



# SPHERE

Teaching Civic  
Culture Together

## Centers of Progress, Pt. 10: Chang'an (Trade)

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### Lesson Overview

Featured article: [Centers of Progress, Pt. 10: Chang'an \(Trade\)](#) by [Chelsea Follett](#)

"Trade brought Chang'an extraordinary cultural and economic wealth and made it among the world's most dazzling and cosmopolitan cities in its day," writes Chelsea Follett in this article about the Tang dynasty capital.

In this lesson, you'll learn how the Silk Road greatly expanded the international flow of goods and ideas and how Chang'an both benefited from and contributed to that exchange.



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## Warm-up

Students, working in pairs, should discuss the following questions:

- What is 'trade'?
- What is a modern example of trade?
- What are some of the benefits of trade?
- What are some of its costs?

Students will then share their answers with the class. What do students agree on? In what ways do they disagree?

Then, each pair of students writes a list of the costs and benefits of trade. You may ask them to write them on a T-chart.

Next, using their list of costs and benefits of trade and what they already know from studying history and economics, ask students to briefly respond to this prompt in writing:

**Acknowledging that trade has costs, describe some of its benefits. Provide one example of how trade enriches your own life.**

## Questions for reading, writing, and discussion

Read [Centers of Progress, Pt. 10: Chang'an \(Trade\)](#), then answer the following questions:

- According to the article, what is the definition of 'trade'? Why does Follett say that Chang'an—which means “perpetual peace” is an appropriate name for the city?
- In describing the Silk Road as it leaves from Chang'an, the article states, “Goods were passed along in a staggered progression, with most merchants acting as middlemen who only traveled along a Silk Road subsection.”

Using your knowledge of the Silk Road, describe the institutions, habits, and norms that were necessary for this system to work.

	What institutions, habits, and norms were necessary for this system to work along the Silk Road?
Social	
Political	
Cultural	
Economic	

- Follett argues that international trade enriched the cultural life of Chang'an. What were some of the specific cultural ideas—including religious ones—that made it such a cosmopolitan capital?
- What were some of the specific challenges posed by Chang'an's connections to the Silk Road?
- Cultural clashes, war, and contagion were some of the costs of international trade on the Silk Road. Nevertheless, trade continued. What specific products were imported to Chang'an that improved the standard of living for the people there?
- What are some benefits you personally derive from international trade? Describe at least three concrete examples in detail.

## Extension Activity/Homework

- **Conduct a Socratic seminar, panel discussion, or class debate**

Have students hold a Socratic seminar, panel discussion, or class debate on the costs and benefits of international trade. In making their arguments, students should use specific evidence from the article as well as personal examples from their own lives.

To gather additional evidence for the debate, students can also refer to these resources:

[Our World in Data - Trade and Globalization](#)

[Free Trade Empowers Women and Tariffs Hurt Them](#)

[Africa Tries Free Trade](#)

[Singapore's Free Trade Success Story](#)

[Restricting Trade Would Hurt Bangladeshi Factory Women](#)

- **Take on the role of a person in Chang'an**

Have students make a Google Slides or PowerPoint presentation in which they write a profile of an inhabitant of Tang dynasty Chang'an. Choices could include:

- Chinese owner of a silk manufacturing export business
- Chinese government official in charge of regulating imports, exports, and marketplaces
- Persian merchant who transports rugs and precious stones on the Silk Road to Chang'an
- Indian Buddhist missionary interested in winning Chinese converts in Chang'an
- Member of a traveling dance troupe originally from Samarkand and now living and performing in Chang'an

Students should address the following topics in their profile:

- Description of the person's occupation
- The person's social or class status in Chang'an
- The person's possible political outlook if any

- The person's perspective on trade (i.e., how does trade benefit them?)
- Cultural issues the person encounters pertaining to trade and internationalization
- The technology used in the person's occupation and its connection to trade

Students may make a screen recording of their presentations or present them to the whole class.

- **Write an obituary for the Silk Road**

The Silk Road diminished in importance after maritime trade became prominent in the 1500s. Have students write an obituary for the Silk Road. They should address these questions:

- How should the Silk Road be seen historically?
- How did it benefit those who took part in trade along its route?
- What were some of its unfortunate legacies?
- What connections does the Silk Road have to our modern lives?

The tone of the obituary should be reflective of their overall opinion of the Silk Road legacy—mostly positive, mostly negative, or neutral. In other words, style should match content.