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## Silk Road Carved Out By Nomads!



Shrutti Kothari

Nearly 5,000 years ago, long before Marco Polo traversed the vast east-west trade routes of the Great Silk Road, nomads were carving the foundations for these trans-Asian interaction networks.

"Our model shows that long-term strategies of mobility by highland nomadic herders structured enduring routes for seasonal migrations to summer pastures, which correspond significantly with the evolving geography of 'Silk Road' interaction across Asia's mountains," says Michael Frachetti, associate professor of anthropology at Washington University in St. Louis.



Zuluk Silk Route Sikkim.

### #HIGHWAYS&TRAILS

Towns, shrines, and caravan stops have long illustrated key points of interaction along this vast network, but defining its many routes has been far more elusive," Frachetti says. "As a result, there is little known of the detailed pathways used for millennia by merchants, monks, and pilgrims to navigate and interact across the highlands of Inner Asia."

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### Connect the Dots

For over a century, the Silk Road term coined in 1877 by German explorer Baron von Richthofen has intrigued modern historians and archaeologists who wish to understand the emergence of what many consider the world's most complex ancient overland trade system.

"The locations of ancient cities,

Though Inner Asia's massive mountains separated oasis societies living in hot, arid lowlands, the region's mountain nomads were united by a shared ecological challenge: hot summers that left lowland pastures parched and barren. In response, mobile pastoralists evolved a similar strategy for success across the entire mountain corridor: escaping the grass-withering summer heat by driving flocks to higher elevations.

"Archeology documents the development of mountain-herding economies in highland Asia as early as 3000 BC, and we argue that centuries of ecologically strategic mobility on the part of these herders etched the foundational routes and geography of ancient trans-Asian trade networks," Frachetti says.

To test the theory, researchers designed a model that simulates highland herding mobility as "flows" directed by seasonally available meadows. Although the model is generated without using Silk Road sites in its calculations, the pathways it projects show remarkable geographic overlap with known Silk Road locations compiled independently by Tim Williams, a leading Silk Road scholar at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London.

"The development of the Silk



Ferdinand von Richthofen coined the term 'Silk Road.'

As Frachetti has found in earlier research, nomads do not wander aimlessly. Pastoralist movement through the mountains is rooted in local knowledge of the landscape and is guided by ecological factors, like the seasonal productivity of grassy meadows.

Roads through lowland deserts, fertile piedmonts, and oases was influenced by many factors. However, the overlap of pasture-driven routes and known Silk Road sites indicate that the highland Silk Roads networks (750 m to 4,000 m) emerged in relation to long-established seasonal mobility patterns used by nomadic herders in the mountains of Inner Asia," Williams says.

### Cross-valley Pathways

Frachetti, who directs the Spatial Analysis, Interpretation, and Exploration (SAIE) laboratory, has studied nomadic herding cultures and their ancient trade networks around the world. He has led excavations at sites in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and other Central Asian countries.

His field work documents that these societies had inter-continental connections spanning thousands of years, a phenomenon he traces to the antiquity of cross-valley pathways that, once engrained, formed the grassroots network that became the Silk Road.

Proving that theory is challenging because the Silk Road's central corridor runs through some of Inner Asia's most remote mountain ranges: the Hindu Kush in Northern Afghanistan; the Pamir in Tajikistan; the Dzhungar in Kazakhstan; the Tian Shan in



Trade caravans on the Silk Road, Central Asia.



A nomadic pastoralist moves cattle across the foothills of Kazakhstan.

and distribution of prime highland grasslands, but suggests that a broad geography of mountain pasture has not changed drastically over the past several thousand years. Routes oriented for the best grazing would be well known to nomads making similar seasonal migrations over many generations.

Varying the simulated mobility model over 500 iterations (the rough equivalent of 20 generations), well-defined, grass-driven mobility patterns emerged. When the route-building process is shown dynamically, small pasture-based paths appear as rivulets and streams that converge over zones of rich pasture to form rivers of nomadic mobility.

### Channels, not Barriers

While the study provides broad support for Frachetti's theories about the early evolution of the Silk Road, it also provides a roadmap for future research aimed at uncovering ancient structures of social participation across the mountains of Central Asia.

It also offers lessons about the importance of participation and connectivity in overcoming the great challenges that continue to confront civilizations.

"This model demonstrates that these rugged mountains were not huge barriers that forced regional communities into isolation, but acted as channels for economic and political forms of participation that supported long-standing connections between neighbouring communities," Frachetti says.

"It illustrates that civilization's greatest accomplishments evidenced in the amazing scale of Silk Road connectivity often arise organically in environments where connectivity is the norm; isolation here would be a formula for disaster."

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### International Disability Day

International Disability Day, or the International Day of People with Disability, is a day that has been promoted by the United Nations since 1992. The aim of International Disability Day is to encourage a better understanding of people affected by a disability, together with helping to make people more aware of the rights, dignity and welfare of disabled people. International Disability Day is not concerned exclusively with either mental or physical disabilities, but rather encompasses all known disabilities, from Autism to Down Syndrome to Multiple Sclerosis.

### #HAPPENINGS@QATAR

For Hajime Moriyasu, Japan's coach, football came full circle at the Khalifa Stadium on Thursday night. Fifteen minutes away from the scene of Japanese football's biggest heartbreak, his wards beat mighty Spain to usher in a new era for Asian football.

## From the Agony of Doha to Ecstasy in Qatar



Boria Majumdar from Qatar

The beauty of sport often lies in the stories of redemption that it scripts. For Japanese football, Qatar and Doha were once synonyms for agony. Now, after adding the scalp of Spain to a famous victory over Germany, they venture into the second round backed by millions of delirious fans. A generation after the Agony of Doha has come the Ecstasy of Qatar.

In 1992, Japan had won the Asian Cup on home soil, beating Iran, China and Saudi Arabia on the way to the title. In October 1993, the final round of Asian qualifying matches for the 1994 World Cup took place in Qatar. Six teams competing for two spots, with as many as 15 matches in a round-robin format played across just two weeks.

Heading into the final round of games, Japan were on course to make a first World Cup appearance, top of the table with two wins and a draw. But with only two points for a win in those days, only a point separated them from Iran in fifth place. With the exception of North Korea, each of the teams harboured hopes of making it to the USA.

When Kazuyoshi Miura - Japanese football's first modern-day icon, who had learned his trade with Santos and Palmeiras in Brazil as a teenager - scored his 13th goal of the qualifying campaign, the pressure was squarely on the other teams. In the era before mobile telephony, it wasn't easy to keep track of other scores in games being played at the same time, but at half time, each team knew what had to be done.

Japan and Saudi Arabia, who led Iran 2-1, were both on course for the finals. South Korea, drawing 0-0 with their northern neighbours, were heading out. In the space of nine second-half minutes, everything changed. South Korea went 2-0 up, and Saudi led 2-2 against Iran. Most crucially, Ahmed Radhi - scorer of Iraq's only goal at the 1986 World Cup, who died from Covid-19 complications in 2020 - equalized for Iraq after taking a cross on his chest and finishing coolly past the keeper.

Japan's race wasn't run though. In the 69th minute, with South Korea still leading 2-0 and Saudi Arabia having stretched their advantage to 4-2, Masashi



Kazuyoshi Miura.

Nakayama ran on to a through ball from the Brazilian-born Ruy Ramos. His finish was unerring and Japan again had a foot in the finals.

Heading into injury time, Japan's fate was in their hands. South Korea had won 3-0 and Saudi 4-3, but victory would keep Japan top of the heap. But just as the clock ticked past 90 minutes, Iraq won a corner. It was played short, and when the cross came in, Jaffer Salman glanced a header into the far corner of the net. Even on the grainy footage from that long-ago day, you can see three Japanese players slump to the turf disconsolate. South Korea, who Japan had beaten days earlier with a strike from Miura, were through on goal difference. The Blue Samurai would have to wait for their moment in the World Cup sun.

It was impossible not to think of that evening as Japan soaked up the pressure from Spain's

relentless passing rhythm before twice hitting them on the break. Japan completed just 166 passes on the night, compared to Spain's astonishing 992, but it was the unfielded Asian team that proved to be more incisive.

More than perhaps anyone else, Hajime Moriyasu, the Japanese coach, knew that it's how you end a game that matters, not how you start it. After all, Moriyasu had been part of the Japanese midfield that evening at the Hamad bin Khalifa Stadium. "I can't remember the changing room after the game, or speaking to the media afterward, or the bus ride back to the hotel," he would say years later. "I had devoted myself to my World Cup dream. We had so many training camps that I spent more time with my team-mates than with my family. I could see the World Cup right in front of me but when I went to grab it, it vanished into thin air."

Moriyasu played the last of his 35 games for Japan in 1996. By the time Japan made it to the World Cup in 1998, he had made way for an exciting new generation of stars. Even more heart-breaking was the experience of Miura. Japan's top scorer with 14 goals in qualifying as they made it to France '98 and the torch-bearer for a generation, he was controversially omitted from the World Cup squad.

He was 31 at the time. These days, he turns out for Suzuka Point Getters in Japanese football's fourth tier. He scored a goal as recently as last month, and thousands go to watch Miura hasn't stopped running. You sense that the ghost of 1993 won't let him either. For Moriyasu, his crestfallen comrade that day, there is at least some redemption.



Ao Tanaka of Japan scores a goal to make it 2-1 during the FIFA World Cup.

## Golden Generation and a Night to Forget

"Ever tried. Ever Failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better." Samuel Beckett



Croatia vs Belgium

We will never know if anyone from the Belgium management used these words from Beckett in the dressing room at the end of what was a disastrous night. Perhaps they did not. But the team did exactly what Beckett had suggested. They tried and failed. Failed poorly in fact. If you consider the chances missed by Lukaku alone, it was a disaster of sorts. Tried against Morocco and failed and it was the same again last night against Croatia. Is it the fear of failure that is holding them back? If you had seen the body language of coach Martinez and Thierry Henry, you would understand what I mean.

The Belgians were battling two enemies simultaneously with the second no less potent and more powerful at times. They were fighting demons in their own mind. The first sign of victory is evident when the mind is at peace with the job at hand. For Belgium it never happened. They weren't great in the first half but as Beckett suggested they tried and as a team were expected to fail better in the second half.

With the supply line doing better and keeping them in the hunt, Lukaku and the boys had a final chance at redemption. Deep down that's when things should have changed. Some of them got blown away by the mounting pressure and stepped back an inch. It was a scared team on

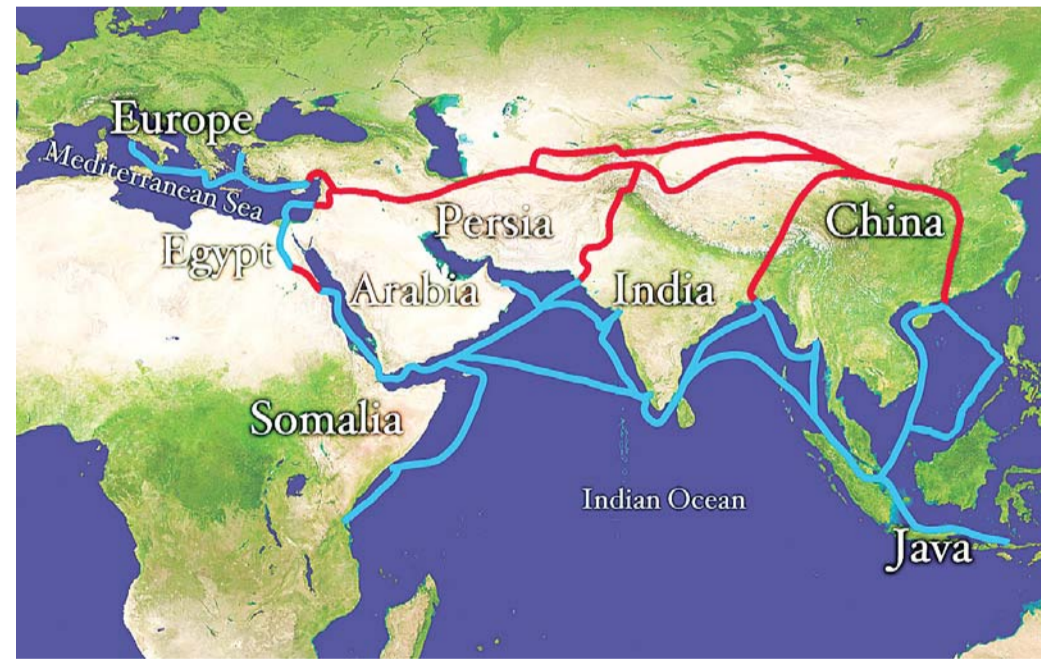
show. That's where the opportunity was lost. The momentum gained after hitting the post was for a time carried forward into the last part of the match and it was time to push home the advantage. But yet again there was a moment of reckoning. Lukaku with an open goal. He has scored goals like these a million times in his career. Not last night. That's sport for you. Real not real. No retakes. No second chance.

Could they try harder and fail better? Or better still can they come back and emerge winners going forward? Euro is a year and a half away and can Belgium regroup? Questions that can go on to define their careers going forward. How strong are they when the opposition decides to have a go and it comes off? More for KDB, what impact will this campaign have on him going forward? And even if he failed, could he fail better at least? Does he have the mental steel left to succeed for his country? For someone who went to Qatar in red hot form the job was a tad more difficult. All of a sudden scoring goals or setting them up was proving hard and as a senior player, it is only natural KDB must have felt the pressure.

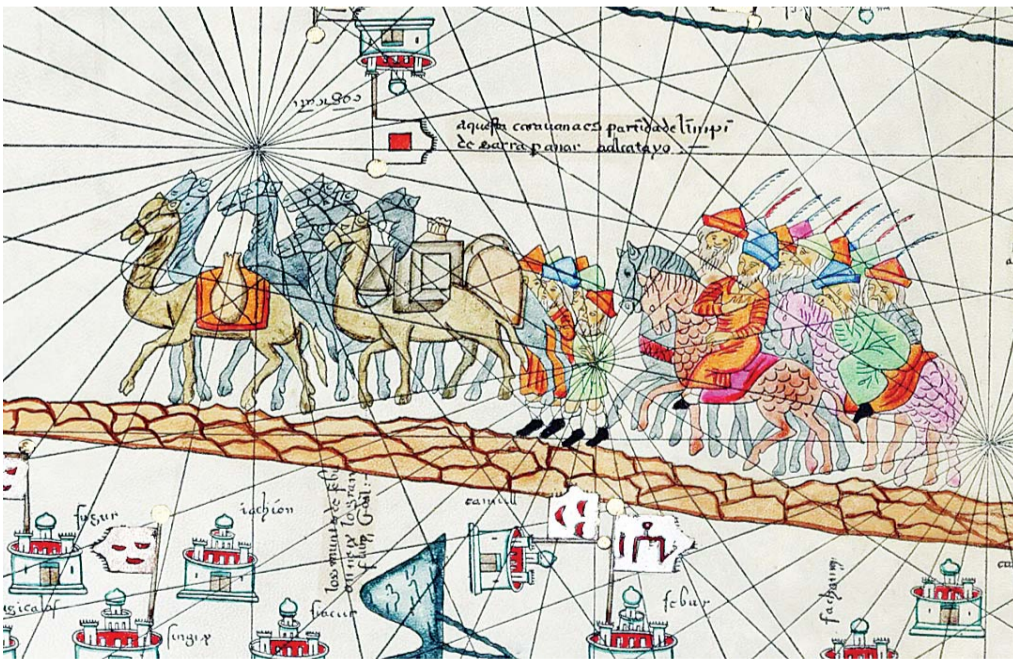
Belgium might yet again lose the Euros in 2024. KDB might yet again fail. But these things will matter less to the fans. So we hope. For they will try again. And try harder. And even when they fail they will pick themselves up to try and fail better. That's what a fan wants. That failure isn't feared anymore.



Belgium coach Roberto Martinez.

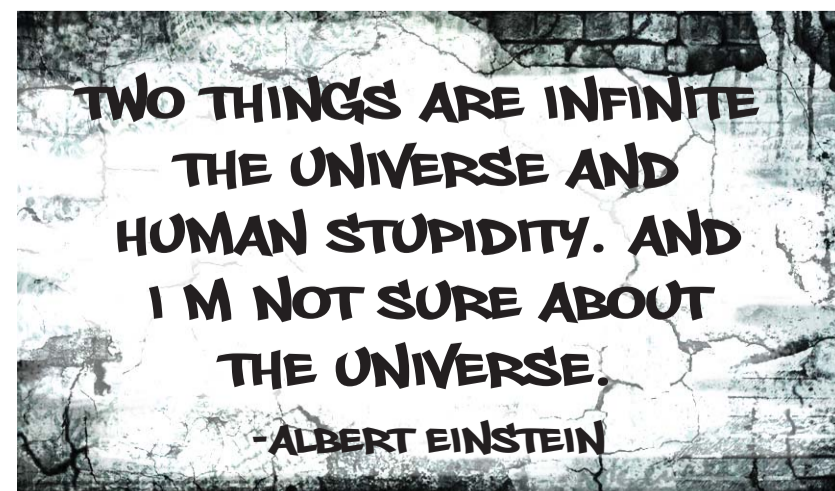


The Silk Road.



Caravan of Marco Polo traveling along the Silk Road.

### THE WALL



### BABY BLUES

By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



### ZITS

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

