

Editor's Note

The December 2019 issue of *Acta Via Serica* examines the flow and exchange along the Silk Road of religious belief systems such as the Goddess Nana cult (Manya Saadi-Nejad), religious sculptures of giant Buddhas (Dorothy Wong) and the itinerant monk genre of Buddhist painting (Kyong-Mi Kim), items such as alcoholic beverages and their related customs and ceramic ware designs (In-Sung Kim), knowledge of science and math related of astronomy (Rüdiger Lohlker) and the travel of individuals such as the Franciscan Friar explorers Benedict the Pole and John of Pian de Carpine (Renata Czekalska) and Korean emissaries and the Korean pilgrim monk Hyecho (Bakhrom Abdukhalimov).

In her article, Dorothy Wong investigates the spread along the Silk Road of the construction of colossal Buddha statues. She examines the religious, social and political circumstances surrounding the building of these colossal statues during the first millennium CE. Spreading from Darel in India to Bamiyan in Afghanistan, Yungang and Longmen in China, Seokguram in Korea, and Nara and Kamakura in Japan. Professor Wong argues that the enormous Buddha statues became a metaphor for the universal dimension of the Buddha and came to symbolize the authority of rulers by linking temporal with spiritual rulership. She concludes by briefly comparing the current wave of building colossal Buddha statues with historical examples

In-Sung Kim explains how nearly five hundred years of constant and diverse contact with foreign influence through the Silk Road produced a flowering of artistic creativity during the Korean Goryeo Dynasty. Through the international intermediation of the Khitan Liao and Mongol nomadic powers, Goryeo society came to embrace a medieval global culture, which included a diverse range of foreign alcoholic drinks such as kumis, araq, and grape wines. The change in beverages drinks led to an unprecedented proliferation of Goryeo

drinking vessel forms and decorations, evident in ceramic ewers, pitchers, flasks, and bottles which became so widely available and familiar that Koreans forgot their foreign origins. Dr. Kim concludes that medieval Korean society was far more open to international art and culture than is commonly understood.

Kyong-Mi Kim delves into the dissemination along the Silk Road from China to Korea of the visual tradition of the itinerant monk and its transformation into an established genre of Korean Buddhist painting, portraying a monk accompanied by a tiger. Professor Kim shows how paintings of sacred monks first became popular in China with Xuanzang, who was often shown accompanied by a monkey. In Korea, though, the popularity of stories about monks who tamed and preached to tigers led to the prevalence of Buddhist paintings portraying monks with tigers. Professor Kim shows how tigers came to occupy pride of place as Buddhism's chief guardian animal in Korea, and were frequently portrayed as guardians for arhats (the highest level of Buddhist disciple) and the sansin (mountain gods).

Rüdiger Lohlker explores the spread of astronomy related scientific knowledge from the 13th to 17th centuries from Samarqand west to Europe, as well as to South, Central and East Asia. Professor Lohlker explains how advancements in astronomy were tied to developments in Islamic theology, as scholars sought to check philosophical and theoretical knowledge against an external material existence emanating from God and used mathematical proofs as a methodological framework for all intellectual activity, including science, philosophy, and theology. He traces the spread along the Silk Road in all directions of Islamic-based scientific knowledge in the form of observatory design, astronomical instruments, scientific manuscripts, and scholars.

Renata Czekalska reconstructs the historic journey from 1245-1248 of the two Franciscan friars Benedict the Pole and John of Pian de Carpine, the first known Europeans after A.D. 900 to complete a successful return journey east of Baghdad along portions of the Silk Road and provide accounts of their travels. Their reports describe the initial diplomatic dealings between the Holy See and the non-Christian world and outline Church policy in Central and Eastern Europe, while their travels opened the way for merchants and missionaries and established political relations between the papacy and Mongol leaders. Their expedition represented a milestone in geographic research by bringing awareness of Eastern lands to medieval Europeans. Dr. Czekalska reviews Pope Innocent IV's motivations for and

organization of the Papal mission to meet the Mongols, reviews the traveler's route, examines the role of Benedict the Pole as the secretary and translator to the papal legate Pian de Carpino, and appraises the outcome of the journey in terms of exchange between Europe and Asia.

Bakhrom Abdukhalimov chronicles the long history of exchange along the Silk Road between Central Asia and Korea. Professor Abdukhalimov discusses medieval wall paintings showing visiting Korean emissaries from the Early Medieval Samarkand King's Afrasiab Palace in Varhuman, reviews records of Korean ambassadors on diplomatic missions to the Turks, analyzes the important historical accounts of the Korean Silla Buddhist monk Hyecho's pilgrimage to India, and examines valuable Central Asian grave goods excavated from Korean Silla Dynasty tombs, including glass bottles, Sogdian statues and items made of Siberian birch.

Manya Saadi-Nejad offers forth a controversial proposition that cultural connections, stemming from trade, spread the cult of Nana from the 1st to 4th centuries CE over vast distances along an area that later became part of the Silk Road, from the Mediterranean world and Mesopotamia to Iran, Sogdiana, Bactria, and the lands of the Kushan Empire. Spurning critics, Dr. Saadi-Nejad draws parallels between the worship of the Goddess of Nanai in the the Kušan Empire with the Armenian goddess Nane, Iranian River goddess Anāhitā, the Sumerian goddess Inanna, the Greek goddess Artemis, and Babylonian goddess Ištar.

The December 2019 issue marks a transition phase for us at *Acta Via Serica*. The editorial board has invited Dr. James C. Schopf, a professor in the Keimyung University Department of Political Science, to serve as new Associate Editor. After transitioning to a new editorial team, we will continue efforts to improve manuscript management and broaden our audience, both online and offline. We look forward to providing scholars and readers with intellectually stimulating topics by introducing issues focused on themes proposed by authors.

Finally, we would like to express our sincerest gratitude to each of this edition's contributors, to our in-house editorial team, to members of our editorial board and to each of our external peer reviewers for all their effort. We would like to especially thank our Managing Editor, Dr. Cagri Erdem, and Assistant Editor, Dr. Young Hee Kim, who will be leaving *Acta Via Serica* after this issue, for all their hard work. We also would like to

give thanks to our publisher, President Synn Ilhi, and to the administration of Keimyung University, for their continued, generous support of the publication of this journal. Now we turn towards the June 2020 issue.

The Editorial Staff