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### **THE NEW SILK ROAD AND THE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE MIDDLE EAST AND CHINA**

#### **The Old Silk Road and New Silk Road**

The term “Silk Road” is used in two senses – literal and metaphorical. When talking about it in its original sense economic historians tell us that the Arab world was a centre of global trade that straddled three continents and that Arab traders trafficked in goods they bought and sold as they travelled overland and across the seas between Asia, Africa and Europe. Later, however, the centre of global commerce shifted gradually westwards, driven by the disasters and calamities that afflicted the Arab world, and consequently the silk caravans linking Asia with Europe all but disappeared, striking the death knell for a highly significant era in the history of world trade.

Much later, however, the fortunes of the world trade began to revive, particularly starting from the Far East to the Arabian/Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. International banks opened branches over the old routes while business zones and cargo ports have been established in place of the caravans of former times. Just as was the case with the area in general, it was accompanied by a strong economic revival throughout. It explains why some economists today are talking about “a revival of the Silk Road” – in its literal rather than metaphorical sense. Nowadays the economic focus on the Silk Road has never been stronger.

However, the new Silk Road also has a cultural side and this is reflected in numerous ways. TV satellite channels are springing up and a communications revolution is taking place, along the new Silk Road. In 1991, H.M Sultan Qaboos sponsored the UNESCO journey for re-exploring the Silk Road between Venice to Osaka. Later he sponsored the UNESCO website of the Silk Road website (named ‘The Silk Road online Platform for Dialogue, Diversity & Development’). Certainly, this type of involvement encourages co-operation and understanding between the different religions and nations along the route<sup>1</sup>.

### **Towards a New Mutual Understanding Between Religions and Cultures**

We live in an age of multi-culturalism, ethnic pluralism and globalisation and this raises the question of how we should communicate and interact with others, or what we might call the “different other”.

Intercommunication along the new Silk Road involves mutual contacts among followers of the great religions of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Today we shall re-evaluate the recent view which presupposes a clash of civilizations and the inevitability of conflict between religions. Instead we will pick up on the often marginalised conversation where people are talking of a religion, ethics or values “encounter”, and the “shared” or “common” Silk Road. Indeed, with a history of mutual contacts going back over a thousand years all sides can benefit from “mutual understanding” among a diverse plurality of religion and cultures. Certainly we should mull over the issues and seek new insights through encountering together both our shared and our separate heritages.

Hearing in the Arab world the expression “interfaith dialogue” we immediately think of it as being a dialogue amid the Abrahamic faiths, either between Islam and Christianity or Islam and Judaism. In both these cases the primary reference would be dialogue among the Muslim East and the Judaeo-Christian West.

However, the idea of a West-East or East-East Silk Road dialogue rarely enters our minds, despite the fact that West-East Christian-Buddhist or Hinduism dialogues have been going on for some time and are seen by both sides as moving in a positive direction. Meanwhile, dialogue between Islam and the Eastern religions is still in its early stages<sup>2</sup>.

In this context we are reminded of about initiative by Catholic philosopher Hans Kung entitled “Global Ethics”, which was globally welcomed. Certainly, it is an important initiative the post-Cold War instead of clashes among civilizations”. Kung’s initiative has brought recognition to role of religious ethics

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<sup>1</sup> <http://en.unesco.org/silkroad>.

<sup>2</sup> J. Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2010, p. 53.

whether Abrahamic or non-Abrahamic in order to confront global developments in the 21 century<sup>3</sup>.

Similarly, in Oman we also have an Arabic-Islamic initiative by Shaykh Abdullah b. Muhammad al-Salmi, the Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs. This initiative is based on the recognition of values among religions and humanities by reasons, ethics and justice. This gives a different approach than those mainly used amid Abrahamic religions<sup>4</sup>.

In the old days the relationships between different faiths were defined by rivalry, conquest and military campaigns, and it was sometimes in this context that mutual antipathy developed among the religions. Today, however, in the age of the communications revolution, that kind of attitude is unproductive. Where religions are concerned, the communications revolution has now opened a door that had long been closed; and while that door used to be opened by force and coercion on those rare occasions selves today all religions can write their own “books” about themselves and present, them to whomsoever they please.

From an Islamic point of view, we can bridge the “mutual understanding gap” between Islam and the religions of the East by recognizing the following principles:

1. Islam and the Eastern religions – whether Buddhist, Hindu or Shinto – all share a deep respect for the environment and the natural world. Thus Islam finds itself in total harmony with all the religions of the East. For example, where the attitude to plants is concerned, Muslim can cite numerous verses from the Qur’an and Sayings of the Prophet which urge mankind to conserve the environment and accord plants special treatment, even in times of war, as a part of the ethics and “etiquette” of war in Islam. Nevertheless, I should prefer to give you some actual examples of Muslim behaviour towards plants and the environment.

The Sufi Ibn ‘Arabi (1164–1240) has given us a wonderful concept of “companionship” between man and plants, based on a principle which he described as “companionship with other forms and other species (other than humans)”. What he meant by this was that “companionship” did not just represent ties among a person and others of his or her kind (i.e. a human-human relationship). It also covered relationships between man and other species – human-plant, human-animal etc. This was what had in mind when he spoke about humans and their “companionship with the animals and trees they possess, as well as with those with which they come into contact, even if they do not own them”. In other words, ownership of a thing or a living creature was not a precondition for a “companionable relationship”. Rather, “companionship” merely required that

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<sup>3</sup> H. Kung, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Abdullah Bin Mohammed Al Salmi, *Religious Tolerance: A Vision for a New World*, ed. A. Ziaka, Olms Verlag, Hildesheim–Zurich–New York 2016.

other, non-human species – such as plants, animals – should be treated with gentleness, mercy and kindness. It was incumbent upon every human being

if [he] should see a tree withering for lack of water, even if its owner is present, and if he is able to water it [in his capacity] as its ‘companion of that hour’ (seeing that he has benefited from its shade or leant against it to rest, or stood near it for some purpose or other), then considering that all these actions represent companionship and he is capable of providing water, it is his duty to respect the claim of companionship and water it accordingly... not for the sake of its owner, nor out of a desire to benefit from its fruit, whether or not it should bear fruit and whether or not it is someone’s private property<sup>5</sup>.

Something similar is reported about the Omani Imam Ahmed bin Sa’id al Sa’idi al ‘Azdi (r. 1741–1782). The historian Ibn Ruzaiq (d.1873) records that Imam Ahmad’s high moral character was such that one day before he left Muscat he wanted to go to Sumail for some purpose. When he was near Wadi Halfain he found that the sun was blazing brightly, so he retreated to the shade of a large tree. Then after the sunset he continued his journey to Sumail. Years later he set off from Rustaq to go to Nizwa accompanied by a large number of people on camels and horses. When he arrived in Wadi Halfain he looked to the right and the left and did not see that large tree. So he said to himself: “Perhaps it has died”. Then he set off in its direction on his camel and found it was no more than a dried-up stump, and the sun was blazing hot. So he dismounted his camel and made the camel sit with him, and he ordered that a carpet should be laid near the dried-up stump of the tree. Then dismissed his riding companions in that intense heat. So the riders were astounded by him.

When he arrived in Nizwa one of the *qadis* (judges) who had accompanied him on the journey asked him why he had stayed by the dried-up stump of the tree, so he told him that he had sat in the shade of its branches in the days when it was green. The judge said to him: “Do you honour something that cannot understand and is dead?” He replied: “A free man is one who does not forget an act of kindness. A person who forgets an act of kindness is not a free man. A free man should not forget about an act of kindness either from something that speaks or from something that is dumb”. So the justice said: “Let it suffice for me. These are indeed words of wisdom that an intelligent free man should not forget”<sup>6</sup>.

Likewise the Prophetic Tradition says: “Plant trees, even if the Angel of Death should find you in the farm”<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Muhiyi al-Din Ibn Arabi, *Alfutuhah Almakkiya* (in Arabic), Dar Sadir, Vol. 3, Beyrouth 2004, p. 334.

<sup>6</sup> Muhammad b. Humayd Ibn Ruzayk, *Alfath Almoubin Fi Sirat Al-Sada Al-Bu Sa’idiyin* (in Arabic), ed., Abd al-Mun’im, Amir and Muhammad Murci Abdallah, Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, Muscat 2001, p. 311–312. See the translation of the text on: G.P. Badger, *The History of Imams and Seyyid of Oman by Salil Ibn Ruzayq from A.D 661–1856*, Hackluyt, London 1871.

<sup>7</sup> Abu Rabi’ Al-Wissyani, *Siyar Al-Wissyani* (in Arabic), ed. Umar Luqman Asbana, Vol. 1, p. 369, Ministry of Heritage and Culture, Muscat 2009.

So this is the first principle of the Silk Road interfaith dialogue.

The second principle concerns the attitudes to animals. One reported that example of Imam Sultan bin Sayf al Ya‘rubi’s high moral character was his love of horses. He did not like his horse to be fed unless he was there, because he was afraid it might be not given enough to eat. In the month of Ramadhan, after praying the *Maghrib* (Sunset) Prayer he would feed his horse himself; he would stand feeding the horse until it had had enough, then he would return to his fort with his wife and the members of his household<sup>8</sup>.

2. Another common basis for dialogue between Islam and the Eastern religions is the fact that they all expect man to hold himself to account and blame himself when appropriate for the sake of his own peace of mind and spirit. In both Islam and the Eastern religions a person seeks solace through “internalised spiritual prayer”. *Tasawwuf* (Sufism/mysticism) is a journey which man makes into his innermost self in order to discover its well-springs that never run dry. The Eastern religions, too, have a tendency to “inward-lookingness” in which man looks into his essential self in order to find, spiritual solace.

Surprisingly people are seeking a third yardstick for defining worldly success (other than money and power), and are beginning to look to “meditation”, “wonder at the world around them” and “wisdom”, according to the most widely-sold book in America: *Thrive: The Third Metric to Redefining Success and Creating a Life of Well-Being, Wisdom and Wonder*, by the American thinker Arianna Huffington. Today in particular, Islam and the Eastern religions offer a secure, sound and practicable way to achieve success – that is to say, true success, not mere toilsome, wearisome material success with its uncertain results and consequences<sup>9</sup>.

For example, between Islam and Buddhism, Johan Elversorg (2010) – argues this understanding can only be achieved by a re-examination of the narratives that reinforce prejudices and plant the seeds of mutual suspicion amid the two cultures. He notes that it is the function of the objective historian to overcome and discredit prejudices. Otherwise, how will Buddhists and Muslims be able to understand each other?

Will the two sides develop a new hybrid culture containing both Islamic and Buddhist elements? Are we on the threshold of a new era of Buddhist-Islamic cultural exchange? Or will the dissimilarities between them lead to their opposite, and to open conflict? The author’s response to these questions is that nobody can guess what will happen. However, he adds that one thing is

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<sup>8</sup> Nur al-Din Abdullah b. Humayd Al-Salimi, *Tuhfat Al- Ayyan Bi-Sirat Ahl Oman*, Vol. 1, p. 154–155, Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, Muscat 1981.

<sup>9</sup> A. Huffington, *Thrive: The Third Metric to Redefining Success and Creating a Life of Well-Being, Wisdom and Wonder*, New York 2014.

certain – that is, that interaction between the Buddhist and Islamic cultures is still at its early stages<sup>10</sup>.

3. Silk was not the only factor that determined the Silk Road's identity. Ideas also played a part. The Silk Road is a network of historic trading routes linking the Far East with South Asia and South-East Asia with Europe and the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, what we almost forget is that silk was not the only substance that was transported between the countries along the way, since there were also exchanges of other products which travelled along those roads, including religions and philosophies. Cultural exchanges have invariably included the adoption of – and adaptation to – different ways of life and behaviour. If we appreciate this fact we will be better able to understand the connotations that the term “Silk Road” enjoys today and why there is still a certain mystique associated with it.

### **The New Silk's Road: the Future of Trade and the Future of Human Intercommunication**

Robert Kaplan 2010 hypothesis on the new global strategic has occurred due the political and economic developments in the Indian Ocean in the last decades. However, these developments would shift the centre of international trade from north Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. This hypothesis gives a new dimension for understanding on the global political situation the post-Cold War<sup>11</sup>.

Hillary Clinton put forward a vision of “the New Silk Road” from the Near East to the Far East based on co-operation and collaboration in areas of trade, research and intellectual development. Speaking on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2012, her Deputy Assistant Secretary Geoffrey Pyatt described a strategy for “reconnecting” those countries which had been “torn apart by decades of war and rivalry – for example, the USA, India, Japan and Afghanistan” – and he stressed that co-operation could be achieved through increased trade flow and dialogue between opinion-formers at every level, whether industrial, diplomatic or educational. He observed that the word “geography” was “problematic” and was generally used to prevent, rather than promote, dialogue between representatives of different countries. Hence it was necessary to construct an “open and integrated” framework for dialogue.

Robert O. Blake Jr, Assistant Secretary of State at the US State Department, gave a speech on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2013 in which he said that the “Silk Road Strategy” was largely dependent on the active participation of the states concerned. He stressed the need for better cultural understanding, since along with

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<sup>10</sup> J. Elversorg, *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2010.

<sup>11</sup> R. Kaplan, *Monsoon. The Indian Ocean and The Future American Power*, Random House, New York 2010.

the exchange of basic commodities there was another kind of exchange that was no less important – the exchange of ideas.

In parallel to this, in 2013, the Chinese President Xi Jinping launched the widely publicized “Belt and Road” or “New Silk Road” initiative – an idea clearly inspired by the old Silk Road that flourished until the dawn of the modern age and was only brought to an end by the violence and wars that afflicted maritime trade in the Indian Ocean and its neighbouring regions after the sixteenth century. His motive was not mere nostalgia for the past, since the project, which marked a major new cultural departure, was essentially forward-looking and designed to promote a better future for a mankind yearning for closer mutual relations, prosperity and peace.

There has been talk of a new Silk Road for more than a hundred years. Throughout that time there have been ideas and initiatives aimed at reviving its old commercial and economic role as part of a strategy to promote peace and co-operation across those vast continents and oceans which in recent centuries have suffered the effects of hostile relations, wars and embargoes. While travellers by land and sea have tried to explore those parts of it which still exist. This is a praiseworthy aim, particularly for the area covered by it extends over half the surface of the globe (around sixty percent, to be more precise!).

Following the launch of the ‘Belt of and Road’ initiative, in March 2014 the Chinese government issued a booklet on the project entitled Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt, which described in detail the steps that had already been taken and called upon all interested parties to join up and take part. According to the booklet, the Silk Road Economic Belt aims to establish three main routes: the first route would link China with Europe through Central Asia and Russia; the second would extend from China to the Gulf region and the Mediterranean through Central and West Asia; and the third would run from China and through South Asia and the Indian Ocean. In complicate with the plan, much of the twenty-first century maritime Silk Roads will be based on the old sea lanes. It would follow two routes: the first will extend from the Chinese coastal ports to the Indian Ocean via the South China Sea, then on to the shores of Europe, while the second will link China’s ports with the South Pacific. This means that the ways of the new Silk Road will run through and link over sixty countries in Asia, Africa and Europe, while connecting some four and a half billion people with economies totalling up to a trillion US Dollars – i.e. around thirty percent of the current volume of the global economy.

The first stage of the plan entails a series of road and railway’s construction projects in the regions along the new Silk Road’s overland routes. These will be essential in order to guarantee the smooth passage of air, sea and land freight moreover, ensure that the countries located on and within these giant communication networks work together in laying oil and gas pipelines and establishing cross-border power supply connections, as well as telecommunications cables for



what the Chinese booklet calls the “Information Silk Road”<sup>12</sup>. The huge range of exciting – and massive – development projects requires massive financial support which can only be made available through international co-operation. China’s response to this situation has been twofold. It set up the Silk Road Fund to channel investment into specific projects, and established the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). So far around sixty countries from the five continents have signed up as founder members of the AIIB, including most major industrial nations apart from the United States, Japan and Canada. Among the Arab states that have joined are Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Jordan, and Egypt. According to Xue Qingguo, Dean of the Department of Arabic Studies at Beijing Foreign Studies University, the participation of countries with opposing political views in this global project is clear evidence of a “meeting of interests” and shows that it is possible to overcome differences for the sake of a more prosperous, secure and co-operative world.

Of course, the most obvious aspects of the Chinese initiative are economic and trade-related. However, its human and interactive/cultural/intellectual aspects are no less important, since it will foster cultural, intellectual, academic and media exchanges. With this aim in mind, China has offered ten thousand scholarships for students from across the world – or, more specifically, from those countries located along the initiative’s routes – to study at Chinese universities specialising in technology, economics, cultural disciplines, the media and communications. China has also started running a series of cultural programmes in collaboration with the countries that are involved in the project.

Professor Xue Qingguo has posed the following questions on the project and attempted to answer them:

1. Why is the initiative happening now?
2. What is the initiative’s significance for Arab countries in the light of the upheavals currently being faced by the region?
3. Why are the United States and some of its allies not signing up to the initiative, and does this indicate a new polarisation?
4. Is this initiative different from the untamed globalisation process that many countries are complaining about; in other words, will the initiative be gentler and more humane?

With its financial and monetary resources and high levels of productivity, China today is the world’s second economy after the United States. Having leapt from one world to another, its economic development has encountered some problems, such as a productivity glut that has cut demand for new goods and commodities in the local markets. It also faces difficulties in its trade with Western countries because of their protective counter-measures. All these factors mean that there is a need for a new impetus for sustainable growth, and this in

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<sup>12</sup> J.A. Millward, *The Silk Road: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, New York 2013, p. 82–86.



turn requires a high level of interaction, unhampered by disputes (or at least with an ability to overcome them). All problems and difficulties, however as great they may be, can be overcome by a rational, broad-minded approach. In the Chinese view, the initiative is not a project to be imposed by force of arms, or even by the devices of economic globalization. Countries should join it voluntarily and benefit by doing so – rather than suffer harm for this reason. It is true that it is an association initiated by China, but it creates links between countries near and far, during respecting local cultures, conditions and customs. Indeed, it propagates different languages and cultures just as the old Silk Road did in the past.

Moreover, in addition to its important role of promoting human contacts and interaction, the initiative has also given a boost to the advanced economies while helping to resolve the problem of capital shortfalls in the economies of those developing countries along its routes that have signed up to it. One consequence of this is that the countries whose economies are thus interlinked will lay their disputes and conflicts to one side and set their sights on a new world of mutual understanding through interaction and exchange, in the interests of prosperity and a better future for mankind.

In the view of Arab experts, the Arab countries which have joined the initiative – or intend to join – are not aligning themselves with China or against America, because the New Silk Road is inclusive and represents a new model for economic and human relations. Indeed, it may well turn out to be a new and constructive model in a more optimistic world of dwindling conflicts in which political and strategic polarisation can become a thing of the past. Where the Arabs are concerned, it may represent a historic revival of an era in which they travelled overland to the Far East through Central Asia and Turkestan, or plied the Indian Ocean, establishing states and civilizations along its shores and developing relations with East and South-East Asia and the Indian sub-continent in a region free from conflicts and wars. Even if it is not an answer to the mentioned above question about polarisation, it does at least point to other possibilities for the Arab states and the peoples of Asia, Africa and Europe. At the very least, it offers an example of “freedom from polarisation”, even if this does not mean “freedom from competition”, since it is based upon the principle of mutual dependence and a recognition that the world shares a common destiny.

Today the Arab countries are suffering from internal strife as well as conflicts with their neighbours and the outside world. At the same time, the New Silk Road offers great prospects for economic growth that will lead to lower levels of conflict, as well as opportunities for the kinds of exchanges that are conducive to better relations. The developing Arab states will benefit from the modern communications systems, the free economic zones, the oil and gas transportation networks and the water supply channels. And above all, they will benefit from the huge opportunities for cultural co-operation and human contacts. In such a situation there will be no room for “conflict for the sake of conflict”; in fact, everyone

can be a winner in a world – and a region – of waning conflicts. The Arabs – and the wider world – need to embrace the principles of co-operation, exchanges of benefits and common interests. Those were the values and practices that defined the spirit of the old Silk Road and enabled it to function as a channel for the transport of goods between the Far East, China, the Levant and the Mediterranean. In its modern incarnation, today's Chinese initiative offers a shared spiritual element that – in our view – can add a new dimension to Chinese and Asian-Arab relationship. Here I am referring not to the volume of goods traded, which is massive, but to the spirit of development – that is to say, the resolution of problems through material and human development. This is the distinctive quality of the Chinese Renaissance – a quality that can also help revive the Arabs' fortunes if they co-operate and collaborate with the great human community created by the Chinese initiative.

China and East Asia – not surprisingly – are benefiting from the initiative. After all, it provides an additional channel for the transport and marketing of Eastern goods. However, the Arabs and Africans are also benefiting enormously; or rather, they can benefit enormously if they agree to work together and co-operate in the interests of growth, development and an end to backwardness and strife, and seize the excellent opportunities for cultural and human interaction with China and the Far East.

### **Why did the Silk Road never die?**

First and foremost, the Silk Road is a cultural phenomenon and people look back to it nostalgically because throughout the years of its existence it was always a road of cultural intercommunication par excellence. The worlds of Ibn Battutah, Sulaiman al Tajir al Omani and Mahmud al Kashgari were not fantasy worlds; nor were there any conflicts in their day between the countries along the Silk Road. If the will and commitment are there, our present-day New Silk Road will help create a world of peace, progress, co-operation and solidarity.

Countries along the Silk Road have generally learnt how to co-operate with each other through a process of “adaptation”. In 2003 the President of the International Black Sea University in Tbilisi noted that adaptation was “the only way for people to learn to tolerate different opinions and ideas”. He added: “The main cause of current conflicts is due to the fact that human beings fail to get to know each other”.

By “getting to know each other” we can revive the spirit of the Great Silk Road and generate “cultural richness through positive interaction”. If we understand this, it will come as no surprise to us to learn that the academic Victoria Bledsloe sees the history of the Silk Road as one involving both cultural and commercial negotiation.

In this connection another scholar is quoted as saying:

The history of the Silk Road's religions is part of a broader history – the history of intercultural dialogue. That dialogue became possible thanks to the development of a strong network of ties between individuals who possessed enough commercial skills and a sufficient spirit of adventure to enable them to overcome the difficulties of intercommunication and the perils of travel through the great Eurasian continent.

At the end of his book James A. Millward wonders: “Why did the Silk Road never die?” One answer he suggests is that the Silk Road was never just a trade route; it was also an “ideas route”. So it was not merely a road for transporting goods and this was the reason why it never died. Even if we were to suppose that in one sense it died from the end of the fifteenth century, religions still travelled along it during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and there was a lively spiritual scene along its entire length<sup>13</sup>.

### **Nowy Jedwabny Szlak a powiązania między Bliskim Wschodem i Chinami**

Termin „Jedwabny Szlak” ma dwa znaczenia: dosłowne i metaforyczne. W czasach, kiedy termin ten został wprowadzony do obiegu, centrum handlowym ówczesnego globalnego świata był świat arabski. Później centrum to przesunęło się na zachód, w dużym stopniu ze względu na chaos i zaburzenia, które zaczęły wstrząsać Bliskim Wschodem. W kolejnym okresie handel światowy zaczął intensywnie rozwijać się na Dalekim Wschodzie, z którym ściśle powiązana jest Zatoka Arabska/Perska oraz basen Morza Czerwonego. Dzisiaj gospodarcze znaczenie Jedwabnego Szlaku staje się ważniejsze niż kiedykolwiek. W artykule analizowane są kulturowe aspekty idei Jedwabnego Szlaku oraz formy, w jakich ta idea zaczyna się wyrażać.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Jedwabny Szlak, współpraca, Bliski Wschód, Chiny

### **The New Silk Road and the Communication Between the Middle East and China**

The term “Silk Road” is used in two senses – literal and metaphorical. At the time of the original sense of this term the Arab world was a centre of global trade. Later, however, the centre of global commerce shifted gradually westwards, driven by the disasters and calamities that afflicted the Arab world. Much later, however, the fortunes of the world trade began to revive, particularly starting from the Far East to the Arabian/Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. Some economists today are talking about “a revival of the Silk Road” – in its literal rather than metaphorical sense. Today the economic focus on the Silk Road has never been stronger. This article stresses that the new Silk Road also has a cultural side and discusses numerous ways of its reflection.

**Key words:** Silk Road, Communication, Middle East, China

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 94.

