



NHSMUNC V

Northwood High School Model UN



Navigating the Silk Road [“Pax Mongolica”]

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WELCOME LETTER

Delegates,

My name is Benjamin Pham, and I'm elated to be welcoming all of you to the "Navigating the Silk Road" conference at NHSMUNC V. As your head chair, I hope this committee will be not only an amazing learning experience, an interesting challenge, but also a fun experience in which you can express your creativity, solve problems, and form relationships with other delegates.

I joined MUN relatively late in my high school experience, but under the mentorship of some other incredible and passionate delegates, I came to love MUN, winning my first award at THSMUN and going on to participate in a variety of conferences, including last year's NHSMUNC IV. I started in GA assemblies but came to love crisis committees, as I find their accelerated pace and need for decisive action particularly interesting, which is why I have incorporated some aspects of crisis into this specialized committee

As your Head Chair, I won't necessarily be looking for "power delegates" who try to dominate conversations or hyper-specific historical evidence. Especially with the fantastical elements of this conference, we can play a little fast and loose regarding those specifics. What's more important is your passion and connection to the character you play throughout the committee. I want to see delegates who really put themselves into the mindset of their character, trying to achieve the goals that their character would have. The impact you make in the committee shouldn't be boiled down to conquering the world or killing a bunch of people; your impact should be in crafting a unique, creative story that fits sensibly with the time period you are placed in.

I am so incredibly excited to see how you react to the problems laid out for you to solve in committee, and how you will try to twist the situation in your favor. I'm looking forward to finding out how you will plan to solve problems and move the committee forward, or if you have a penchant for chaos, derail it entirely. There was a particularly memorable committee I attended where one of the delegates managed to assassinate half of the leaders in the room, which was certainly a fun situation to puzzle out. Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at bentompham@gmail.com

Eagerly,
Benjamin Pham
Head Chair, Specialized Committee (NHSMUNC V)

NHSMUNC V POLICIES

At NHSMUNC, policies prioritize fairness and delegate engagement through structured evaluation, with chairs utilizing score sheets to track comments, speeches, and participation throughout the committee. They ensure an equitable distribution of speaking opportunities, balancing the number of comments and interventions made by each country. Holistic grading is employed to evaluate delegates comprehensively, considering factors such as participation, collaboration, adherence to country policy, creativity in proposing in-depth and bloc-oriented solutions, preparation through background knowledge and position papers, and overall diplomacy and professionalism. This approach emphasizes the quality of contributions and encourages delegates to present well-researched, actionable ideas that align with their country's policy while addressing the committee's goals.

POSITION PAPER FORMAT

Position papers are an essential element of committee preparation. The document should not only convey the stance of the character you are representing, but it should also discuss potential solutions to the ideas at hand. The bulk of pre-conference preparation is often done within position paper research. While not required, submission of a position paper may be considered as a demonstration of preparedness, depth of understanding, and commitment to the topic, potentially influencing overall evaluations such as delegate awards or performance recognition.

Papers are graded based on clarity, depth, and creativity in addressing the topic, with strong adherence to formatting and citation guidelines. Emphasis is placed on demonstrating a thorough understanding of the background, presenting nuanced policies, offering original and bloc-aligned solutions, and using high-quality sources effectively.

Requirements:

- Single spaced
- 1 page minimum, 2 page maximum (not including your works cited page)
- Times New Roman font, size 12
- 1-inch borders
- All external sources must be cited in MLA format in the works cited page

To be considered for research awards, a PDF copy of your position paper must be submitted to this [link](#) by **April 17, 2026 at 11:59pm**.

NON-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

NHSMUNC is dedicated to providing a safe and welcoming environment for all delegates regardless of race, color, religion, gender expression, sexual orientation, or disability. In accordance with the Irvine Unified School District Non-Discrimination Policy, we will seek to make all reasonable accommodations for delegates and advisors upon request. We recognize that diversity is integral in cultivating an environment conducive to developing a well-rounded worldview, particularly in Model UN, and therefore encourage all interested delegates to register regardless of their background and experience.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Summary

Rather than a singular pathway, the “Silk Road” is a retroactively given term used to describe an intricate network of trade routes, spanning over 4,000 miles across land between China and Europe, connecting most of Eurasia. Named after its most renowned product, highly lucrative and sought-after silk textiles primarily produced in China, the Silk Road, as it is defined in the modern day, is estimated to have functioned between 114 C.E. and 1450 CE.

As previously mentioned, the Silk Road was not a singular pathway, nor was it ever traveled in its entirety by a single trading group. Instead, goods traveling along the Silk Road frequently changed hands, working in a sort of relay, whereby groups inhabiting a specific area would trade goods on one side of their territory, then ferry them to the opposing side, where they would then be handed off to the denizens of a different area, in a continuing chain to their final destination.

In conjunction with the immense amount of time for which it existed, the surprisingly decentralized nature of the Silk Road led to a constantly changing web of different trading groups, warring and conquering empires, and even shifting landscapes and trade routes. Despite this, the Silk Road continued facilitating the flow of not just goods, but ideas, religions, and knowledge. The changes in the Silk Road throughout its history have been generally classified into the following, notably overlapping eras, often describing regional changes.

Chinese Initiation (130 BCE)

The formation of the Silk Road began with the explorations of China’s Han Dynasty and the formation of the Protectorate of the Western Regions(AKA Xiyu). Exploring westward, Zhang Qian found routes through the Hexi Corridor, across the Tarim basin, and into the Fergana valley, establishing contact with central asian civilizations such as the Dayuan and Yeuzhi peoples. After defeating the Xiongnu and Dayuan, the Han Dynasty established itself in central Asia, exporting its silks to the area, establishing what would be only the first section of the Silk Road, and ushering in the first period of *Pax Sinica*.

Roman Empire (30 BCE - 3rd Century CE)

Around 30 BCE, after their conquest of Egypt, Rome wrested control of the eastern trade routes of the Silk Road from Hellenistic (Greek) and Arab powers, sparking an era of massive trade along the Silk Road. Roman influence on the Silk Road was expansive, with their wares flowing as far as Korea, as well as massively increasing the amounts of goods traded, especially with India along maritime routes.

At the turn of the first and second centuries CE, Maes Titianus would become one of the people to travel farthest along the silk road, venturing from the Mediterranean Roman Empire, making it all the way to the Pamirs at the edge of Chinese territory at the time, with some individuals in his employ being taken as far east as Luoyang and are believed to have contacted the Han emperor He himself. This sparked a massive period of trade between Rome and China along the Silk Road.

The travels of Maes Titianus would occur in a lull of a fragile time period, in which the nomadic Kushan often blocked access to China via the Silk Road.

The import of high-value and high-prestige goods, such as gold, jewelry, and silk, from China into Rome was highly frowned upon as immoral by the government, although their attempts to curb the use of these products were mostly ineffectual.

Byzantine Empire (6th-14th Century)

It is believed that sometime during the rule of Emperor Justinian, two Nestorian Christian Monks discovered the method of silk production, and several more monks were dispatched to infiltrate China and steal silkworm eggs. This mission would succeed, leading to thriving silk production in the Byzantine Empire, giving them a monopoly on medieval European silks, with one of their major producers being Thrace. Despite this, Chinese silks would continue to flow along the Silk Road, as the quality of Chinese silks far surpassed that of any Byzantine producer. As a direct result, Byzantine emperor Justin II would ally with the First Turkish Khaganate to establish a more direct link to the Silk Road, allowing the Byzantine Empire to trade silks directly with the Sogdians, bypassing the Sasanian Empire.

From the Chinese perspective, not much changed between the rule of the Roman and Byzantine empires, viewing the two as virtually identical. There are claims that during the rule of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty in China, a Byzantine man became a high-profile physician and astronomer within the court of Kublai Khan. Other connections between Europe and China formed during this era, as Uyghur Christian diplomat Rabban Bar Sauma would travel throughout Europe, and the Byzantine ruler Andronikos II Palaiogos was also an in-law of Kublai Khan.

Tang Dynasty (7th Century)

The Silk Road would be reopened by the Tang in 639, with Hou Junji's conquering of the Western Regions, remaining open until 678, when Tibet captured it. In 699, the Silk Road would reopen more permanently under Empress Wu with the reconquering of the Four Garrisons of Anxi, reestablishing a direct connection between China and the West.

With Turks settled in the Ordos region, the Tang government would use the help of their Turkic allies to conquer, subdue, and dominate the steppes of Central Asia in the 640s and 650s. Under the Tang emperors Taizong and Gaozong, China would conquer the Eastern and Western Turkish Khaganates, respectively, fully taking control of the Western Regions. The Tang would go

on to reopen the Silk Road, their portion of the route referred to as the Tang-Tubo(Tang-Tibet) Road, and usher in a second era of Pax Sinica.

During the rule of the Tang Dynasty, the Silk Road would be ushered into a golden age, and massive amounts of trade conducted between east and west enriched the Persian and Sogdian merchants who mediated trade along the Silk Road. In addition, China would also expand its maritime routes, though those won't be focused on during the committee. Culturally, Tang China became very cosmopolitan, as its urban centers welcomed foreign influences.

Sogdian-Turkic Tribes (4th-8th Centuries)

The Silk Road was a major force of political, economic, and cultural integration, as it linked together disparate regions and cultures through trade, forming an international culture with shared recognition of languages and currency.

One of the major cultural effects of the Silk Road's usage was the unification of the isolated tribal societies living along the Silk Road and between major centers of civilization. The wealth and resources of these urban centers, traveling between each other on the Silk Road, were incredibly alluring to the previously reclusive nomadic or barbarian tribes, who took up the role of marauders and mercenaries, stealing or protecting the wares traveling along the Silk Road.

The Sogdians were one such tribal group, assuming merchant roles and transporting goods through Central Asia by caravan and dominating the space between the 4th and 8th centuries. Sogdian merchants were often of Sogdian-Turkic lineage, mixing cultural aspects of the two. The unification of nomadic tribes into military states along the Silk Road would also facilitate the expansions of the Nestorian, Manichean, Buddhist, and Islamic religions into Central Asia and China.

Islamic Empires (8th-13th Centuries)

Ctesiphon and, later, Damascus were the most important trade centers in the Umayyad Caliphate/Empire, until the founding of Baghdad by the Abbasid Dynasty, which would grow to become the most important city along the entirety of the Silk Road.

The influence of Islam would expand into Central Asia via the growth of the Umayyad and later Abbasid Caliphates. As the Tang Dynasty declined and lost its influence in Central Asia, losing territory to the Tibetan Empire, the Persian Samanid Empire would fill the role of the Sogdian traders in Central Asia. Later in the 10th century, the Turkic Islamic Kara-Khanid Khanate would further expand the world of Islam into Central Asia. At the same time, Nestorian Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Buddhism in Central Asia would almost completely disappear. During the invasion of the Mongol Empire into Khwarezmia in the 13th century, Bukhara and Samarkand would be ransacked and burned to the ground, though under the Turkic-Mongol leader Timur of the Timurid Empire in 1370, Samarkand would be revived.

Pax Mongolica (13th-14th Centuries)

The expansion of the Mongol Empire between 1207 and 1360 provided a stabilizing force throughout the Asian continent, bringing about the reestablishment of the Silk Road. The Mongol Empire's massive scope of control ended the dominance of the Islamic Caliphate's control on world trade, as the Mongols would come to almost wholly control Asia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and therefore the trade routes passing through them.

The Mongol Empire would develop numerous trade routes, including new overland and maritime routes through the Eurasian continent, Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Indian Ocean, and Mongol business partnerships would flourish.

Under the stability of the Mongol Empire's control of the Silk Road, the flow of information, culture, and people between east and west increased. For instance, as Mongol diplomat Rabban Bar Sauma reported on the European Courts between 1287 and 1288, Marco Polo would travel the opposite direction down the Silk Road to China. Marco Polo, while not the first, was the most widely read historian of the "Far East", putting it into the public eye of the West. Other Europeans would stay in China more permanently, living and dying in the east. Later in the 13th century, Frankish Crusaders would attempt to ally with the Mongols in conquering the Holy Land, though these attempts would fail, and the Ilkhanate would go on to destroy the Abbasid and Ayyubid dynasties, convert to Islam, and make peace with the Mamluks.

The Black Death is thought to have traveled to Europe from Central Asia through the Silk Road, along the trade routes of the Mongol Empire.

The fragmentation of the Mongol Empire would lead to the end of Pax Mongolica, the era of peace defined by the unity of the Mongol Empire and its ability to maintain the safety and function of the Silk Road. With the Mongol Empire falling apart into different warring factions, and the Byzantine Empire crumbling, there was no more unified great political power along the Silk Road, causing the economic and cultural separation of nations and states throughout Eurasia.

Committee Scenario

The format of this committee will be that of a fictionalized summit between rulers of great powers, or other individuals of vast influence, from throughout the history of the Silk Road; however, the time frame at which the summit occurs will be rooted in a specific time period. The current events of this fictionalized committee will be based on the rise of the Mongol Empire in the early 13th century, importantly, before the establishment of the Yuan Dynasty in China.

Under the Khans Genghis and Kublai, the Mongol Empire solidified its claim and control over its core lands and peoples, unifying a variety of nomadic tribes, and using this newfound strength to undergo a litany of invasions, including those into Islamic Central Asia and Northeastern Persia. Campaigns into East Asia would include China and Japan. European conquests would involve incursions into Volga Bulgaria, the lands of the Kievan Rus, Poland, Bulgaria, Russia, and

Hungary. In the Middle East, the Mongols would attack the Persian, Mesopotamian, and Kwarazemian Empires, as well as the Levant, Anatolia, and the Nizaris of Alamut. The Mongols would also invade parts of India, though their later historical conquests into South and Southeast Asia will not play a role in this committee.

Despite the seeming invincibility of the Mongol Empire during its meteoric rise, cracks are already starting to show, as the multitudinous campaigns of the Mongols have caused a great deal of stress on the young empire. While not an overextension of their power, the empire's attacks have drained it of a large portion of tactical resources, including trained manpower, horses, and weaponry. In addition, the nomadic origins of the Mongol Empire have led to a very loose internal governmental system, as different tribes, as well as annexed nations within the empire, strain against each other, and the now much larger Mongol Empire is struggling to stay together, reflecting the real-life fracturing of the Mongol Empire.

Meanwhile, China remains much the same as it always has, a collapsing and reunifying force, and despite the territorial losses of the Song dynasty to the Mongol Empire, both the Song and the Jin Dynasties remain powerful military and economic forces.

Similarly, Middle Eastern nations such as the Khawarzmian Empire, the Nizari Ismaili State, and the Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad have suffered incursions from the Mongol Empire, reducing their military influence and economic control over the middle portion of the Silk Road. Despite this, their major cities and trade centers remain standing, and it remains to be seen whether or not the people of the region can put together a strong enough defense to dissuade or deflect future attacks from the Mongol Empire.

At the end of the Silk Road, most European countries remain removed from the situation, except for the economic and trade impacts of disruptions to Silk Road trade. As they are not at risk of attacks from the Mongol Empire, European nations may benefit from the stabilization of Silk Road trade brought about by Mongol dominance. Still, they must take caution lest the conquest-hungry nation become a future enemy.

(For the sake of the committee, scale the power and development of the group you represent to around 80% of their peak influence)

When the committee begins, delegates will be tasked with laying out the strengths, desires, and political avenues of cooperation of the group they represent. Delegates must take care to balance the dependencies and weaknesses of their nation, with their military, political, cultural, and economic strengths, to gather the political capital necessary to achieve their goals. The committee will take place over a span of time, so you will be able to see how your military plans affect the situation throughout the session. Remember to work quickly, lest other nations legislate and unite around you.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

The Mongol Rise

One of the key issues on the table during the committee will be dealing with the rise of the Mongol Empire in Central Asia. The nascent empire has great military strength, with apparent intentions to continue expanding its territory, but the question remains whether or not the fledgling nation will overextend itself. Might the correct path be to create a peaceful agreement, or allow the empire to grow enough that it fractures, allowing you to snare the pieces of the empire for yourself? Is that risk even with it?

Silk Road Trade

A wealth-generating trade artery that spans entirely across Eurasia, domination and control of the Silk Road could be a massive boon for a nation willing to risk taking control of it. However, war is detrimental to trade, as attacks and frequent changes in rulers have often blocked trade routes and halted the flow of wealth along the Silk Road. A Silk Road completely ruled by the Mongol Empire would create the stability needed to allow it to flourish, enriching all the communities on it, but is your nation willing to let the benefits of control go to the Mongol Empire?

Culture

How has the connective power of the Silk Road changed the demographics and culture of your nation, and to what degree should you allow it? Expand on policies regarding religion, the dissemination of knowledge, and the creation of multicultural cosmopolitan centers during the committee.

Military Readiness

In a feudal era of warring kingdoms and states, it is in your best interest to look after the military might of your nation. How will you secure your ability to fight back against invaders, invade other countries yourself, and everything in between? How can you ensure the security of your nation?

Economic Role

What is your role on the Silk Road? What products or services does your nation primarily provide or consume, and how does that relate to the consumption and production of other nations along the Silk Road? Do you want to expand your nation's economy and become a greater part of the Silk Road trade? Or more accurately, how are you going to do so and enrich your nation?

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