similar to those of

Begram, a gold crown with decoration like those of the West and stirrups older than those known in the West.

Articles excavated from remains on Silk Road range from imports to indigenous goods employing foreign patterns to indigenous goods mixing native materials with imported things like turquoise and lapis lazuli. Some imported ingredients were so regularly employed in some localities as to lead us to consider these imports to be the culture of the local people. In this respect, culture of some ethnic groups along Silk Road can be said to be a culture of imported goods.

REIMPORTATION OF CULTURAL ELEMENTS

The importation of materials brought about an important secondary effect. New products developed from imported goods were reimported by the original exporting countries. Stirrups are a good example. Horses were of course originally domesticated by hunting tribes before horses and horse-riding techniques were brought to agricultural tribes. Stirrups, however, did not first exist among such typical mounted tribes as Scythians and Huns (Slide 28). For example, stirrups are not included in carvings and statues with horse-riding patterns, such as a bronze Parthian mounted figure excavated at Dura-Europos (second to third century, A. D.) or Sasanian silver-plate with hunting scene of fifth to sixth century (Slide 29).

Stirrups did not appear in societies of such mounted tribes until the seventh or eighth century.

Yet stirrups were already in use in China as early as the first half of the fourth century. A terracotta mounted figure excavated from No. 21 Hshi-chin Tomb in Chinpenling, Changsha, Hunan (Slide 30) is equipped with a triangular stirrup on the left of the horse and none on the right. Horse trappings buried in No. 154 Chin Tomb (first half fourth century) in Hsiaomintun, Anyang, Henan (Slide 31) also have a single stirrup on the left. These stirrups, however, may have been employed only to mount the horse.

Such stirrups were not required by mounted tribes because they could simply jump onto their horses. On the other hand, agricultural tribes unfamiliar with horse riding had much difficulty mounting the animals, leading to the invention of stirrups. As pairs of stirrups showed the advantage of stabilizing riders' bodies during a ride and during battle, they came into general acceptance. Thus stirrups were invented by agricultural tribes and eventually imported by mounted tribes. Stirrups appeared in Japan as early as the fifth century.

Another example of reimportation can be seen in Buddhist clay figures found at Tepe-Shutur temple remains at Hadda, Afghanistan. A Heracles placed to guard a Buddha figure appears to be the same as Greek Heracles, but its hand holds a Buddhist vajra instead of a club. This example suggests that the vajra pani, Buddha's guard, was a derivative of the Greek Heracles.

* The slides shown when the lecture was given are not reproduced (ed.).