

# Isolation and Trade

## Invasion:

China's geography kept it separated from much of the world. The Himalaya mountains kept China isolated from India, and it was a very far distance from both Egypt and Mesopotamia. However, it was still occasionally invaded by other groups. Most of these invaders came from areas North of China, by a people called the Mongols.

## A Wall Goes Up:

During the Qin dynasty, emperor Qin She Huangdi grew tired of invasion, so he had a large wall constructed in northern China to keep out the invading migrant Mongols. The Great wall of China as it became known, was one of the largest construction projects in human history. The wall stretches more than 3,945 miles, built along all plains, hills, mountains and even deserts. The wall includes numerous lookout towers that tower 40 feet or higher. These towers would house small military units to keep look out and fight back possible invaders. The Great wall of China is the world's longest man made structure and is estimated to had up to a million people died during its construction.

## Genghis Khan

Genghis Khan grew up on the marsh, cold plains of Mongolia. At a young age he learned to ride horses and enjoyed hunting with his brothers. When he was only nine years old he learned that his father had been poisoned by a group of his enemies, and removed Genghis' family from power. Over the next several years he began to build up his own tribe. His group of warriors continued to grow and they admired Genghis Khan's courage and brutality. Genghis Khan finally got his revenge on the group that killed his father by decimating their army and executing their leaders. Genghis Khan didn't stop there, he continued to conquer other groups and even captured the capital city of China ending the reign of the Jin Dynasty. Historians are still fascinated with Genghis Khan and his brilliant battle field strategy today.

## Trade: Positive Interaction with the Outside World.

While China wanted to keep out invaders, they welcomed traders, who came to China to buy things they couldn't find anywhere else. People came from as far as Rome to trade with the Chinese, traveling a path known as the Silk Road. The Silk Road wasn't an actual paved road, but rather a path that traders traversed across the continent of Asia. There were many stops along the way that served as trading posts, where merchants and caravans would stop to buy and sell their goods. Not many people traveled the entire route, instead they traded between cities or small section of the routes. Merchants and tradesmen traveled in large caravans. They would have many guards with them to deter bandits and robbers hiding out along the trade routes. Camels were popular animals for transport because much of the road was through dry and harsh lands.

## Why is it called the Silk Road?

It was called the Silk Road because one of the major products traded was silk cloth from China. People throughout Asia and Europe prized Chinese silk for its softness and luxury. Silk actually comes from a worm and must be spun into fabric. The Chinese kept this process a secret for thousands of years. If a merchant was caught transporting silk worms out of China, they were thrown in jail or put to death.

## What else do you have?

Besides silk, the Chinese also exported (sold) teas, salt, sugar, porcelain, and spices. Most of what was traded was expensive luxury goods. This was because it was such a long trip and because merchants didn't have a whole lot of room for their goods. The Chinese imported (bought) goods like cotton, ivory, wool, gold and silver.

## Marco Polo

Marco Polo was a merchant and explorer who claimed to have traveled throughout the Far East and China for much of his life. He was born in Venice, Italy as the son of a wealthy merchant. Marco Polo's father thought he could make more money if he traveled the entire route of the silk road, bringing back Chinese goods directly to Venice. This trip would take approximately ten years to complete. A few years after returning home, Marco Polo was arrested. In jail he told a writer named Rustichello about his journeys. Rustichello wrote down these stories years later in a book called The Travels of Marco Polo. The stories of his travels were the basis for what much of Europe knew about ancient China for many years.