

The Silk Roads: Highways of Culture and Commerce



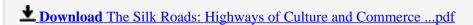
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Towards the middle of the 20th century, scholarly research revealed that the fabled Silk Roads, far from being mere trade routes, were cultural highways that played a pivotal role in linking east and west, intermittently bringing together nomads and city dwellers, pastoral peoples and farmers, merchants and monks, and soldiers and pilgrims. The notion of movement is therefore central to an understanding of the relations between peoples; it is also the factor of which specialists have, for various reasons, not taken sufficient account. It is in this context that the Silk Roads Project, initiated by UNESCO, assumes its significance. It has proved very fruitful and led to a large variety of projects of which this volume presents a selection. Although the papers collected here are wide-ranging, they reveal the emergence of the concept of a common heritage and plural identity. The studies carried out under the Project have shown that identity, seen from a long-term perspective, cannot be viewed as a ghetto or an enclosure, but as the result of a whole process of synthesis and encounter between peoples and cultures. (from the Introduction)

Vadim Elisseeff was Chairman of the UNESCO International Consultative Committee of the Silk Roads during the ten years of its existence. He is a specialist in the archaeology and history of the Far East and has held a number of important posts in national and international academic or cultural institutions such as that of General Inspector of the Museums of France and Director of Research in Archaeology of the Far East at the Ecole pratique des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, and was a member of the French Commission for Archaeological Excavations from 1955 to 1968.



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