

SILK ROAD

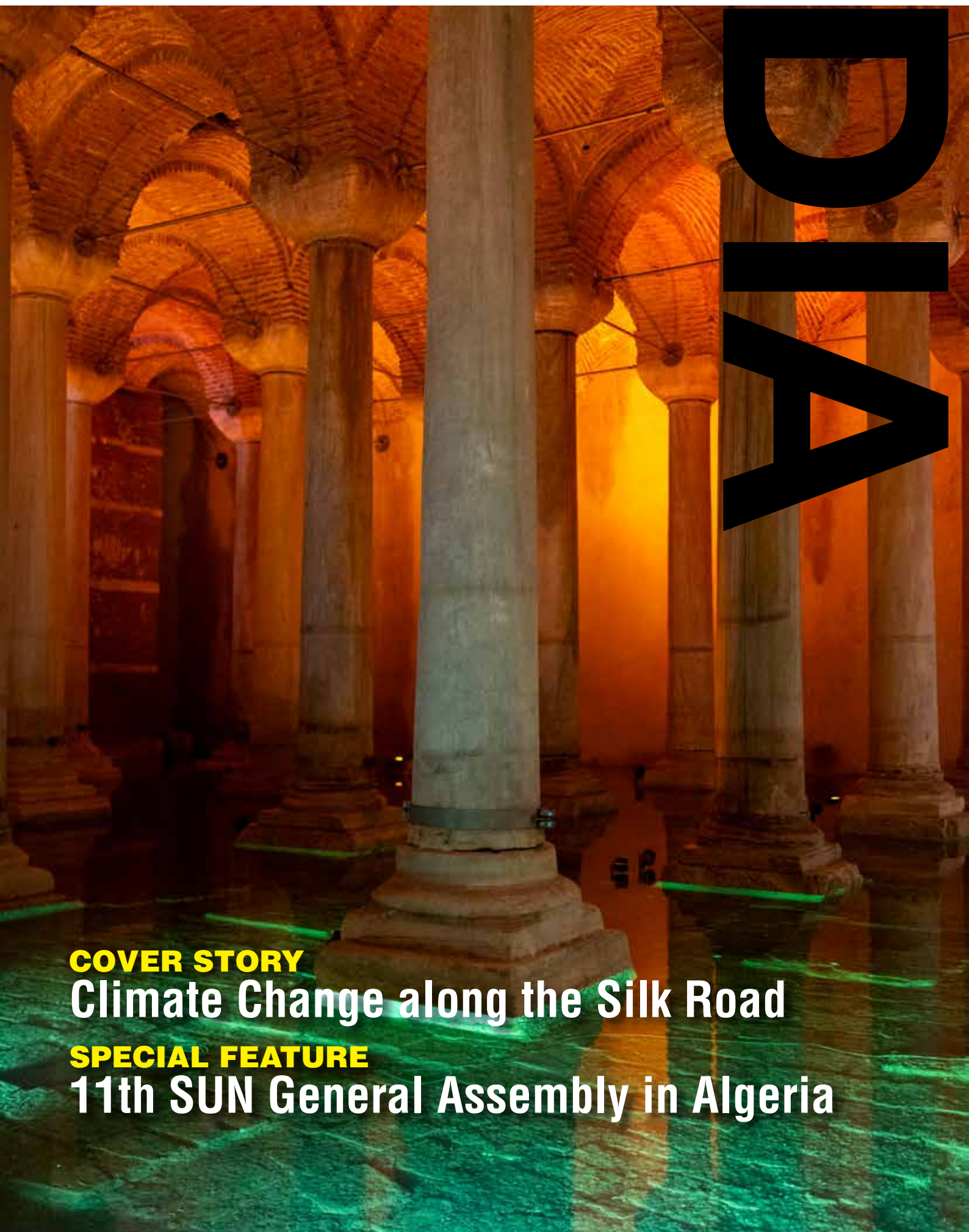
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COVER STORY

Climate Change along the Silk Road

SPECIAL FEATURE

11th SUN General Assembly in Algeria

SILKROADIA

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Shi-yong Chon

A New Chapter for SUN: Climate Col- laboration and Afri- ca

Climate change is undoubtedly one of the greatest challenges facing humanity today. As centers of knowledge, innovation, and international collaboration, universities have a vital role to play in addressing this global crisis. In this regard, the Silk-Road Universities Network (SUN) is uniquely positioned to make a meaningful contribution.

In this issue of ***SILKROADIA***, Dr. Adam Fenech, a world-renowned Canadian climate scientist, explores how universities—particularly SUN member institutions—can work together to confront the challenges of climate change. We are honored to present a series of articles by Dr. Fenech and his colleagues as the Cover Story of this issue.

Dr. Fenech, an award-winning researcher at Canadian University Dubai, has devoted nearly four decades to climate science. He shared the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize through his contributions to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and was later awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal in recognition of his outstanding environmental work.

For the **COVER STORY**, Dr. Fenech authored the lead article, Climate Change along the Silk Road, and co-authored three additional articles with leading experts examining the impact of climate change on the Silk Roads from the perspectives of human health, protected areas, and tourism. ***SILKROADIA*** sincerely thanks Dr. Fenech and his co-authors—Dr. Jeff Brook, Dr. Graham Whitelaw, and

Dr. Daniel Scott—for sharing their expertise with our readers.

A Collaborative Climate Initiative for SUN

Perhaps even more significant for the future of SUN is Dr. Fenech's proposal for a network-wide collaborative project.

The **Silk Road Climate Futures** project is an ambitious initiative that would bring together students and researchers from SUN member universities to study and document the impacts of climate change in their respective countries. By connecting local research with broader regional perspectives, the project aims to bridge the gap between global climate assessments and the practical knowledge needed by governments, communities, and businesses to make informed decisions.

A particularly innovative aspect of the project is its emphasis on student participation. Students from each national team would serve as authors of their country's climate report, with their names appearing on both the national reports and a network-wide synthesis paper comparing climate trends and vulnerabilities

across the Silk Road region. Coordinated by Dr. Fenech, this initiative embodies the very spirit of SUN—fostering international collaboration through research, education, and shared responsibility. It is precisely the kind of project that a network of nearly 80 universities spanning Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa is uniquely equipped to undertake.

Africa Becomes a Key Part of SUN

We also hope readers will enjoy the **SPECIAL FEATURE** highlighting the 11th SUN General Assembly, which will be held in Algeria from November 14 to 20, 2026. This year's gathering is especially significant, as it marks the first time that the SUN General Assembly will be hosted in Africa since the network was established in 2015. It reflects SUN's continuing expansion across continents, echoing the spirit of trade and cultural exchange that once flourished along the ancient Silk Roads.

The General Assembly will be co-hosted by four distinguished Algerian universities located in four different cities: Ferhat Abbas Sétif University 1 (UFAS1),

Abou Bekr Belkaid University of Tlemcen, Abderrahmane Mira University of Béjaïa, and the University of Science and Technology Houari Boumediene (USTHB). Their joint commitment to hosting SUN's flagship annual event demonstrates both the strength of their partnership and Algeria's growing role within the network.

Although all four universities joined SUN only recently, their enthusiasm and dedication clearly reflect the expanding global interest in the network and its mission of reviving the collaborative spirit of the ancient Silk Roads through higher education.

In this **SPECIAL FEATURE, SILKROADIA** introduces Algeria, the four host universities, and their respective cities. Through exclusive interviews with the heads of the co-hosting institutions, readers will gain valuable insights into their vision for strengthening partnerships between SUN and African universities and for deepening academic collaboration across the Silk Road regions.

As SUN enters this exciting new chapter, we warmly welcome Africa as an increasingly important part of our

growing community. May the 11th SUN General Assembly in Algeria be a memorable success and another milestone in the continuing journey of the Silk-Road Universities Network.

Climate Change Along the Silk Road

From the scorched steppes of Central Asia to the vanishing lakes of Iran, the ancient trade corridors that once connected civilisations are today recording some of the most alarming climate data on Earth.



Dr. Adam Fenech

The Silk Road was never a single road. It was a web of routes — overland and maritime, mountain pass and river valley — that carried silk and spice, jade and glassware, Buddhism and Islam across the breadth of Asia for two millennia. It connected civilisations that had never met, changed the languages people spoke, the religions they practised, and the foods they ate. Today, the same geography is being reshaped again — not by merchants or missionaries but by a warming atmosphere that is rewriting the terms on which human life along these corridors is possible.

In 2025, five climate emergencies unfolded simultaneously along the ancient Silk Road routes. Taken together, they constitute a portrait of a region under acute stress — a region that is, in the assessment of climate scientists, among the most vulnerable on Earth to the effects of greenhouse gas emissions that are still overwhelmingly produced by the wealthiest nations and economies.

The global temperature has already risen 1.55°C above pre-industrial levels. All ten of the hottest years in recorded history

have occurred since 2014. Along the Silk Road, that number is not an abstraction. It is felt in the body — in the lung-searing air of Xinjiang, in the receding waterlines of Iranian reservoirs, in the floodwaters running through Pakistani cotton fields at the precise moment the country needed them dry.

Fire in the Steppe: Central Asia and China

The ancient city of Namangan sits in the Fergana Valley of Uzbekistan, a lush agricultural basin walled by mountains that has been a hub of Silk Road trade since at least the fifth century BCE. In March 2025, it recorded 29.4°C — a temperature that would have been remarkable in July and was unheard of in early spring. Across the valley in Kyrgyzstan, Jalalabad hit 30.8°C. In Kazakhstan, the overnight low in Shahdara reached 18.3°C, the hottest March night in the country's recorded history.

Scientists who analysed the event concluded that climate change had made it five to ten degrees hotter and approxi-

5 Extreme Climate Events along the Silk Road 2025

1. Central Asia's record early-season heat (Mar 18–22, 2025)
2. China (Xinjiang) extreme heat and the country's hottest summer on record (Jun–Aug 2025)
3. Northern Kazakhstan spring floods from rapid snowmelt (Apr–May 2025)
4. Pakistan's monsoon flooding with climate fingerprints (late Jun–Sep 2025)
5. Iran's deepening water crisis and lake collapse signals (mid-2025)



In 2025, five climate emergencies unfolded simultaneously along the ancient Silk Road routes

Source: Climate Research Lab, Canadian University Dubai

mately three times more likely than it would have been in a stable climate. The heatwave scorched pastureland across the region's nomadic heartland before the growing season had properly begun, stressing livestock herds and straining water resources that were already depleted from a winter of below-average snowfall.

Further east along the route that carried silk from Chinese looms to Roman markets, the situation was more severe. In Xinjiang — the great desert province through which camel caravans once carried their cargo between China and the Islamic world — temperatures reached 48.7°C in

July 2025. China recorded its hottest summer since records began, and the number of days exceeding 35°C since mid-March was the highest ever measured. Scientists calculated that an event of this intensity would, in a pre-industrial climate, have occurred naturally once every 250 years. In today's climate, it is expected once every five.

“An event of this intensity would once have happened every 250 years. In today's climate it is expected every five.”

The Chinese government's response has been to invest in scale. Construction has begun on what will be the world's largest hydropower dam, in Tibet — a \$170 billion project on the Yarlung Tsangpo river that will produce 300 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually, equal to the United Kingdom's entire annual consumption. The engineering ambition is staggering. The geopolitical consequences for downstream India and Bangladesh, which depend on the same river system, are deeply

uncertain.

Too Much Water and Too Little: Kazakhstan and Pakistan

The Silk Road has always been a story of water — where it could be found, how it was moved, which cities rose where rivers met. The trade routes themselves often traced the edges of deserts and mountain ranges, following the watercourses that made camel travel and human settlement possible. What is happening to water along those routes in 2025 is, in many ways, the central climate story of the region: too much in some places, catastrophically little in others.

In northern Kazakhstan, the spring of 2025 brought the second consecutive year of devastating floods from rapid snowmelt. Parts of the region received two to four times the normal April precipitation while temperatures ran three to eight degrees above average — a combination that sent rivers racing over their banks and into riverside communities whose residents were still recovering from 2024's floods. Hundreds of families were displaced. The

floods were not the random cruelty of an abnormal weather year; they were the predictable consequence of a climate that is warming the region faster than the global average.

Pakistan's crisis was of a different character but equal severity. The 2025 monsoon season, which runs from June through September, killed more than 1,000 people and forced the evacuation of 2.5 million in Punjab and Sindh — two provinces that together form the agricultural heart of a country of 240 million. At least half of Punjab's rice crop and 60 percent of its cotton and maize were destroyed, representing damage worth up to USD 3.5 billion.

The timing carried a particular cruelty. Pakistan's wheat planting season falls immediately after the monsoon; the flooding arrived precisely when fields needed to be prepared for the crop that provides nearly half of the country's caloric intake. "Food insecurity is coming," one of my mantras during recent lectures. "Not higher prices. Food insecurity." The remark cuts to the distinction that climate scientists

make between a wealthy nation's adaptation challenge and a poor nation's survival question. On the Silk Road, many of the countries facing the sharpest climate impacts have contributed the least to the emissions that caused them.

A Lake Disappearing: Iran and the Thirst of the Region



Lake Urmia, Iran — satellite images showing the lake in 2020 (left) and three years later (right). Once 6,000 km² and the largest lake in the Middle East, Urmia is now less than 10% of its original size and is expected to disappear entirely.

Source: NASA Earth Observatory

Lake Urmia is — or was — one of the great natural landmarks of the ancient world. At 6,000 square kilometres it was the largest

lake in the Middle East, a hypersaline body of extraordinary ecological richness that formed the backdrop to some of the earliest settled civilisations in history. The salt flats around it were mentioned by ancient writers. Caravans passed along its shores. It figures in the oldest layers of Persian poetry.

Today it is less than ten percent of its original size. Three years of satellite imagery capture the collapse in terms that require no scientific training to understand: what was once a body of water the colour of green jade has become a white salt flat ringed by the ghost of its former shoreline. Iran's National Drought Monitoring Center reports that Tehran received only 158 millimetres of rainfall last year — 42 percent below the long-term average. Nineteen of the country's major dams are between three and fifteen percent full. A 30 percent reduction in rainfall over five years, made significantly worse by climate change, has produced a water crisis that is now threatening not just agriculture and ecosystems but the political stability of a country of 90 million people.

The drying of Lake Urmia is both a symptom and a harbinger. As the lakebed is exposed, its salt content becomes airborne, creating toxic dust storms that damage crops and human respiratory systems across the surrounding region. The feedback loop is self-reinforcing: less water means more dust means more damaged agriculture means more pressure on remaining water resources. It is the kind of cascading crisis that climate scientists have long modelled and that politicians have long preferred to treat as a future problem. It is not a future problem. It is happening now.

A Route Through the Anthropocene

The Silk Road carried more than goods. It carried disease — the Black Death travelled west along its routes in the fourteenth century, killing perhaps a third of Europe's population. It carried technologies: papermaking, gunpowder, the magnetic compass moved from China to the Islamic world and then to Europe via these same corridors. It carried ideas that transformed philosophy, mathematics, and

medicine. The point is that what happens along the Silk Road does not stay along the Silk Road. The region's climate crisis is a global crisis in miniature — one that will produce migration, conflict, and economic disruption felt far beyond the steppes and deserts where it is incubating.

Atmospheric CO₂ now stands at 426.68 parts per million — a concentration unprecedented in the entirety of human history and, according to ice core records, not seen on Earth for at least three million years. The warming it is causing is not uniform. Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia are warming faster than the global average. The communities least responsible for these emissions are bearing the heaviest consequences. The mathematics of carbon budgets are unambiguous: the proven fossil fuel reserves currently held by the world's energy companies contain five times more carbon than can be burned while staying within the agreed 2°C warming limit.

There is no comfortable framing for this. The countries and communities along the Silk Road — Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan,

Kazakhstan, China, Pakistan, Iran — are experiencing the effects of emissions produced overwhelmingly by the industrialised economies of Western Europe, North America, and, increasingly, China itself. The ancient routes connected peoples who needed each other's goods. The contemporary crisis connects them through a shared atmosphere that is warming whether or not they had any role in the warming.

“The communities least responsible for these emissions are bearing the heaviest consequences.”

What the Route Ahead Requires

There is a temptation, when confronted with data of this scale, to reach for technological salvation. Climate scientists are familiar with the proposals: seeding the upper atmosphere with sulphur dioxide particles to reflect sunlight; fertilising oceans with iron to stimulate carbon-absorbing algae; positioning giant mirrors at the gravitationally stable point between

Earth and the sun. Each has been modelled. None has been demonstrated at meaningful scale. None addresses the fundamental equation.

What the Silk Road's contemporary climate story demands is something harder and more durable: a recognition that the relationship between human economic activity and the natural systems that sustain it must change in kind, not merely in degree. The ancient merchants who travelled these routes understood, in a practical sense, that they were dependent on the land, the water, the mountain passes, the seasonal rains. They adapted their routes, their timing, and their technologies to what the environment would support. The civilisations that thrived on the Silk Road were the ones that understood this dependency.

The civilisation now inheriting those routes — equipped with satellites, climate models, drone technologies, and centuries of accumulated scientific knowledge — has the tools to understand it with a precision the ancient merchants could not have imagined. Whether it has the political will

to act on that understanding remains, in 2026, the question on which everything depends.

Dr. Adam Fenech is Researcher at the Canadian University Dubai. He holds a PhD in Geography from the University of Toronto and has 37 years of experience in climate science. He shared in the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for his contributions to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal for his environmental work.

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Climate Change and Protected Areas along the Silk Road

The boundaries drawn on maps to protect the natural world were drawn for a climate that no longer exists. The species inside them did not agree to stay.



Dr. Adam Fenech



Dr. Graham Whitelaw

The Silk Road was, among many other things, a corridor through some of the most biologically extraordinary landscapes on Earth. The merchants who carried their goods through the Pamir and the Karakoram, across the Taklamakan and over the Hindu Kush, were moving through ecosystems of staggering diversity — high-altitude grasslands grazed by Marco Polo sheep and snow leopards, river valleys thick with walnut and wild apple forests that are the genetic ancestors of every apple now grown commercially in the world, wetlands along the Caspian shore that funnel millions of migratory birds between continents. They did not think of these landscapes as ecosystems. They thought of them as the world. The distinction matters less than the fact: what they were moving through was irreplaceable.

Much of it is now protected, at least on paper. National parks, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, wetland reserves, transboundary conservation zones — the countries of the Silk Road corridor have, over the past century, drawn boundaries around their most significant natural areas and de-

clared them safe. The problem is that the boundaries were drawn for a climate that is ceasing to exist. And the species and systems inside them have no interest in staying where the lines were drawn.

Lines on a Map, Species on the Move

A protected area is a human institution. It exists in law, in park ranger posts, in management plans and visitor regulations. The snow leopard — the Silk Road's most iconic large predator, ranging from the Altai Mountains of Mongolia to the Hindu Kush of Afghanistan — does not read the legislation. It follows its prey. Its prey follow the vegetation. The vegetation follows the climate. As temperatures rise and the alpine zones that snow leopards depend on shift higher in elevation, the animals move with them, often crossing out of protected boundaries into unmanaged landscapes where they encounter livestock, farmers, and the retaliatory killing that remains one of the primary threats to the species' survival.

This is not a theoretical future scenario. It is measurable and measured. Cam-

era trap studies across the range states of Central and South Asia have documented range contractions and elevational shifts in snow leopard habitat over the past two decades. The parks and reserves that anchor their conservation — the Sarychat-Ertash Reserve in Kyrgyzstan, the Wakhan Corridor in Afghanistan, the Hemis National Park in India — were designated based on where the animals were. The animals are moving. The boundaries are not.

The snow leopard is the visible face of a broader phenomenon. Across the Silk Road's protected landscapes, endemic plant species are shifting their flowering times in response to earlier springs, disrupting the synchrony with pollinators that evolution spent millennia calibrating. Migratory birds are arriving at stopover wetlands to find the water levels, temperatures, and food availability changed in ways that don't match the timing cues encoded in their biology. Fish species in the cold rivers of Central Asia are retreating upstream into diminishing thermal refugia, running out of mountain long before they run out of need.

"The boundaries were drawn for a climate that is ceasing to exist. The species inside them did not agree to stay."

Fire, Water, and the Edges of Reserves

The protected areas of the Silk Road are not islands of stability in a sea of change. They are embedded in landscapes that are themselves under pressure, and what happens outside their boundaries shapes what survives within them. The forests surrounding the nature reserves of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are experiencing fire seasons of increasing intensity and duration — driven by hotter, drier summers and the accumulation of fuel loads that more frequent drought has created. Fire does not respect a reserve boundary. It burns where the fuel and the wind take it.

Water, again, is the central variable. Iran's protected wetlands — Hamoun Lake, the Shadegan Marshes, the internationally designated Ramsar sites along the Caspian coast — are shrinking as drought, groundwater extraction, and upstream damming combine to reduce inflows.

Hamoun Lake, a vast shallow wetland on the Afghan border that once supported hundreds of thousands of waterbirds and the communities that depended on them, has been almost completely dry for years. Its disappearance has not just destroyed a protected area, it has destroyed a way of life, an ecosystem, and a significant node in the migratory bird flyway connecting Siberia to the Indian subcontinent. The birds that once wintered there have to go somewhere else. Many of them don't make it.

Pakistan's 2025 monsoon floods, meanwhile, inundated the edges of protected areas across Punjab and Sindh, flushing invasive species into reserve boundaries, destroying nesting sites, and depositing sediment loads that will affect aquatic ecosystems for years. The floods were not random misfortune. They bore, as scientists confirmed, the clear fingerprints of a climate that is intensifying Pakistan's monsoon season at the same time it is deepening its droughts. Protected areas designed for a world of predictable seasonal variation are being asked to absorb extremes at both ends of the spectrum simultaneously.

Conservation Drawn for Yesterday's Climate

"A protected area designed to conserve what exists will fail if what exists is already changing faster than the boundaries can be re-drawn."

The logic of protected areas has always been conservative in the literal sense: preserve what is there. Draw a line around the significant thing — the forest, the wetland, the mountain ecosystem — and defend it from the pressures of the human world outside. That logic was sound when the primary threats were logging, hunting, and agricultural encroachment. It was not designed for a threat that operates at the atmospheric level and respects no boundary drawn by any government or international convention.

What protected areas along the Silk Road need is not more lines on maps but a fundamental rethinking of what conservation means under climate change. Species must be able to move as their habitats

shift — which means connectivity between protected areas, through corridors of managed land that allow migration without collision with human settlements. Management plans must anticipate change rather than assume stability. Fire regimes, water allocations, and land use in the unprotected landscapes surrounding reserves must be considered part of conservation planning, not external to it.

The ancient civilisations along the Silk Road sustained themselves, where they did sustain themselves, by reading their landscapes with precision and adapting to what those landscapes could provide. The Zoroastrian traditions of Iran treated the natural elements as sacred. The nomadic cultures of the Central Asian steppe moved with their herds in rhythms tuned to the land's seasonal capacity. They did not always get it right. The ruins of abandoned oasis cities across the Taklamakan are testimony to what happens when a civilisation outstrips what its environment can support.

We have better tools now. We have satellite monitoring, climate projections, spe-

cies distribution models, and half a century of conservation science. The question is whether we will use them to protect what remains before the lines we have drawn become outlines of what used to be there.

Dr. Graham Whitelaw is a leading scholar in conservation governance and protected areas management. A professor at Queen's University, his work focuses on biodiversity conservation, co-management with Indigenous communities, and the effectiveness of protected area systems. Dr. Whitelaw has contributed to national and international initiatives aimed at strengthening environmental stewardship and advancing sustainable land-use practices. His research integrates policy, community engagement, and ecological science to support resilient protected areas that balance conservation goals with social and economic priorities in an era of global environmental change.

Climate Change and Human Health along the Silk Road

The ancient routes that carried plague across continents are carrying new threats today. This time, the vector is the climate itself.



Dr. Adam Fenech



Dr. Jeff Brook

The Silk Road has always had an uncomfortable relationship with disease. The Black Death travelled west along its routes in the fourteenth century, carried by rats aboard trading ships and fleas in the saddlebags of merchants, killing perhaps a third of Europe's population before it was done. Smallpox moved in the opposite direction, eastward into populations with no immunity. Cholera, measles, influenza — the great trading corridors of the ancient world were also, inevitably, the great corridors of contagion. Connectivity has always carried a price. The question for the twenty-first century is what that price looks like when the vector is not a bacterium or a virus but the climate itself.

It looks, it turns out, like many things at once. Heat stress and mortality. Contaminated water and the diseases that travel with it. Dust storms carrying pathogens across borders that no quarantine can close. The expanding range of mosquitoes that have never before reached the high valleys of Central Asia. Climate change does not create one new health threat along the Silk Road. It creates dozens, si-

multaneously, in some of the world's most medically under-resourced communities.

The Body in Extreme Heat

The human body is a finely calibrated instrument. It operates within a narrow thermal range and spends considerable energy maintaining it. When the air temperature rises above approximately 35°C and humidity is high, the primary cooling mechanism — sweating — begins to fail. The wet-bulb temperature, which accounts for both heat and humidity, becomes the critical measure. At a wet-bulb temperature of 35°C, sustained for even a few hours, a healthy adult will die without artificial cooling. That threshold has been crossed, briefly, in parts of the Persian Gulf. Climate scientists project it will be crossed regularly across the Silk Road corridor — Pakistan, Iran, the river valleys of Central Asia — within decades.

In Central Asia's March 2025 heatwave, minimum overnight temperatures in Kazakhstan hit 18.3°C — the hottest March night in recorded history. The body does not recover from heat stress if the nights

do not cool. Sleep is disrupted, core temperature stays elevated, cardiovascular systems under strain do not rest. The elderly, the very young, outdoor labourers, and people with pre-existing conditions are the first to die. They are always the first to die. And along the Silk Road, they die in communities where air conditioning is a luxury, where hospitals are distant, and where the data systems that would even count their deaths are often absent.

"Climate change does not create one new health threat along the Silk Road. It creates dozens, simultaneously."

Water, Dust, and the Diseases They Carry
Iran's Lake Urmia was once 6,000 square kilometres of water. It is now less than ten percent of that size. As the lakebed has been exposed, the salts and agricultural chemicals deposited over decades have become airborne — swept up by the winds that cross the Iranian plateau and carried into the lungs of millions of people in the surrounding cities and farmlands. Respira-

tory illness in the region has risen sharply. Dust storms of this kind are not merely unpleasant. They carry fine particulate matter deep into lung tissue, exacerbating asthma, causing cardiovascular events, and transporting fungal spores that can cause serious infection in immunocompromised individuals.

The same dynamic is unfolding across the drying basins of Central Asia. The Aral Sea — once the fourth largest lake in the world, now largely a salt desert — has been producing toxic dust storms for decades, and the communities nearest its former shores have some of the highest rates of respiratory disease, anaemia, and throat cancer in the region. The drying of Lake Urmia is repeating that catastrophe in real time, in a country of 90 million people.

Where water remains, it is increasingly unsafe. Pakistan's 2025 monsoon floods, which killed more than 1,000 people and displaced 2.5 million, also contaminated drinking water sources across Punjab and Sindh with sewage, agricultural chemicals, and the debris of destroyed infrastructure. Cholera and typhoid follow floods in Pa-

kistan with grim predictability. Food insecurity follows the destruction of crops. Malnutrition weakens immune systems, making every subsequent illness more dangerous. The cascade is not complicated. It is just very hard to stop once it begins.

The Mosquito Moving North

Malaria was once endemic across much of Central Asia. Soviet-era drainage and insecticide programmes largely eliminated it by the mid-twentieth century. It is coming back. Rising temperatures are expanding the range of *Anopheles* mosquitoes into highland areas where they have not historically survived the winter. Vector-borne diseases — malaria, dengue fever, leishmaniasis — are shifting their geographic distributions faster than health systems designed for a stable climate can track them. A Pakistani physician trained to recognise the diseases of the lowland monsoon belt may not have been taught to diagnose dengue in a mountain community where dengue has never before appeared.

This is the underappreciated dimension of climate and health: it is not just that

more people will get sick. It is that they will get sick in places and from diseases that the local health infrastructure has no experience managing. The Silk Road's communities are not helpless — they have adapted to formidable challenges across millennia. But the pace of climate change is compressing the adaptation timeline in ways that no amount of historical resilience can fully absorb.

"The pace of climate change is compressing the adaptation timeline in ways that no amount of historical resilience can fully absorb."

The ancient merchants who carried plague along these routes did not know what they were carrying. We do not have that excuse. The health consequences of climate change along the Silk Road are documented, projected, and, in many cases, already visible in morbidity and mortality data. The civilisations that managed disease in the past were the ones that eventually understood its mechanisms and organised

collective responses. The mechanism is understood. The response remains, by any honest measure, inadequate to the scale of what is coming.

Dr. Jeff Brook is a leading expert in air quality and climate–health interactions, with extensive experience in atmospheric science, emissions measurement, and environmental policy. A former senior scientist with Environment and Climate Change Canada and now an academic leader, his work has shaped understanding of how air pollution and climate change intersect to impact human health. Dr. Brook’s research integrates monitoring, modelling, and policy analysis to inform evidence-based decision-making, advancing strategies to reduce emissions and improve public health outcomes in a changing global climate.

Climate Change and Tourism along the Silk Road

*The travellers are still arriving.
But the landscapes they have come
to witness are quietly, irreversibly
changing beneath their feet.*



Dr. Adam Fenech



Dr. Daniel Scott

The Silk Road invented tourism before anyone had a word for it. The pilgrims who walked from China to India to retrieve Buddhist scriptures, the diplomats who traveled from Constantinople to the Tang court bearing gifts and curiosity, the merchants who detoured to marvel at the hanging gardens of Babylon or the blue-tiled domes of Samarkand — they were not simply moving goods and ideas, they were moving themselves through landscapes they found extraordinary. The touristic impulse of cultural exchange has not changed. What has changed is the landscapes.

Tourism along the ancient Silk Road corridors is a significant and growing industry. The countries that inherited these ancient travel routes — Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Iran, Pakistan, western China — have invested heavily in recent decades in the visitor economy and infrastructure of welcome: restored caravanserais, UNESCO-listed medinas, high-altitude trekking circuits, and the kind of carefully curated heritage tourism that sells a connection to antiquity. And travel-

lers have responded. International arrivals to Central Asia were growing at double-digit rates before the pandemic and have recovered strongly since. The Silk Road, as a global tourism brand, works.

What it cannot do is hold the climate still.

The Glaciers the Caravans Depended On

The mountain passes of the Pamir, the Karakoram, and the Tian Shan were not merely scenic backdrops to Silk Road travel. They were the source of the water that made everything else possible — the rivers that irrigated the oasis cities, the springs that sustained the caravanserais, the snowmelt that fed the valleys where the great trading entrepôts of Samarkand, Kashgar, and Merv were built. Travellers on the ancient routes understood this dependency viscerally. They planned their journeys around the seasonal rhythms of snow and thaw. They knew which passes closed in winter and which rivers ran high in spring.

Those rhythms are being disrupted. Central Asian glaciers are retreating at

some of the fastest rates recorded anywhere on Earth. Scientists project that the region could lose more than half of its glacier mass by 2100 under current emissions trajectories. For tourism, the immediate consequence is visible: the high-altitude trekking circuits of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which attract adventure travellers from across the world, are offering a product that is disappearing in real time. Tour operators marketing glacier walks are, in a sense, selling tickets to a closing exhibition. Some call it 'last chance' tourism.

"Tour operators marketing glacier walks are selling tickets to a closing exhibition."

The longer-term consequence is more serious. As glaciers retreat, they initially release more meltwater, inflating river flows and sometimes triggering catastrophic glacial lake outburst floods — events that have already destroyed villages, roads, and tourism infrastructure across the Karakoram. Then, as the ice runs out, they release less. The oasis cities that tourism has made

accessible will face the same water stress that agriculture and ordinary life are already encountering. Samarkand without adequate water is not a tourism product. It is a humanitarian crisis.

Heat That Cannot Be Ignored

Extreme heat is becoming a direct constraint on tourism in ways that the industry has been slow to acknowledge. The ancient city of Khiva in Uzbekistan — a perfectly preserved walled city that has drawn visitors since it appeared on the caravan routes from Persia to the Volga — recorded temperatures in the upper thirties throughout the summer of 2025. In Xinjiang, where the oasis towns of Turpan and Dunhuang anchor one of the most historically rich tourism corridors in the world, July temperatures reached 48.7°C. Turpan is already famous as one of the hottest inhabited places on Earth. The climate is making that distinction less romantic and more limiting.

Tourism has a narrow operational window in extreme heat. Outdoor sites — and the Silk Road's most compelling attractions

are almost universally outdoor, from the wind-eroded ruins of ancient Merv to the painted caves of Dunhuang — become inaccessible and dangerous for many travellers for significant portions of the year. Visitor numbers are already shifting seasonally in response, compressing demand into spring and autumn shoulder periods that are themselves becoming less predictable. The infrastructure of tourism — guides, guesthouses, transport — depends on a reasonably stable seasonal rhythm. That rhythm is breaking down.

What the Ancient Merchants Understood

There is a particular irony in the vulnerability of Silk Road tourism to climate change. The travellers who are drawn to these routes are often drawn precisely by their ancientness — by the sense of touching something that has endured. The caravanserais, the minarets, the bazaars, the mountain passes: they evoke continuity across centuries. But the environmental systems that made those centuries possible are not ancient in that stable sense. They are dynamic, they are sensitive, and they

are now being pushed outside the range within which human civilization along these routes was built.

The ancient merchants understood their dependence on the natural world in ways that modern tourism sometimes forgets. They knew that a failed harvest in the Fergana Valley meant a different route. They knew that a drought on the steppe meant a different season. They adapted constantly, because they had no choice. The civilisations that thrived were the ones that read the environment accurately and responded in time.

"The civilisations that thrived were the ones that read the environment accurately and responded in time."

The tourism industry along the Silk Road now faces the same test. The landscapes are still extraordinary. The history is still astonishing. The hospitality of communities from Samarkand to Kashgar is still genuine. But the terms are changing. A tourism industry that treats the natural

environment as a stable backdrop to its product — rather than a dynamic system that requires active protection — will find the backdrop changing around it faster than it can adapt. Responding to climate change represents an ever-evolving societal journey. The route ahead, as it always has been, belongs to those who read the landscape with science and local knowledge, and plan accordingly.

Dr. Daniel Scott is a distinguished professor in the Department of Geography and Environmental Management at the University of Waterloo, and a research fellow at the Canadian University Dubai. An internationally recognized expert on climate change and sustainable tourism, his work has informed both academic research, global policy, and tourism sector investment. He has contributed extensively to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and led research for organizations like UN Tourism, the International Olympic Committee and the World Bank that guide international climate action.

Tracing Tomorrow's Weather: How a Silk Road of Universities is Mapping Our Climate Future



Prof. Adam Fenech

On a bright Dubai morning, Dr. Adam Fenech is doing what he has done for most of his career: turning raw climate data into human stories.

For decades, the Canadian-born climatologist has advised governments, helped coastal communities visualize sea-level rise, and co-authored major climate assessments. Now, as a senior academic at Canadian University Dubai, he's leading a project that stretches far beyond any single city or country - out along the historic Silk Road, into classrooms and labs from East Asia to the Mediterranean and down into Africa.

It's called **Silk Road Climate Futures**, and at its heart is a deceptively simple idea: give university students the tools to understand their own country's changing climate with scientific rigour, and then let them tell the world what they find.

A New Silk Road, Built from Data

The **Silk Road University Network (SUN)** links institutions across Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa. These are countries already living with the fingerprints

of climate change from hotter summers, shifting rainfall, longer growing seasons, to more extremes. Yet the scientific picture is uneven: some nations have detailed impact assessments; others have only fragments.

“Global reports are essential,” Fenech explains, “but they’re written at 30,000 feet. Ministers, mayors, and farmers don’t live at 30,000 feet. They live in particular valleys, on particular coasts, in particular cities.”

Silk Road Climate Futures is designed to fill that gap. Every participating SUN university forms a national team including students, early-career researchers, and a faculty lead. Using a common methodology, they will:

- Reconstruct past climate using historical station data.
- Build future projections with ensembles of global climate models.
- Assess the impacts of those changes on one key sector, for example, agriculture, water, health, tourism, infrastructure, or energy.

- Write a peer-reviewed scientific paper that stands shoulder-to-shoulder with work from more established climate centres.

It's ambitious, unapologetically technical—and deliberately student-centred.

Learning by Doing: The Student Experience

Silk Road Climate Futures is not a traditional training course. There are no lecture halls lined with sleepy faces, no exams to cram for. Instead, students learn by building something that matters.

Each SUN team begins with the basics: acquiring daily temperature and precipitation data from national archives or trusted global repositories. Under Fenech's guidance, they learn how to clean and quality-control those records, spotting suspicious jumps, filling small gaps, understanding when “missing data” is a warning sign rather than a nuisance.

From there, the work becomes more analytical. Students calculate climate indices that capture extremes: hot days and warm

nights, cold spells, maximum dry spells, intense three-day rainfall events. They look not just at averages, but at the tails of the distribution for the events people remember that damage infrastructure and test health systems.

Next comes future climate modelling. Using multiple global climate models under different emissions scenarios, students validate simulated “historical” climate against their observed data, then generate projections for the 2030s, 2050s, and 2080s. In the process, they gain a practical understanding of uncertainty: not as an excuse for inaction, but as a range that can be quantified, discussed, and planned for.

Finally, each team applies a climate change impact assessment framework, based on IPCC technical guidelines and Fenech’s own Rapid Assessment of the Impacts of Climate Change (RAICC), to a sector that matters most in their national context. For one country, that might be wheat yields on a drying plain; for another, heat stress in a megacity; for a third, coastal tourism under shifting storm patterns.

Fenech's Signature: Rigor with a Human Face

What makes this project feel different is the way it fuses academic rigor with a quiet, persistent humanism, very much a reflection of Fenech himself.

Over his career, he has refined a set of practical methods: how to choose the “right” climate models for a given region, how to derive meaningful indices of extremes, how to link those indices to sectoral risk in a way that policy-makers can understand. Those methods, tested across Canada, China, the Middle East, island states and beyond, form the backbone of Silk Road Climate Futures.

But he is equally focused on who does the work.

“Capacity-building is not a side effect; it’s the point,” he likes to say. The project is designed so that students are not assistants, they are authors. Their names will appear on the national climate papers they help build, and on a network-wide synthesis paper comparing trends and vulnerabilities across the Silk Road corridor.

The training model reflects that ethos.

Participants earn micro-credentials in climate data analysis, future modelling, climate-change impact assessment, and scientific writing - recognizable, stackable signals of skill that can accompany a degree or stand alone on a CV.

For a master's student in Tashkent, a PhD candidate in Tehran, or an undergraduate in Nairobi, this is not just an academic exercise. It is a chance to leave university with something many early-career scientists only dream of: a first-authored paper, and hard evidence that they can take a problem from messy data to polished publication.

One Method, Many Stories

The genius of the project lies in its common framework. Every SUN country team follows a protocol that uses the same basic steps for data, modelling, and impact assessment. That means the final outputs - dozens of national papers and a single comparative synthesis - will be genuinely comparable.

Yet within that shared scaffolding, there is room for national stories to emerge.

One country may discover that the last fifty years have brought a slow but relentless rise in hot nights, pushing cities toward thresholds linked to cardiovascular stress. Another may find that rainfall totals haven't changed dramatically, but the pattern has with longer dry spells punctuated by fierce, short deluges that overwhelm drainage systems and wash away topsoil. A third might see their growing season stretch, tempting a shift to new crops, even as heat extremes inch closer to livestock tolerance limits.

Because every team produces a sector-focused impact assessment rather than just a climate trend report, the project speaks directly to mayors, ministers, and business leaders. These are not abstract projections; they're grounded assessments of risk and opportunity in agriculture, tourism, health, water, energy, or infrastructure.

When those national stories are woven together in the final synthesis, readers will see what Fenech has suspected for years: that along the Silk Road corridor, countries share more than trade routes and cul-

tural heritage. They share climate futures, shaped by common atmospheric physics but filtered through very different landscapes and capacities.

A Launchpad for Global Careers

For the students, the project is as much about identity as it is about data.

To learn climate science from within your own country, using your own records, and then publish those results internationally is a powerful experience. It tells young researchers that they do not need to leave home to do world-class work; that their own regions are not just sites of vulnerability, but also laboratories of innovation and leadership.

The micro-credentials and publications will travel with them into graduate programs, government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector. A water engineer in Amman, a health officer in Bishkek, an energy planner in Istanbul, all could be alumni of Silk Road Climate Futures, carrying its methods and mentality into the decisions that shape their societies.

And for the Canadian University Dubai

and the wider SUN network, the project quietly redefines what a university can be in the climate era: not just a place where knowledge is consumed, but a node in a distributed, global climate intelligence system, powered by students.

The Road Ahead

In an age of climate anxiety, Silk Road Climate Futures offers a different way to think about the future, not as a looming catastrophe described in someone else's report, but as a set of evolving possibilities that you can help map and understand.

That, perhaps, is the most Fenech-like aspect of the project: beneath the datasets and indices and acronyms lies a professor's deep belief in his students. Give them access. Give them structure. Give them something real to work on. Then step back and let them surprise you.

If the historic Silk Road once moved silk, spices, and ideas between continents, this new Silk Road may move something just as valuable: a generation of young scientists who can read the climate, speak to power, and write their own countries into the

global story of change.

Ruy González de Clavijo's Embassy to *Amir Timur*, 1403-1406



Dr. Elisabetta Ragagnin

In May 1403, King Henry III of Castile and León dispatched a diplomatic embassy to the court of Amir Timur (Tamerlane), the powerful ruler of a vast Central Asian empire. The mission was led by Ruy González de Clavijo, a nobleman and royal chamberlain, accompanied by Friar Alfonso Páez, a learned theologian, Gómez de Salazar, an officer of the Royal Guard, and

a small retinue. The aim was to cultivate an alliance against the Ottoman Turks, who had recently been defeated by Amir Timur at the Battle of Ankara in 1402. Amir Timur's victory delayed the fall of Constantinople by half a century, until the city was finally taken by Mehmed the Conqueror in 1453.

Clavijo's detailed written account of the journey, the *Embajada a Tamorlán* is, beyond any doubt, one of the most vivid European eyewitness records of the late Timurid world.

The embassy sailed from Cádiz across the Mediterranean, stopping in Greece and Rhodes before reaching Constantinople, where a shipwreck forced an unplanned winter sojourn as guests of Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos. Departing in spring 1404, the party crossed the Black Sea to Trebizond and then travelled overland through Anatolia, Persia, and Khorasan, passing through major cities including Tabriz, Sultaniyeh, Nishapur, and Balkh, before crossing the Oxus River (Amu Darya) and the Iron Gates into Transoxiana. They arrived in Samarkand on 8 Septem-

ber 1404, nearly a year and a half after leaving Spain.

The Castilians spent over two months in and around Samarkand, attending magnificent feasts and banquets in Amir Timur's elegant garden pavilions. Clavijo describes Amir Timur – by then in his seventies and gravely ill – presiding over banquets of roast horse, mutton, and rice dishes, and enjoying drinking wine. The court included wives, grandsons, and ambassadors from China and Egypt. Clavijo provides the most detailed Western description of Samarkand at its Timurid apogee: its markets, mosques, orchards, and the magnificent tent-pavilions of the Turkic elite.

However, despite the splendid hospitality, the ambassadors were never granted a farewell audience or the letter of reply they sought for their king, as Amir Timur's health was failing. They were dispatched on 21 November 1404, just three months before Timur's death in February 1405.

The return journey followed roughly the same route, with a detour through the Caucasus. The embassy reached Castile in March 1406, after nearly three years

of travel. Clavijo's account – likely compiled from notes shortly after his return – was first published in Seville in 1582. It remains a primary source of exceptional value for historians of the Timurid empire, the Silk Road, Turkic and Mongolic nomadic culture, late medieval diplomacy, and the food, material culture, and urban life of Central Asia at the turn of the fifteenth century.

Late spring 2026, Samarkand

In May, Samarkand is beautiful – pleasantly dry, with flowers and fruit in abundance everywhere you turn. Clavijo is happily sipping a delicious bowl of qimiz – fermented mare's milk, the favourite beverage of steppe peoples – in a pavilion near the bazaar.

Interviewer: Welcome back to Samarkand, dear Ruy González de Clavijo! What a pleasure to have you here. Thank you for accepting our invitation and for finding time to meet with us.

RGC: It's my pleasure, dear Interviewer

Khanum, and a great honor to have been chosen for an interview by Silkroadia. I must admit I feel rather embarrassed, having seen the important figures you've interviewed in previous issues of the journal.

Interviewer: In the mosaic of human knowledge, every single one of us matters. You did a wonderful service for humanity and for cultural heritage studies.

RGC: Thank you, dear Khanum, for your kind words. We should also thank fate, though – especially the bad weather. In a way, we owe our visit to Samarkand at the apogee of Amir Timur's time to that bad weather. As you know, we had planned to travel east in the autumn. However, as you read in my travel account, our galliot was wrecked in the stormy Black Sea – quite near the city, in fact, not even on the open sea, still within sight of the Bosphorus – and so we had to turn back to Constantinople, or Istanbul, as I should say nowadays. It was November. We returned to our house in Pera, the quarter where Eu-

ropeans used to stay, and there we found ourselves stuck for four months. In the meantime, Amir Timur and his entourage had left their winter camp in Qarabagh in March and set off back to Samarkand. Had it not been for the storm on the Black Sea, our embassy would have reached Amir Timur's encampment in Qarabagh and gone no further, rather than continuing on to Samarkand.

Interviewer: Well, this time then bad weather was a blessing in disguise! As for food, what did you like the most?

RGC: My answer is straightforward: horse meat and melons.

But actually all the food was great. We enjoyed lavish hospitality all along the road, and food was at the heart of it. Wherever we stopped, a sofra would immediately be rolled out – a leather mat spread like a tablecloth – and laden with delicious fare: bread, of course, and an abundance of dairy, what the Mongols aptly call *tsagaan idee*, 'white food'. This included clotted cream, qurut-type cheese,

qimiz, and very often honey and assorted jams, all mixed with cream and bread – pure paradise on earth. Crossing the sandy stretches near rivers, we were also treated to seabuckthorn juices and jams, a delicious vitamin boost. From humble roadside snacks to far more elaborate spreads, such as the feast we were offered in Erzin-can, the table never disappointed.

Interviewer: In your book you don't seem very enthusiastic about the thin flatbread, am I right?

RGC: The flatbread, incidentally, was not my favorite at the time – as I note in my travel account – but looking back now, I've changed my mind. It is actually practical, simple, and easy to make. Variants of it are spread throughout the Silk Roads, for instance the Indian chapati or lavash – puffed straight from the oven, especially alongside kebabs from Turkey throughout Central Asia. Now I cannot eat kebab without lavash.

Interviewer: You've given us a wonderful

glimpse into everyday food in the Timurid-ruled lands – for those who don't yet know this stretch of history, the territories running from eastern Anatolia through Transoxiana. Thank you very much. May I ask you what is your impression of Samarkand today?

RGC: I had the extraordinary fortune to see Samarkand precisely when it stood as the most important hub on the Silk Road. You could meet the whole world there, and we all relished it immensely – drinking fermented mare's milk with Mongols, sipping sherbet with merchants from Ferghana, enjoying games of chess with travelers from China and Turkic peoples from all over Central and Inner Asia. And then there were all the curious gifts that the various embassies brought along as tribute for Amir Timur.

I remember the ambassador from Egypt, whom we met in Khoy, in northern Iran, and who eventually traveled with us all the way to Samarkand. They were bringing as tribute to Amir Timur a most sophisticated animal – called in Persian shotor-

gâv-palang, that is ‘camel-cow-leopard’ – the giraffe. It indeed has the long neck and height of a camel, the body and legs of a cow, and the spotted pattern of a leopard. I love this name.

But let’s return to Samarkand – forgive me, whenever I start recollecting my journey, a thousand wonderful memories come flooding back. In Samarkand, it was also quite remarkable to see Amir Timur personally supervising all the major construction works, such as the Bibi-Khanum Mosque. It’s a real pleasure to sit here today and watch the world come to admire the beauties of Timurid architecture.

And last but not least – all the wonderful parties we were invited to in Samarkand. It was truly amazing to meet the women of Amir Timur’s family, celebrating and enjoying themselves every bit as much as the men. On several occasions, it was the women who played host.

Interviewer: I have one last question. What impressed you most – something you’d have loved to bring back to Europe?

RGC: I was hugely impressed by the re-

lay postal and courier system – the yam – which you can also read about in Marco Polo’s account. Wow, so quick, so efficient!

It consisted of stations spaced roughly a day’s ride apart along major routes, each stocked with fresh horses, provisions, and lodging for couriers, officials, and envoys. The riders and station-keepers were known as yamchis. I still keep a yamchi horse myself – his name is Oxus. I rode him here today, and he too is enjoying the city; he’s grazing just three kilometers from here.

RGC: Now, I’d like to share a little secret with you...

Together with some colleagues – among them Rustichello, whose name you surely remember in connection with Marco Polo’s travelogue (see *Silkroadia*, vol, 2, no. 1, July 2020, pp. 41–49) – I’m preparing a noir fiction series centered on a detective khanum and her yamchis. Three episodes, each set in a different era: Marco Polo’s time, my time, and yours.

Interviewer: A medieval noir starring a

detective khanum – now that is a scoop!
Can you reveal anything about the plot?

RGC: Only a little. Episode one opens at a yam station on the road to Bukhara: a courier is found dead, his saddlebag empty, and the only witness is –

At this moment a loud ping interrupts him. Clavijo produces a phone from the folds of his caftan and squints at the screen.

RGC: Forgive me – it's Rustichello. Ha! He's finished the draft of the first episode. He says our dinner at a caravanserai in Bukhara last week left him so inspired that he wrote through the night – and now he demands I come at once to hear him read it aloud. Apparently the whole caravanse-
rai has already heard it. Twice. Including the camels.

Interviewer: Then we mustn't keep you!

RGC: You see the irony, dear Khanum? I once spent three years crossing the world so that two kings might exchange a single

letter – and this man sulks if I don't reply within a minute. But a man who turned a Genoese prison cell into a bestseller is not to be kept waiting. Besides, it's a two-day ride to Bukhara, and Oxus hates being hurried straight after lunch. (typing slowly, with one finger) "On... my... way."

Interviewer: On behalf of Silkroadia and its readers, thank you for this wonderful conversation – and good luck to you and your team. We can't wait to see the series!

RGC: The moment the script is final, we start filming – and I promise Silkroadia's readers will be the first to get a teaser. Goodbye for now, dear Khanum, and my warmest regards to your readership. ¡Adiós!

He drains the last of his qimiz, whistles for Oxus, and is gone – at yamchi speed.

Dr. Elisabetta Ragagnin (ragagnin@unive.it) is Associate Professor of Turkic and Mongolic Studies at the Department of Asian and North African Studies, Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Her research fields include linguistics, philology, cultural studies and literature of Turkic and Mongolic languages and peoples, as well as Silk Road Studies.



An aerial view of mosque nested with the density built urban neighborhood in Algiers, Algeria

11th
GA of SUN
WILL BE HELD IN
ALGERIA
CO-HOSTED BY
4 ALGERIAN
UNIVERSITIES

The 11th GA of SUN is planned to be held in Algeria from 14 November to 20 November 2026.

The annual gathering of SUN will be co-hosted by 4 Algerian Universities to present the uniqueness of Algerian academic and cultural activities. This section presents the introduction to Algeria and the interviews with the head of co-hosting universities where the rectors present the preparations for the GA and their views on future collaborations and partnerships.

Algeria: A Western Gateway of the Silk Roads and a Bridge Between Continents



Prof. Mostéfa Khiati

For more than two thousand years, Algeria has occupied a unique place in world history. Stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to the heart of the Sahara, the country lies at the natural intersection of Europe

and Africa, the Mediterranean and the Sahel, East and West. This strategic geography has made Algeria far more than a territory of passage; it has made it a land of encounters, exchanges, and innovation.

Although Algeria was not situated on the classical overland Silk Road linking China to Central Asia and Persia, modern historical scholarship increasingly recognizes that the Silk Road was never a single road but rather a vast network of interconnected maritime and overland routes spanning Afro-Eurasia. Within this broader system, Algeria emerged as one of its western gateways. Through its ports, caravan cities, and centers of learning, Algeria connected Mediterranean commerce with trans-Saharan trade and facilitated the circulation of goods, technologies, scientific knowledge, and cultural traditions across continents.

Indeed, one of Algeria's greatest historical contributions to the Silk Roads lies precisely in its role as an intermediary civilization. The country became a strategic hinge between Europe, North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa, allowing products

and ideas from Asia and the Mediterranean to reach the African interior, while the wealth and intellectual traditions of African kingdoms flowed northward toward Europe and the Mediterranean world.

The foundations of this role can be traced back to antiquity. From the ninth century BCE onward, Phoenician merchants established trading settlements along the Algerian coast, notably at Tipasa, Cherchell, and Hippo Regius. These settlements connected local Berber populations to extensive Mediterranean commercial networks extending from the Levant to the western Mediterranean. Under the Numidian kingdoms and later Roman rule, Algeria became one of the empire's most prosperous provinces. Roman Africa supplied wheat, olive oil, livestock, and manufactured goods to markets throughout the Mediterranean and developed some of the ancient world's most sophisticated urban centers.

Archaeological evidence demonstrates the extraordinary reach of these exchanges. Luxury marbles from the Aegean, fine ceramics from the eastern Med-

iterranean, and products originating from distant regions reached Algerian cities through complex commercial circuits. Although exchanges with India and East Asia were generally indirect, Algeria participated fully in the wider Afro-Eurasian ecosystem of connectivity that historians now associate with the extended Silk Roads.

The Arab-Islamic expansion of the seventh century opened a new chapter in Algeria's history. Successive Berber and Arab-Berber dynasties transformed the country into one of the principal intermediaries between the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa. The trans-Saharan caravan routes that crossed Algeria fulfilled functions comparable to those of the Silk Road in Asia. Through these routes circulated not only gold, salt, textiles, and luxury products, but also books, scientific manuscripts, religious scholarship, artistic traditions, and technological innovations.

Several Algerian cities became major nodes within this network, each playing a distinctive role in the country's emergence as a center of exchange and civilization.

Tlemcen: The Great Crossroads of the Western Silk Roads

Among Algeria's historical cities, Tlemcen occupies a particularly remarkable position. Under the Zayyanid dynasty between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, it became one of the leading commercial and intellectual capitals of North Africa. Located at the intersection of Mediterranean trade routes and trans-Saharan caravan corridors, Tlemcen functioned as one of the principal western gateways of the Silk Roads.

Merchants from Genoa, Venice, Catalonia, and Marseille established permanent trading communities in the city. African gold, Mediterranean manufactures, textiles, spices, and scholarly works circulated through its markets. At the same time, Tlemcen's madrasas and libraries attracted scholars and intellectuals from across the Islamic world. The city became a place where commerce and knowledge reinforced one another, transforming it into one of the most cosmopolitan urban

centers of the medieval Mediterranean.

Algiers: The Mediterranean Gateway

If Tlemcen symbolized Algeria's role as a bridge between the Mediterranean and Africa, Algiers embodied its openness to the wider Mediterranean world. Benefiting from a strategic location at the center of the Mediterranean basin, Algiers progressively developed into one of North Africa's principal ports.

During the Ottoman period, the city became a major political, diplomatic, and commercial center where merchants, sailors, diplomats, and scholars from numerous countries interacted continuously. Goods originating in Europe, North Africa, and the Ottoman East circulated through its port, while the city itself evolved into a cosmopolitan center characterized by cultural diversity and economic dynamism.

Today, Algiers remains Algeria's political and economic capital and one of the Mediterranean's major urban centers, con-

tinuing a tradition of openness and connectivity that stretches back many centuries.

Constantine: A City of Knowledge and Continuity

Constantine, spectacularly situated on rocky plateaus connected by its iconic bridges, represents one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Successively Numidian, Roman, Arab, and Ottoman, it became an important center of scholarship, craftsmanship, and commerce.

Its strategic location allowed it to connect the eastern highlands with the Mediterranean coast and facilitated exchanges between different regions of North Africa. Throughout its history, Constantine cultivated traditions of intellectual production and cultural refinement that continue to shape Algeria's educational and scientific landscape today.

Béjaïa: A Gateway of Science and Innovation

Few cities better illustrate Algeria's contribution to the global circulation of knowledge than Béjaïa. During the Middle Ages, it emerged as one of the Mediterranean's most active ports and a renowned center of science and learning.

It was in Béjaïa that the young Leonardo Fibonacci encountered the Hindu-Arabic numeral system through his Arab teachers. The mathematical knowledge he acquired there later transformed European mathematics, accounting, and commerce. This extraordinary episode perfectly illustrates Algeria's historical role not merely as a trading center but also as a transmitter of scientific knowledge between civilizations.

Oran: A Window onto Europe

Facing the Iberian Peninsula, Oran devel-

oped into one of the western Mediterranean's great ports. Throughout its history, it absorbed Andalusian, Ottoman, Spanish, and French influences, becoming a vibrant center of commerce and cultural creativity.

Its maritime openness made it one of Algeria's principal interfaces with Europe and contributed significantly to the country's long-standing tradition of intercultural dialogue and economic exchange.

Sétif: Memory, Resilience, and National Renewal

Sétif occupies a unique place in Algeria's historical narrative. Founded during the Roman period as Sitifis, it became one of the principal urban centers of Roman Africa and a prosperous agricultural and commercial hub.

Yet its significance extends far beyond antiquity. The events of 8 May 1945 profoundly transformed Algeria's modern history. The tragic repression of demon-

strations calling for freedom and equality accelerated the emergence of a national movement determined to achieve self-determination. Sétif thus became a symbol of resilience and national awakening.

The subsequent War of Liberation (1954-1962) represented one of the defining chapters of contemporary history. Beyond political independence, it forged a powerful sense of national unity and collective purpose. Following independence, Algeria invested heavily in education, infrastructure, healthcare, industry, and scientific development. The spirit of determination and solidarity inherited from the liberation struggle continues to inspire the country's development strategy.

Today, Algeria is rediscovering and reinventing its historical vocation as a bridge between continents and cultures. Major investments in transportation infrastructure, renewable energy, digital transformation, scientific research, and higher education are reinforcing its emergence as a regional hub of cooperation and innovation.

Above all, Algeria's greatest asset re-

mains its people. With one of the youngest populations in the Mediterranean region, the country is investing heavily in education, entrepreneurship, and technological innovation. A new generation of students, researchers, and entrepreneurs is increasingly integrated into global networks and actively shaping the country's future.

The history of the Silk Roads teaches us that prosperity often emerges where ideas, cultures, and people meet. For centuries, Algeria has fulfilled precisely this role. From the caravan markets of Tlemcen and the scholarly circles of Béjaïa to the ports of Algiers and Oran, the intellectual traditions of Constantine, and the enduring symbolism of Sétif, Algeria has consistently served as a platform of exchange and a meeting place of civilizations.

Its most valuable contribution has never been limited to gold, wheat, olive oil, or textiles. Rather, it has been its remarkable ability to create connections—between Africa and Europe, between the Mediterranean and the Sahara, between commerce and knowledge, and between heritage and innovation. That enduring capacity for

connection, inherited from centuries of exchange and reimagined for a globalized world, continues to define Algeria today: a nation deeply rooted in its rich history and confidently looking toward the future as a bridge of dialogue, cooperation, and innovation between civilizations.

Prof. Mostéfa Khiati, Professor Emeritus, teaching at the University of Health Sciences of Algiers.

Interview with Professor Djamal Eddine AKRETCHÉ, Rector of the University of Science and Technolo- gy Houari Boumediene (USTHB)



Rector Djamal Eddine AKRETCHÉ
and the logo of USTHB



Q: Thank you very much Rector Djamal Eddine Akretche for accepting our invitation for this written interview with SILKROADIA. Would you like to intro-

duce yourself and the University of Science and Technology Houari Boumediene (USTHB) to our readers?

A: Thank you for this opportunity. I am Professor Djamal Eddine Akretche, Rector of the University of Science and Technology Houari Boumediene (USTHB), one of Algeria's leading institutions of higher education and scientific research. As a graduate of USTHB and a researcher in chemistry and materials science, I have devoted my academic career to scientific research, innovation, and university development.

USTHB is recognized as a center of excellence in science, technology, engineering, and innovation. Since its establishment, the university has played a major role in educating generations of scientists, engineers, researchers, and decision-makers who contribute to Algeria's development. Through its strong academic programs, research laboratories, and international partnerships, USTHB continues to strengthen its position as a leading university in Africa and the Arab region.

Q: SILKROADIA was told that the 11th

General Assembly of SUN will be hosted across several cities in Algeria, bringing together universities from different regions of the country. As the host of the closing ceremony and the final segment of this important event in Algiers, how do you feel about USTHB's role in co-hosting the 11th GA of SUN?

A: It is both an honor and a responsibility for USTHB to serve as one of the co-hosting universities of the 11th General Assembly of SUN and to host the closing ceremony in Algiers. This event reflects the growing role of Algerian universities in international academic cooperation and demonstrates Algeria's commitment to strengthening educational and scientific exchanges along the modern Silk Road.

We are proud to welcome distinguished university leaders, scholars, researchers, and students from across the SUN community. Hosting the concluding segment of the General Assembly provides an excellent opportunity to showcase Algeria's academic potential, scientific achievements, and cultural richness while con-

tributing to the continued development of the SUN network.

Q: Algiers has historically been an important gateway between Africa, the Mediterranean, and the wider Silk Road region. How would you describe the city to our readers? What unique academic, scientific, and cultural experiences can Algiers offer to SUN participants and international guests?

A: Algiers is a unique Mediterranean capital where history, culture, science, and modernity meet. Often referred to as “Algiers the White” because of its magnificent white façades overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, the city has served for centuries as a crossroads connecting Africa, Europe, and the Arab world.

Participants will discover a city rich in heritage, including the UNESCO-listed Casbah, historic monuments, museums, cultural institutions, and vibrant artistic traditions. Algiers is also the principal scientific and academic hub of Algeria, home to leading universities, research centers,

and innovation ecosystems. Beyond academic exchanges, our guests will experience the warmth of Algerian hospitality, the richness of Mediterranean culture, and the diversity that has shaped our national identity.

Q: As you may know, students play a vital role in SUN through the network's student body, USSUN – United Students of SUN. What are your views on students as connectors of cross-cultural understanding and international cooperation? What unique opportunities does USTHB offer to SUN students and young researchers?

A: Students are among the most powerful ambassadors of intercultural dialogue and international cooperation. Through academic exchanges, collaborative projects, and personal interactions, they contribute significantly to building mutual understanding and lasting friendships among nations.

At USTHB, we strongly encourage student participation in research, innovation, en-

trepreneurship, and international mobility programs. Young researchers benefit from access to modern laboratories, multidisciplinary research environments, and opportunities to collaborate with international partners. Through SUN and USSUN, students can broaden their perspectives, develop global competencies, and prepare themselves to become future leaders capable of addressing worldwide challenges.

Q: USTHB will host the closing ceremony of the 11th General Assembly of SUN on 18 November 2026, as well as academic activities bringing together university leaders, scholars, and students from around the world. Could you please explain how you foresee the preparation of these events and what you recognize as the main challenges? How do you collaborate with the other Algerian host universities to ensure the success of the General Assembly?

A: The preparation of an event of this scale requires careful planning, close coordination, and strong institutional commitment.

USTHB is working closely with the organizing committees and the partner universities involved in hosting different segments of the General Assembly across Algeria.

Our preparations focus on ensuring excellent academic content, efficient logistics, high-quality hospitality, and meaningful opportunities for networking and collaboration. The main challenges include coordinating activities across multiple locations, facilitating international participation, and maintaining seamless communication among all stakeholders. Through regular consultation and teamwork, the Algerian host universities are committed to delivering a successful and memorable General Assembly that reflects the spirit of cooperation and friendship promoted by SUN.

Q: As one of the leading universities in Africa and the Arab region, what message would you like to share with the heads of SUN member universities regarding the strengthening of international partnerships and the creation of mutually beneficial opportunities for

academics, researchers, innovators, and students?

A: Today more than ever, universities must work together to address global challenges and contribute to sustainable development. International partnerships should go beyond formal agreements and translate into concrete actions that create value for our institutions and our societies.

I encourage all SUN member universities to continue strengthening collaboration in research, innovation, academic mobility, digital education, and capacity building. By combining our expertise, resources, and experiences, we can create meaningful opportunities for our students, researchers, and innovators while fostering a more connected and inclusive global academic community.

Q: The SUN network places great emphasis on innovation, sustainable development, and global academic cooperation. How do you see the role of USTHB in contributing to these objectives,

and what areas of future collaboration would you particularly like to promote within the SUN community?

A: USTHB has long been committed to advancing scientific research, technological innovation, and sustainable development. Our researchers actively contribute to areas such as renewable energy, environmental protection, water management, advanced materials, digital transformation, and emerging technologies.

Within the SUN community, we would particularly welcome stronger collaboration in joint research projects, innovation ecosystems, entrepreneurship programs, student and faculty mobility, artificial intelligence, green technologies, and sustainable urban development. These areas offer tremendous potential for collective progress and for generating solutions that benefit societies across the Silk Road region and beyond.

Q: Lastly, would you like to share a bit of your personal life? As the Rector of USTHB, you undoubtedly have a very demanding schedule. How do you spend

your free time, and what advice would you offer to our readers on maintaining a healthy balance between professional responsibilities and personal well-being?

A: University leadership is indeed demanding, but maintaining balance is essential. Whenever possible, I devote time to reading, reflecting on scientific developments, and spending time with family and friends. These moments provide valuable perspective and renewed energy.

My advice to young academics, researchers, and professionals is to pursue excellence with dedication while remembering the importance of personal well-being. Continuous learning, intellectual curiosity, physical activity, and meaningful human relationships are all essential elements of a balanced and fulfilling life. Success is most sustainable when professional achievement is accompanied by personal growth and well-being.

Professor Djamel Eddine Akretche is a distinguished Algerian academic, researcher, and university leader who currently serves as Rector of the University of Science and Technology Houari Boumediene (USTHB), one of Algeria's

foremost institutions of higher education and scientific research.

A graduate of USTHB, Professor Akretche earned his degree in Chemistry in 1979 and obtained a Doctorate in Materials Chemistry in 1983. Throughout his academic career, he has made significant contributions to the fields of electrochemistry, materials science, environmental chemistry, water treatment, and sustainable development. His research work has resulted in numerous scientific publications and has contributed to addressing important environmental and industrial challenges.

In addition to his research achievements, Professor Akretche has played an active role in university governance and academic administration. He has held several leadership positions within USTHB, contributing to the enhancement of academic standards, the modernization of educational programs, and the promotion of scientific excellence.

As Rector, he is committed to strengthening the university's research and innovation capacities, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and expanding national and international partnerships. Under his leadership, USTHB continues to reinforce its position as a center of excellence in science, technology, engineering, and innovation, while promoting international cooperation, academic mobility, and sustainable development.

Algiers: A Historical, Cultural, Scientific and Mediterranean Metropolis



Jardin d'essais



Prof. Mohamed Abdessamad Rezzaz

Algiers, the capital of Algeria, is one of the major metropolitan centers of the Mediterranean basin. Nicknamed “Algiers the White” because of its bright white facades overlooking the sea, it serves as the administrative, economic, cultural, scientific, and academic heart of the country. Located on the Mediterranean coast, at the center of the southern shore of the Western Mediterranean, it enjoys a privileged geographical position that has, for centuries, made it a crossroads between Africa, Europe, and the Arab world. This strategic location has greatly shaped its history, identity, and regional influence.

The historical significance of Algiers is closely linked to its ancient origins and the diversity of civilizations that have succeeded one another there. Founded on the site of the ancient city of Icosium, Algiers has been influenced by Amazigh, Phoenician, Roman, Arab, Ottoman, and European civilizations. Each of these cultures has left visible traces in the city’s architectural, urban, and cultural heritage. The Casbah of Algiers, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is the most remarkable expression of this

legacy. With its winding alleys, traditional houses, palaces, and mosques, it represents an outstanding testimony to Mediterranean urban history. The city also played a central role in Algeria's contemporary history, particularly during the War of Independence, which has given it a strong symbolic value in the collective memory of the nation.

Beyond its historical heritage, Algiers is today the principal institutional and administrative center of Algeria. It hosts the country's main government administrations, major public institutions, and numerous economic, social, and cultural organizations. This concentration of strategic functions makes the capital the primary center for coordinating and driving national development. Its influence also extends regionally through its capacity to host international meetings, forums, and events, thereby strengthening its reputation beyond national borders.

Algiers also occupies a prominent place in the cultural life of the country. As a major center for cultural creation and dissemination, it is home to numer-

ous institutions dedicated to preserving and promoting Algeria's national heritage. Its museums, libraries, theaters, cultural centers, art galleries, and exhibition venues contribute significantly to the richness of its cultural landscape. The city regularly hosts festivals, fairs, conferences, and artistic events that promote Algerian culture and encourage intercultural dialogue. Its architectural heritage reflects the diversity of its identity and constitutes a major element of its attractiveness.

The capital is also recognized as the leading scientific and academic hub of the country. It hosts several prestigious universities, higher education institutions, and training centers that welcome tens of thousands of students every year. These institutions cover a wide range of disciplines, from fundamental sciences and engineering to the humanities and social sciences, as well as medicine, information technologies, and economics. Algiers is also home to numerous research centers and specialized laboratories that contribute to scientific advancement and innovation. This concentration of expertise and

infrastructure makes the city a key driver of scientific and technological progress in Algeria.

The artistic importance of Algiers is equally remarkable. For many years, the city has served as a privileged space for artistic creation, expression, and dissemination. It is notably regarded as the birthplace of Chaabi music, one of the most emblematic musical genres of Algerian heritage. Many artists, writers, poets, musicians, painters, and filmmakers have contributed to its cultural influence. Theaters, performance halls, art galleries, and cultural venues foster the emergence of new forms of artistic expression and encourage creativity. This dynamic contributes to making Algiers a cultural capital that is open to both its national and international environments.

Algiers' role within the Mediterranean basin constitutes one of the most important dimensions of its identity. Thanks to its exceptional geographical location, the city has always been a meeting place for the peoples, cultures, and civilizations of the Mediterranean. Its port, one of the

most important in the region, has historically facilitated commercial, economic, and human exchanges between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. Even today, Algiers remains a privileged space for cooperation and exchange in numerous fields such as economics, higher education, scientific research, environmental protection, transportation, energy, and sustainable development.

The cultural richness of Algiers perfectly reflects this Mediterranean vocation. Its historical heritage, traditions, gastronomy, music, and architecture bear witness to centuries of interaction among different Mediterranean civilizations. This diversity serves as a factor for dialogue and rapprochement among the peoples of the region. Furthermore, the capital's universities and scientific institutions actively participate in cooperation programs with their Mediterranean partners, thereby strengthening exchanges of knowledge and expertise.

Today, Algiers is a modern metropolis undergoing constant development. Its transportation network, including the

metro, tramway, cable cars, seaport, and international airport, enhances its connectivity and supports its growth. While preserving its historical and cultural heritage, the city continues to modernize in order to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. Thanks to the richness of its history, its cultural and scientific dynamism, its administrative importance, and its role as a bridge between the two shores of the Mediterranean, Algiers remains one of the great capitals of the Mediterranean world and a symbol of Algeria's influence and international standing.

Professor Mohamed Abdessamad Rezzaz is a lecturer and researcher in the Department of Geography and Spatial Planning at the Faculty of Earth Sciences, Geography and Spatial Planning (FSTGAT), Houari Boumediene University of Science and Technology (USTHB), Algeria. He specializes in urban and spatial planning, holding a Ph.D. and Habilitation from USTHB, and has been a Full Professor since 2018. His research focuses on urban planning, sustainable territorial development, and sustainable tourism.

Interview with the Rector of Abderrahmane Mira University Bejaia, Algeria



جامعة بجاية
Tasdawit n Bgayet
Université de Béjaïa

Q: Thank you very much Rector Abdelkrim Beniaiche for accepting our invitation for the written interview with SILKROADIA. Would you like to introduce yourself and the university to our readers?

A: Thank you very much for your invitation. It is an honour for me to address the readers of SILKROADIA. Allow me to introduce myself: Professor Abdelkrim Beniaiche, Rector of Abderrahmane Mira University of Bejaia, professor of optics and precision mechanics, who has been engaged for many years in higher education, scientific research and university governance. Founded in 1983, our university has now become one of Algeria's most prestigious higher education institutions, offering a diverse range of programmes covering the exact and life sciences, technology, medicine, law, humanities and social sciences, languages, as well as economics and management. Today, the University of Bejaia has tens of thousands of students, a large academic community and numerous research laboratories dedicated to education, innovation, scientific output and serving our socio-economic environment.

Q: SILKROADIA was told that this year the General Assembly of SUN will be held in 4 different cities collaborating with four different universities in Alge-

ria. How do you feel about co-hosting this annual gathering of SUN in Béjaïa of Algeria?

A: We are honored and deeply pleased to co-organise this annual meeting of the Silk Road University Network here in Bejaia. The fact that this General Assembly is being held across four Algerian university cities reflects Algeria's diversity, hospitality, and academic vitality. For Béjaïa, this represents a significant opportunity to welcome representatives from prestigious universities, faculty members, researchers and students from diverse countries and cultures. Co-organising this event is also a responsibility: we hope to offer participants not only a well-organised academic meeting but also an authentic experience of Bejaia's history, culture, the beauty of its landscapes, and its open-mindedness.

Q: Abderrahmane Mira University of Béjaïa has recently joined the SUN as a member university and has been a very supportive partner. Would you like to walk our readers through your institute



University of Bejaia Source: Omar Hamdi (Google picture)

and share the reason for your university to join SUN as a member university in the first place?

A: Abderrahmane Mira University of Béjaïa is a young but highly dynamic institution, deeply rooted in its region and open to the international academic community. It is structured around several faculties and numerous research laboratories, with a mission to combine academic excellence, scientific research, innovation, and socio-economic development. Our decision to join the SUN network is a natural one. Béjaïa has historically been a Mediterranean city of trade, knowledge, and intercultural dialogue. SUN embodies values that align

with our vision: cooperation between universities, student and academic staff mobility, intercultural dialogue, and building bridges between communities. Through the SUN network, we hope to strengthen our academic partnerships and actively contribute to joint projects.

Q: Béjaïa holds a special place in Silk Road trades and cultural exchange. How would you describe the city to our readers? What unique experiences does the city offer for our academic and cultural collaborations?

A: Béjaïa is a three-thousand-year-old city whose history reflects the successive layers of Mediterranean civilizations. Known throughout the ages as Saldae, al-Naciriya, Bougie, Béjaïa, and Bgayet, it has been a port city, a center of trade, a place of knowledge and learning, as well as a meeting point for diverse cultures. During the Hammadid period, Béjaïa became an important intellectual and commercial center of the Mediterranean, attracting scholars, merchants, travelers, and spiritual figures.

The city is also associated with the transmission of mathematical knowledge to Europe through Leonardo Fibonacci, who discovered calculation methods in Béjaïa that later contributed to the widespread use of Arabic numerals in the West. Today, Béjaïa offers a unique combination of historical sites, natural beauty, student life, and cultural diversity. Its bay, its port, its mountains and the Soummam Valley make it an exceptional place for academic and cultural meetings.

Q: As you may know, students play a vital role in SUN through the SUN's student body called 'USSUN - United Students of SUN'. What are your views on the students as connectors of cross-cultural diversity? What unique opportunities does your university offer for SUN students?

A: Students are living bridges between cultures. They are often more open-minded, more mobile and more enthusiastic about discovering new ways of thinking. Through USSUN, students can become am-

bassadors for dialogue, peace, creativity and mutual understanding. At the University of Bejaia, SUN students will find a welcoming academic environment, a multilingual and multicultural setting, as well as opportunities to interact with Algerian students through a range of academic, cultural and social activities. We believe that student mobility, exchanges, cultural visits and collaborative projects can forge human bonds strong enough to extend beyond formal institutional conventions.

Q: As the co-host of the 11th GA of SUN, could you please explain how you foresee the preparation of the event and what you recognize as the main challenges? How do you collaborate with other hosts to address these challenges?

A: Organising such an event requires coordination, forward planning and a collective commitment. Our priorities are to ensure a warm welcome, smooth logistics, engaging academic sessions and a rich cultural programme. The most significant challenges concern coordination between

the various host universities, transport, accommodation, protocols, communication and time management. However, these challenges also present an opportunity to demonstrate the capacity of Algerian universities to work together. We are collaborating quite closely with other host universities, sharing information, harmonising our programmes and coordinating our responsibilities with the aim of offering participants a cohesive and memorable experience.

Q: As a young partner of the SUN network, what would you like to share with the heads of the member universities of SUN on strengthening partnerships and creating mutually winning space for scholars, academics, and students?

A: As a young partner of SUN, we believe that the strength of the consortium lies in a correct, balanced, and sustainable cooperation. Relationships should not be limited to formal or ceremonial meetings; they should generate real opportunities for students, researchers, and academic

staff. We encourage the development of joint research projects, the co-supervision of doctoral theses, exchange programmes, summer schools, cultural initiatives, and digital collaboration. A mutually beneficial environment is created when each university contributes according to its strengths and benefits from shared knowledge, trust, and long-term commitment.

Q: Lastly, would you like to share a bit of your personal life - as a rector you must have quite a busy schedule. How do you spend your free time? Do you have recommendations for our readers to have work-life balance?

A: The role of rector is indeed demanding, because a university is a living institution that requires constant attention. However, I believe that balance is essential for maintaining clarity of mind and making sound decisions. In my free time, I try to stay close to my family, read and enjoy quiet moments as much as possible. Béjaïa also offers magnificent natural spaces that invite reflection and renewal. My modest

recommendation is to preserve time for family, culture, health and inner balance. A manager must work with seriousness and commitment, but must also preserve the personal energy necessary to serve others with clarity and dedication.

Mr. Abdelkrim Beniaiche is a Professor in the field of optics and precision mechanics. After obtaining his baccalaureate in mathematics in June 1981, he continued his studies at the University of Sétif, where he obtained his engineering degree. His passion for research prompted him to deepen his knowledge, leading him to obtain a Magister degree in technical optics in 1995. He then defended his doctoral thesis in optics and precision mechanics on the subject of "Study of the Optical Bistability of Lasers with Saturable Absorbers in a Multimode Fabry-Pérot Resonator with Inhomogeneous Broadening."

Mr. Beniaiche has held several positions of responsibility at the University of Sétif, including that of head of the instrumental optics and photonics speciality. He was the director of the Photonic Systems and Nonlinear Optics Laboratory from 2005 to October 2015, director of the Institute of Optics and Precision Mechanics from June 2010 to March 2013, and Vice-rector in charge of external exchanges, cooperation, animation, communication and scientific events from March 2013 to July 2015.

In parallel to his teaching activities, Mr. Beniaiche's career has been distinguished by his numerous publications and presentations at international conferences. He has also taken part in various research projects and has supervised doctoral theses and master's dissertations. Furthermore, his experience as an athlete and sports manager led him to serve four terms as Vice-President of the Algerian University Sports Federation, once as Chairman of the Technical Commission of the Arab University Sports

Union in Abu Dhabi, and to take part in several Universiades around the world.

Additionally, due to his significant contributions and exemplary commitment to higher education, he was promoted to the position of Rector, heading the University of Bordj Bou Arréridj from July 2015 to July 2019, then the University of Sétif 1 (Ferhat Abbas) from July 2019 to May 2021, before joining the University of Bejaia in May 2021.

Mr. Beniaiche, rector of Bejaia University, distinguished himself internationally in 2025, winning the “Virtue and Knowledge” prize in its special “Mare Nostrum” category at the 9th edition of the eponymous festival, held on Saturday, June 21, 2025, in Porto Cesareo, Italy. This prestigious prize recognizes committed individuals whose social, civic, and cultural impact extends throughout the Mediterranean Basin and is awarded by the Italian Association Mediterranea Mente, on the recommendation of UNIMED (Union of Mediterranean Universities).

Mr. Beniaiche continues to inspire his students and colleagues through his passion for teaching and research, while asserting that academic ethics and deontology are the only path to the promotion and development of the Algerian university system.

Bejaia Through the Centuries



A view of the city of Bejaia



Prof. Settar OUATMANI

Bejaia, a three-thousand-year-old city, has experienced since ancient times a rich history marked by political, military

and cultural events, along with profound economic and social changes. Throughout history, it has been known by various names, including Asselden, Saldae, al-Naciriya, Bougie, Bgayet and Bejaïa. By its privileged position on the Mediterranean Sea, it has flourished as a true crossroads of sciences, civilisations, exchanges and multiculturalism.

A former trading post frequented by the Phoenicians, merchants and navigators, Bejaïa witnessed the founding of the colony of Saldae during the Roman era under the Emperor Augustus, around 27 BC. This territory was then part of Caesariensis Mauretania. Another colony was established about thirty kilometers from Bejaïa: Tubusuctu, present-day Tiklat. Saldae and its surroundings thus became a place of settlement, trade, and urban development, whose remains still recall the long history of human presence in the region.

The arrival of Islam in the Maghreb, from the 7th century AD onwards, profoundly transformed the region's history. Bejaia and its population were deeply affected by these changes. According to Ibn

Khaldoun, the city's inhabitants belonged in particular to the Kutama, a large Berber tribe present in the eastern part of the central Maghreb, notably in the regions of Bejaia, Jijel, Setif, Constantine and Annaba. Under the authority of the governor of Kairouan, the region of Bejaia experienced periods of relative autonomy interspersed with periods of subordination to successive dynasties, until the Hammadid era.

Under the rule of this dynasty, the new city of al-Naciriya was founded. This was a time of greatness. As the capital of the Banû Hammad from the second half of the 11th century onwards, Bejaia became a city of Mediterranean renown and a major centre of civilisation. Its founder, Nacer Ibn Alinas, and his son al-Mansur made great efforts to build splendid palaces and castles, of which unfortunately few traces remain today. Trade flourished, particularly through the port, and craft and industrial activities experienced a significant growth.

Bejaia, a city of openness and tolerance, then became a center of knowledge that attracted students, merchants, trav-

elers and scholars from different backgrounds. It played a significant role in the transmission of mathematical knowledge to the West. The famous Italian mathematician Leonardo Fibonacci spent time there in his youth, with his merchant father, and discovered the calculation methods used in the Arab-Muslim world, which then contributed to the spread of Arabic numerals in Europe. In the 12th century, the great Sufi master Abou Madyane Chouiab also stayed at Bejaïa before moving to Tlemcen, where he died.

In 1152, Béjaïa was taken by the Almohads. From that time to 1510, it was shaken by various political crises and power struggles. It was briefly dominated by Ibn Ghania, captured by the Almohads, then came under the influence of the Hafsid and Marinid dynasties; the Zianides attempts to take permanent control of the city remained without a follow-up. However, this city continued to attract renowned visitors, travelers, jurisconsults, scholars and mystics. The example of Ibn Khaldun, who stayed there between 1352-1354 and then between 1365-1366, illustrates the in-

tellectual prestige of the city. We can also mention the Sufi master Yahya al-Idli, who died in 1477.

During this period, Béjaia welcomed other prominent figures from the Maghreb, Europe and Andalusia who sought to perfect their knowledge in the religious, literary and scientific fields. Among them were the Sicilian poet Ibn Hamdis, the algebra scholar al-Qurashi, the great Andalusian thinker Ibn al-Arabi, the famous traveller Ibn Battuta, and Ibn Toumert, a major figure in the religious and political history of the Maghreb.

At the beginning of the 16th century, Spanish attacks on the Maghreb coast intensified. After Mers el-Kébir in 1505 and Oran in 1509, Bejaïa was captured in 1510 by troops commanded by Pedro de Navarro, despite the resistance of its last governor. For forty-five years, the Spanish held the city and repelled all attempts to liberate it.

The Spanish occupation ended in 1555. Attacked by sea and land by the troops of Beylerbey Salah Raïs, Bejaïa was recaptured by the Ottomans. Initially at-

tached to Algiers, the former Hammadid capital then became part of the Beylik of Constantine from 1567 until the French conquest.

After the French capture of Algiers, the Algerian coastal cities suffered the same fate one after another. Bejaïa was occupied by General Trézel's troops at the end of 1833. Two years later, entire neighborhoods of the city were razed to the ground by the new authorities, leading to the departure of part of the population and the gradual construction of a new city wall. During the colonial era, Bejaïa, called Bougie by the French, was a sub-prefecture dependent on the department of Constantine. While the city experienced growth in its economic, commercial, and tourist activities, revolts periodically shook the colonial authority. With the rise and evolution of Algerian nationalism, Bejaïa lived to the rhythm of the peaceful political struggle led by its own activists.

During the War of National Liberation, the population of Bejaïa made its presence felt not only through the direct involvement of its citizens in the National

Liberation Front, but also through their active support for the Revolution. The region was the setting of one of the key events in contemporary Algerian history: the Soummam Congress, held on August 20, 1956, in Ifri-Ouzellaguen, a pivotal moment in the political and military organization of the Revolution.

Today, several buildings still stand: Bordj Moussa, the Casbah, Fort Abdelkader, Bab El Fouka, one of the old gates of Bejaïa, Fort Gouraya, Cap Carbon, the Countess's Castle, and the remains of the old city. These historical sites, along with the bay, the port, the Soummam Valley, and Mount Gouraya, make Bejaïa a city where natural beauty meets a millennia-old history. A Mediterranean, university, and welcoming city, Bejaïa remains today faithful to its heritage: that of a place for encounters, knowledge, exchange, and dialogue between peoples.

Prof. Settar OUATMANI is a professor of history at the University of Bejaia and a specialist in contemporary Algeria, particularly the resistance movements of the 19th century, the national movement and the Algerian Revolution.

Interview with the Rector of Abou Bekr Belkaid University of Tlemcen



Rector Mourad Meghachou and the logo of the University

Q: Thank you very much rector Mourad Meghachou for accepting our invitation for the written interview with SILKROADIA. Would you like to introduce yourself and the university to our readers?

A: I am Professor Mourad Meghachou, Rector of Abou Bekr Belkaid University of Tlemcen. I hold a PhD in Civil Engineering, specializing in Geotechnical Engineering, from Joseph Fourier University in Grenoble, France. It is a great honor for me to lead one of Algeria's major universities. With nearly 40,000 students, including a large community of doctoral candidates, our university offers a wide range of academic programs and is deeply committed to excellence in education, scientific research, innovation, and international cooperation. Through numerous partnerships with universities and research institutions around the world, we strive to provide our students and researchers with an open, dynamic, and globally connected environment, preparing them to contribute to the scientific, technological, and societal challenges of the future.

Q: SILKORADIA was told that this year the General Assembly of SUN will be held in 4 different cities collaborating with four different universities in Alge-

ria. How do you feel about co-hosting this annual gathering of SUN in Tlemcen of Algeria?

A: For me, co-hosting the 11th SUN General Assembly is a source of great pride. It reflects the increasing international recognition of our university and our commitment to global academic cooperation. Beyond the institutional dimension, this gathering will bring together scholars and university leaders from different cultures to exchange ideas, share experiences, and build new partnerships in research, innovation, and mobility. It is also a privilege to welcome our guests to Tlemcen and offer them the opportunity to discover one of Algeria's most beautiful historical cities and experience the generosity and hospitality of our people.

Q: University of Aboubekr Belkaid Tlemcen has recently joined the SUN as a member university and has been a very supportive partner. Would you like to walk our readers through your institute and share the reason for your universi-

ty to join SUN as a member university in the first place

A: We joined the SUN network because we believe that universities have a shared responsibility to work together in addressing global challenges. Internationalization is a central pillar of our university's strategy, and SUN offers a unique environment where institutions can exchange ideas, share expertise, and create opportunities for collaboration. Through this network, we aim to strengthen academic mobility, foster interdisciplinary research, and establish lasting partnerships that benefit our students, researchers, and society as a whole.

Q: Tlemcen holds a special place in silk road trades and cultural exchange. How would you describe the city to our readers? What unique experiences offer the city for our academic and cultural collaborations?

A: Tlemcen, often called the “Pearl of the Maghreb,” is a city where history, culture,



University of Tlemcen

and innovation come together. Located in northwestern Algeria, it has been a crossroads of civilizations and a center of trade, scholarship, and intercultural exchange for centuries. The city is renowned for its architectural heritage, Andalusian music, refined cuisine, and warm hospitality. At the same time, Tlemcen is looking confidently to the future through its dynamic university community, growing international connections, and commitment to education, research, and sustainable development, making it a vibrant and forward-looking destination.

Q: As you may know, students play a vi-

tal role in SUN through the SUN's student body called 'USSUN - United Students of SUN'. What are your views on the students as connectors of cross cultural diversity? What unique opportunities does your university offer for SUN students?

A: Students are the true ambassadors of intercultural understanding and one of the greatest strengths of the SUN network. Through their curiosity, openness, and creativity, they build bridges between cultures and contribute to a more inclusive and interconnected world. At Abou Bekr Belkaid University of Tlemcen, we encourage this global outlook by offering a multicultural academic environment, opportunities for student mobility and research collaboration, and a rich cultural heritage that enables SUN students to experience firsthand the dialogue between civilizations and the values of diversity, mutual respect, and international cooperation.

Q: As the co-host of the 11th GA of SUN,

could you please explain how do you foresee the preparation of the event and what do you recognize as the main challenges? How do you collaborate with other hosts to address these challenges?

A: The preparation of this General Assembly is much more than an organizational exercise; it is a collective journey that brings together our administrative, academic, and technical communities around a shared vision. Working hand in hand with the other host universities, we are committed to creating an enriching and memorable experience for all participants. While international coordination and logistics require considerable effort, they also provide an opportunity to deepen our cooperation and reinforce the bonds that unite us. In many ways, this collaborative process already reflects the very essence of the SUN network: partnership, trust, and a shared commitment to academic excellence and global engagement.

Q: As a young partner of the SUN net-

work, what would you like to share with the heads of the member universities of SUN on strengthening partnerships and creating mutually winning space for scholars, academics, and students?

A: As a young partner of the SUN network, we join this community with enthusiasm, humility, and a strong sense of purpose. We believe that the future of higher education lies in deeper international cooperation and in partnerships that create value for all participants. Our ambition is to move beyond traditional exchanges and build a dynamic space where knowledge, talent, and innovation circulate freely across borders. By strengthening academic mobility, collaborative research, and intercultural dialogue, we can empower our students and scholars to become global citizens and co-creators of solutions to the challenges facing our world. Together, let us make SUN not only a network of universities, but a community of shared aspirations, mutual learning, and collective progress.

Q: Lastly, would you like to share a bit of your personal life - as a rector you must have a quite busy schedule. How do you spend your free time? Do you have recommendations for our readers to have work-life balance?

A: Despite a particularly demanding schedule, I always make time for reading, scientific reflection, and moments shared with my family. I firmly believe that maintaining a healthy balance between professional responsibilities and personal life is essential to sustaining energy, creativity, and the ability to listen and connect with others. My advice to everyone is to preserve time for their passions, nurture meaningful human relationships, and remember that personal fulfillment is an important source of both inspiration and professional effectiveness.

Professor Mourad Meghachou, 62 years old, married and father of three children, has been the Rector of Abou Bekr-Belkaid University of Tlemcen since November 2021. He graduated as a Civil Engineering State Engineer in 1988 from the University of Sciences and Technology of Oran (Algeria). He also holds a Diploma of

Advanced Studies in Mechanics from the National Polytechnic Institute of Grenoble (France) obtained in 1989, and a Ph.D. from Joseph Fourier University of Grenoble in Soil Mechanics in 1993. His thesis on “soil liquefaction: experiments and modelling” was conducted at the 3S-R laboratory in Grenoble, France. After serving as a Temporary Teaching and Research Assistant (Attaché à l’Enseignement et à La Recherche, ATER) at Joseph Fourier University of Grenoble, he pursued a Post-Doctoral fellowship at the IMG laboratory in Grenoble until 1996, where he worked on applying the method of stereophotogrammetry of false relief for determining the location of deformation of planar objects. Since 1999, he has been a lecturer-researcher at Djillali Liabes University of Sidi Bel Abbes (Algeria), where he holds the position of team leader in Structural Modeling and Geotechnics at the Civil Engineering and Environment Laboratory of Sidi Bel Abbes. He has supervised several Ph.D. theses and Magister theses in geotechnical engineering and the behavior of materials under various loading conditions. He has also held several leadership positions at this university, including as deputy and then head of the civil engineering department, vice-dean responsible for research and postgraduate studies at the faculty of technology, and vice-rector responsible for research and postgraduate studies. From 2018 to 2021, he served as the Rector of Sidi Bel Abbes University. He is also the chairman of the board of several Algerian universities and higher education institutions. As the Rector of the University of Tlemcen, he manages and coordinates all faculties of Higher Education and Scientific Research, including the faculties of Medicine and Biology, thus contributing to the development and academic excellence of the university. Additionally, he has authority over the implementation of academic and administrative policies of the university, supervision of human and financial resources, and promotion of scientific research and innovation. Furthermore, he is responsible for representing the university in various national and international academic and administrative bodies, thereby enhancing its reputation and global presence in the academic arena.

Tlemcen-The Pearl of the Maghreb: A Crossroads of Civilizations



Mediterranean climatic view of the city of Tlemcen



Prof. Wassila Hamza Reguig Mouro

Nestled in northwestern Algeria, Tlemcen is one of North Africa's most remarkable historic cities. Known as the "Pearl of the Maghreb" also as "the city of arts and history", it has connected the Mediterranean world, the Sahara, and sub-Saharan Africa for more than two millennia. Its unique identity emerges from the meeting of Berber, Arab, Andalusian, Ottoman, and Mediterranean traditions, creating a cultural landscape where history, science, architecture, and hospitality remain deeply intertwined.

A Strategic City on the Routes of Trade and Knowledge

Founded as the Roman settlement of Pomaria, Tlemcen became a major Islamic center after the Arab conquest and reached its zenith as the capital of the Zayyanid Kingdom (1235–1556). During this period, the city controlled important trans-Saharan routes linking West Africa

to the Mediterranean.

Beyond regional commerce, Tlemcen occupied a strategic position within the wider network often described as the western extension of the Silk Road. Gold, textiles, spices, manuscripts, and luxury goods circulated through caravan routes connecting the Maghreb with the Mediterranean ports and, indirectly, with the great commercial centers of the Middle East and Asia. The city became not only a marketplace, but also a center for the exchange of ideas, technologies, and scholarly traditions.

This intellectual prestige attracted renowned scholars, including Ibn Khaldun. Tlemcen's madrasas and libraries contributed to its reputation as one of medieval North Africa's leading centers of learning. Its architectural heritage reflects these centuries of prosperity. Visitors can discover the Great Mosque of Tlemcen, the Sidi Boumediene Complex, El Mechouar Palace, and the impressive Mansourah Minaret. In 2011, ISESCO designated Tlemcen the Islamic Capital of Culture 2011.

A Mediterranean Climate

Situated at about 800 meters above sea level, Tlemcen enjoys a pleasant Mediterranean climate. Summers are warm and dry, while winters are cool and relatively wet. Spring and autumn are particularly attractive for cultural visits and outdoor activities. The surrounding fertile plains support olive groves, vineyards, citrus orchards, and cereal production, giving the region a distinctive green landscape unusual for the interior Maghreb.

A Refined Culinary Tradition

Tlemcen's cuisine is renowned throughout Algeria for its elegance and Andalusian influence. Local specialties include Choua, a slow-cooked lamb dish prepared for celebrations; M'hammar, lamb with prunes and almonds; and Karantika, a popular chickpea-based street food.

Traditional breads such as Msemen and Mhadjeb remain daily favorites, while desserts including Kaak, Makrout, and Samsa, flavored with honey and orange blossom water, reflect centuries of cultural exchange between the Maghreb and Andalusia. High-quality olive oil and mint tea ac-

company many meals.

Living Traditions

Tlemcen continues to preserve a rich cultural heritage. The city is famous for Ghar-nati, one of the principal schools of Andalusian classical music, performed during festivals, weddings, and religious celebrations.

Traditional customs remain visible in everyday life. The Haïk, the elegant white veil worn by women, and the Burnous, the woolen cloak worn on ceremonial occasions, symbolize the continuity of local identity. Hospitality is a defining value: guests are welcomed with tea, pastries, and shared meals, reflecting a social culture rooted in generosity and community.

Economy and Contemporary Life

Historically based on agriculture, craftsmanship, and trade, Tlemcen remains known for its olive oil, carpets, embroidery, leatherwork, and zellige mosaics. Tourism has become increasingly important thanks to the city's exceptional historical heritage and natural surroundings.

The University of Tlemcen contributes to the city's intellectual vitality through research, conferences, and international academic exchanges, but Tlemcen's identity extends far beyond a university town: it remains above all a historic crossroads where culture, commerce, and scholarship have met for centuries.

Tlemcen Today

With a metropolitan population approaching one million inhabitants, modern Tlemcen combines a lively historic medina with contemporary infrastructure. The panoramic Lalla Setti Plateau, accessible by cable car, offers one of the most celebrated views in Algeria.

Today, Tlemcen stands as a city where heritage inspires innovation. Its monuments recall centuries of exchange across the Mediterranean and the Sahara, while its cultural institutions, researchers, artists, and entrepreneurs continue to build new connections with the wider world. For visitors and scholars alike, Tlemcen remains a rare place where the memory of the Silk Road, the spirit of Andalusia, and the aspi-

rations of contemporary Algeria meet in a single city.

Professor Wassila Hamza Reguig Mouro is a Full Professor of Literature in the Department of English at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Tlemcen, Algeria. Her research focuses on literary discourse, postcolonial studies, and women's writing. She currently serves as the Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages at the University of Tlemcen.

Interview with the Rector Mohamed El Hadi LATRE- CHE of Ferhat Abbas University Setif 1 (UFAS1)



Rector Mohamed El Hadi
LATRECHE and the logo of
the University

Q: Thank you very much rector Mohamed El Hadi Latreche for accepting our invitation for the written interview with SILKROADIA. Would you like to introduce yourself and the university to our readers?

A: Thank you for this invitation, and warm greetings to all SILKROADIA readers. I am Professor Mohamed El Hadi Latreche, Rector of Ferhat Abbas University Setif 1 (UFAS1), in eastern Algeria. Founded in 1978, UFAS1 has grown into one of Algeria's leading public universities dedicated to science, technology and health sciences, with five faculties and several institutes, including Medicine, Technology, Sciences, Natural and Life Sciences, Economics and Management, Architecture and Earth Sciences, and Optics and Precision Mechanics. Today we welcome more than 45,000 students, including students from over twenty-nine nationalities, supported by close to fifty research laboratories. UFAS1 has also become the leading Algerian institution in several international rankings. Beyond figures, we see ourselves above all as a driving force for our region and as a bridge between Algeria and the international academic community.

Q: SILKORADIA was told that this year the General Assembly of SUN will be held in 4 different cities collaborating

with four different universities in Algeria. How do you feel about co-hosting this annual gathering of SUN in Sétif of Algeria?

A: It is both an honour and a source of real excitement for our university community. Holding the General Assembly across four Algerian cities and four universities is, in itself, a meaningful gesture: it mirrors the very idea of the Silk Road, a network of many crossroads rather than a single destination. For Seif, a city that has historically stood at the meeting point between the coastal Tell and the High Plateaus, this way of organising the event feels very natural.

Architectural ruins of the city of Setif



We are delighted to open our doors to SUN colleagues from around the world, and we see this shared hosting as an opportunity for the four host universities to combine our strengths and offer visitors a fuller, more diverse picture of Algeria's academic and cultural landscape.

Q: Ferhat Abbas University of Setif 1 has recently joined the SUN as a member university and has been a very supportive partner. Would you like to walk our readers through your institute and share the reason for your university to join SUN as a member university in the first place

A: As I mentioned, UFAS1 is a large, research-oriented university built around science, technology and health, but also increasingly engaged in the humanities through cross-disciplinary projects, including a growing interest in architectural and urban heritage. We chose to join SUN because Algeria itself has long been a crossing point of trans-Saharan, Mediterranean and sub-Saharan exchange, and we felt

a natural resonance with SUN's vision of universities as custodians and connectors of shared heritage. Practically, SUN also allows us to diversify our international partnerships beyond our traditional European networks, opening channels for cooperation with universities across Central Asia, the Caucasus and the wider Silk Road region, in research, staff and student mobility, and joint scientific events. It is a young partnership for us, but one we intend to invest in seriously.

Q: Sétif holds a special place in silk road trades and cultural exchange. How would you describe the city to our readers? What unique experiences offer the city for our academic and cultural collaborations?

A: Sétif, ancient Sitifis, sits at over 1,000 metres on Algeria's High Plateaus, historically a stop between the Mediterranean coast and the Sahara. The city still carries the layers of this long history: Roman and Byzantine remains, including the celebrated mosaics housed in our National

Archaeological Museum, alongside colonial-era architecture and a lively, modern city equipped with its own tramway. Today Sétif is also a dynamic economic and industrial centre, not only a university town. For our SUN colleagues, I believe Sétif offers a genuine encounter with a lesser-known but historically rich part of Algeria, and a chance to see, very concretely, how a city can carry Berber, Roman, Ottoman, French and Algerian layers of history at once, much like the Silk Road cities SUN was built to connect.

Q: As you may know, students play a vital role in SUN through the SUN's student body called 'USSUN - United Students of SUN'. What are your views on the students as connectors of cross cultural diversity? What unique opportunities does your university offer for SUN students?

A: I firmly believe students are the most authentic ambassadors of cross-cultural exchange; institutional agreements open doors, but it is students, through daily

contact, friendships and shared projects, who truly turn those doors into bridges. At UFAS1, our international students, currently representing over twenty-nine nationalities, are welcomed each year through a dedicated ‘Marhaba Day’, and can join any of our twenty-four scientific, cultural and sports clubs. We also run active mobility programmes, including Erasmus+ exchanges, and are working to widen these opportunities through our SUN membership. We would very much like to see our students engage actively with USSUN, and we are ready to support their participation in its activities and gatherings.

Q: As the co-host of the 11th GA of SUN, could you please explain how do you foresee the preparation of the event and what do you recognize as the main challenges? How do you collaborate with other hosts to address these challenges?

A: Preparing a General Assembly shared across four cities and four universities is, first and foremost, an exercise in coordination. The main challenge is to keep a single

coherent identity for the event while allowing each host city to contribute its own character, whether through opening sessions, thematic panels, or cultural visits. To manage this, the four co-hosting Algerian universities have set up joint working groups covering logistics, scientific programme, and hospitality for international delegations, with regular coordination meetings between our teams. We are also paying close attention to transport and accommodation across the different cities, so that our guests experience genuine continuity rather than four disconnected events. It requires close trust between the co-hosts, but I see this collaborative model as one of the most valuable outcomes of the whole exercise.

Q: As a young partner of the SUN network, what would you like to share with the heads of the member universities of SUN on strengthening partnerships and creating mutually winning space for scholars, academics, and students?

A: As a recent member, I would say we

approach SUN with both enthusiasm and humility. My main message to fellow rectors would be that partnerships grow strongest not through declarations of intent, but through concrete, repeated actions: joint research projects, staff and student exchanges, co-organised events, and, where possible, joint or double degree programmes. I would also encourage us to think of cooperation within SUN as genuinely reciprocal, where every member, regardless of geography or size, has something distinctive to bring, whether it is scientific expertise, cultural heritage, or a particular regional perspective. Algeria and UFAS1 are ready to contribute in that spirit, and we hope this General Assembly in Algeria will mark a new stage of concrete cooperation for the network.

Q: Lastly, would you like to share a bit of your personal life - as a rector you must have a quite busy schedule. How do you spend your free time? Do you have recommendations for our readers to have work-life balance?

A: Managing a university with more than 45,000 students naturally leaves little free time, but I try to protect a few habits that keep me grounded: reading, particularly on history and the built heritage of our region, and walking whenever the schedule allows it. I have also come to value gardening, which I find genuinely restful; there is something reassuring in a task where results come slowly and quietly, in contrast to the pace of university life. I also value time simply spent with family. If I were to offer one piece of advice, it would be that work-life balance is less about finding large blocks of free time and more about protecting small, regular moments for the things and people that matter, even during the busiest weeks.

Prof. LATRECHE Mohamed El Hadi is a distinguished Professor of Electrical Engineering and a prominent academic leader currently serving as the Rector of the University of Sétif 1 – Ferhat Abbas (UFAS 1), a position he has held since May 2021. He holds a degree in Electrical Engineering from the National Polytechnic School of Algiers (1983) and earned his Ph.D. from the ENSEEIHT / Institut National Polytechnique de Toulouse, France (1987), specializing in the electromagnetic and thermal modeling of electrical machines.

With over three decades of higher education expertise, Prof. Latreche has built an extensive administrative legacy in university governance. He served as the Vice-Rector of Mentouri Constantine University (2006–2012) before advancing to top-tier institutional leadership as the Rector of Constantine 2 University – Abdelhamid Mehri (2012–2019). He then served as the Rector of the University of Brothers Mentouri – Constantine 1 starting in September 2019 to 2021, prior to taking the helm at Sétif 1. Additionally, his leadership in regional academic strategy is highlighted by his role as the President of the Regional Conference of Universities of the East (CRUEst) since April 2015.

As an elite researcher, he directed the Constantine Electrical Engineering Laboratory (LEC) and pioneered multiple international cooperation initiatives, including CMEP projects and the Euro-Mediterranean Tempus quality assurance network. He is a member of the National Habilitation Commission (CNH) and the National Commission for Quality Assurance (CIAQES). His extensive scientific output focuses on applied electromagnetics, numerical modeling, and non-destructive testing, with numerous publications in elite journals such as IEEE Transactions on Magnetics.

Setif Through the Ages



City of Setif



Dr. Nadir Alikhodja

Setif, a city more than two thousand years old, sits at the heart of Algeria's High Plateaus, at an elevation of nearly 1,100 metres. Known in antiquity as Sitifis, it has carried different identities across the centuries, from a Numidian settlement

to a Roman colony, an Islamic city of scholars, a French colonial town, and today a dynamic university city. Its high, fertile plains and strategic position between Kabylia, Constantine and the interior made it, since the earliest times, a meeting point of peoples, ideas and trade.

Long before Rome, the region belonged to the Berber kingdom of Numidia. It was near Setif that the Numidian king Jugurtha waged his last campaigns against Rome, before his defeat and capture by Marius in 105 BC. After the fall of Numidia and the brief client kingdom granted to Juba II, the area passed under direct Roman administration. The true rise of the city began in 97 AD, when the Emperor Nerva founded a colony of military veterans there, officially named *Colonia Nerviana Augusta Martialis Veteranorum Sitifensium*. Populated largely by Italian settlers drawn by a climate reminiscent of their homeland, Sitifis prospered thanks to its wheat-rich soil, soon becoming known as one of the granaries of Roman Africa.

The city's importance only grew with time. Around 297 AD, under Diocletian, Sit-

ifis was made the capital of a newly created province, Mauretania Sitifensis, stretching along the coast from Saldae to the river Ampsaga and deep into the fertile interior. Temples, baths, a circus for chariot races, defensive walls, and a necropolis adorned with fine mosaics testified to its prosperity, while the surrounding countryside supplied grain that was shipped abroad through the port of Saldae, present-day Bejaia. Christianity spread widely from the fourth century onward, and Saint Augustine himself corresponded with the local bishopric, which maintained a monastery and a school. Yet the region was also a stronghold of Donatism, a rigorous Christian movement that long resisted the authority of Rome. Following the Vandal invasion in the fifth century, Sitifis endured a period of decline, before the Byzantine general Solomon reconquered the city in the sixth century and rebuilt its defensive walls, remnants of which still stand today.

The Arab-Muslim conquest of the Maghreb, beginning in the seventh century, transformed the region once again. Sitifis was overrun during the campaigns of

Uqba ibn Nafi around 680 AD, and by the early eighth century, the whole area had turned toward Islam. Under the successive Muslim dynasties who ruled North Africa, from the Umayyads and Abbasids to the Aghlabids, Fatimids, Zirides, Hammadids, Almohads, Hafsids and Zianides, Setif remained a modest but living town on the high plains, its population enriched over time by Arab tribes who settled among the Berber inhabitants. In the mid-eleventh century, the invasion of the Banu Hilal tribes, described by the historian Ibn Khaldun and by Leo Africanus as devastating as a swarm of locusts, brought a long period of disruption to the region's urban and agricultural life.

For several centuries afterward, the ancient Roman city faded into ruin, and the memory of Sitifis survived mainly through Arabic chronicles and the silent stones scattered across the plain. It was only in the nineteenth century, following the French conquest of Algeria, that the town was reborn. In 1838, French troops established a garrison on the site, and by 1848 a new fortress had been built direct-

ly upon the line of the old Byzantine and medieval walls. The colonial administration then laid out the modern town in a strict grid of wide, tree-lined streets, together with a central square, a theatre, and the fountain of Aïn El Fouara, features that still give the city centre its distinctive French-Mediterranean character. Because of its altitude, Setif also became known for its harsh winters and heavy snowfalls, quite unlike the milder climate of the Algerian coast, a contrast that continues to shape daily life in the region today. Setif was made a sub-prefecture of the department of Constantine, and the surrounding high plains were developed intensively for cereal cultivation, cementing the region's long-standing reputation as a granary.

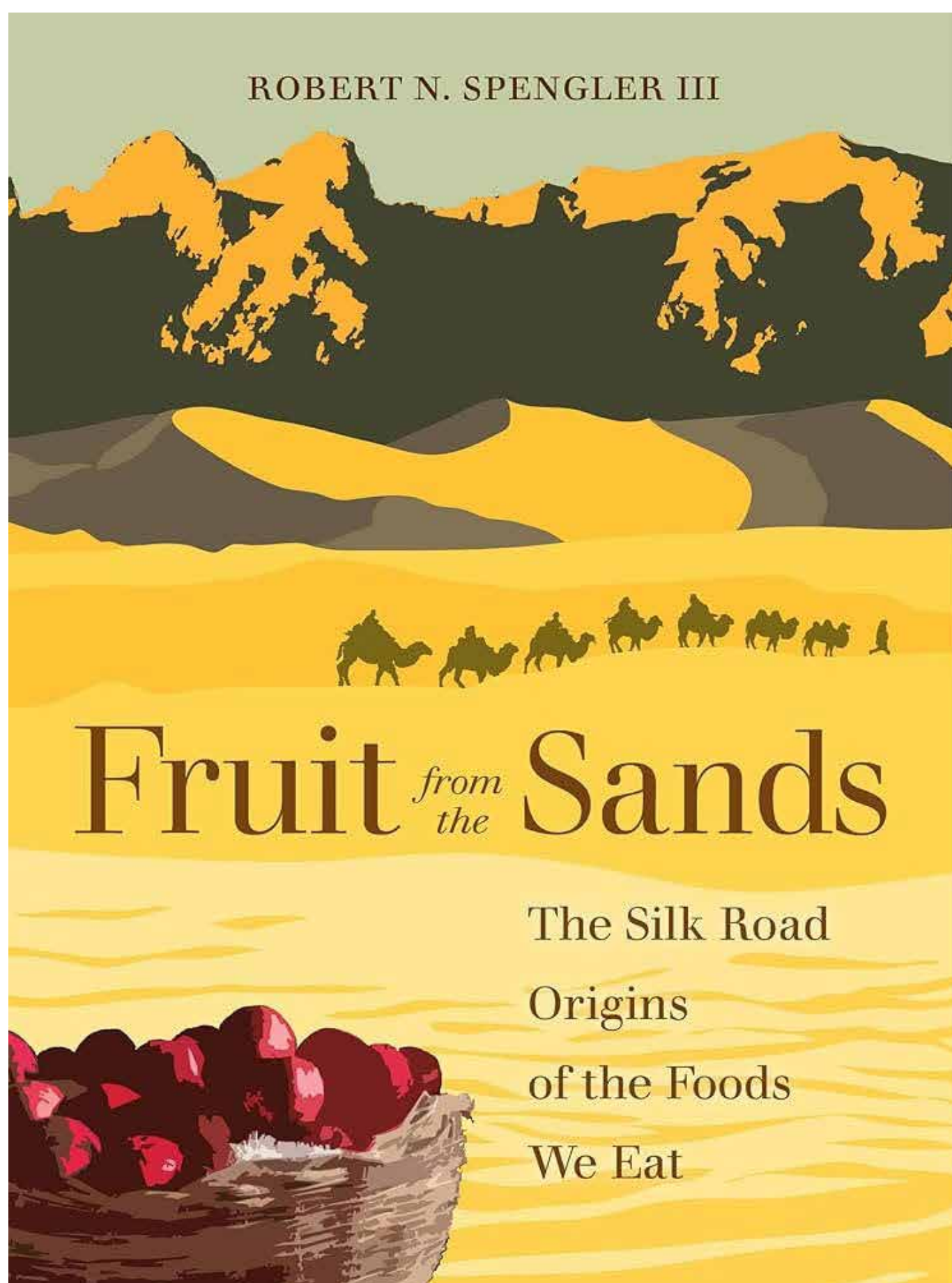
The twentieth century brought both economic growth and deep political awakening. As Algerian nationalism matured, Setif became one of its most active centres. On 8 May 1945, the very day of the Allied victory in Europe, a peaceful demonstration calling for Algerian independence turned into violent repression, triggering the Setif, Guelma and Kherrata massacres.

Thousands of Algerians were killed in the crackdown that followed, an event now widely regarded as one of the founding traumas of the Algerian War of Independence, and one that earned Setif the title of "city of the martyrs" in national memory. During the following years, the population of the region continued to support the nationalist cause, contributing actively to the struggle that culminated in independence in 1962.

Since independence, Setif has grown into a major economic, agricultural and academic hub of eastern Algeria. It hosts Ferhat Abbas Setif 1 University, named after the nationalist leader and statesman born in the region, along with important industrial, commercial and cultural institutions. The city's archaeological museum preserves remarkable Roman mosaics, including the celebrated "Triumph of Dionysus," while the nearby Byzantine fortress and other ancient remains continue to attract researchers and visitors. Surrounded by the wheat fields of the high plains and framed by nearby mountains, Setif today stands as a place where an ancient Roman

legacy, a rich Islamic heritage, a painful colonial history and a proud national memory all come together, a city that, like Bejaia to its north, remains a true crossroads of Algeria's long and layered history.

Dr. Nadir Alikhodja is a Senior Lecturer in Architecture and the Vice-Rector for External Relations, Cooperation, Animation, Communication, and Scientific Events at Ferhat Abbas Sétif 1 University specializing in vernacular architecture and bioclimatic design, his research focuses on the preservation and digital documentation of architectural heritage using advanced methodologies.



**Fruit from the Sands:
The Silk Road Origins
of the Foods We Eat
(2019) by Dr. Robert N.
Spengler III**



Cameron Shirvani Steiner

“But how did humanity get to this point? How have we reached this fever pitch of global communication, commerce, and resource distribution? How did humans gain the ability to reshape the ecosystems around them and even the climate of the earth itself? The answers to these questions lie buried in the archaeological record.” (Spengler, 2019, pp. 3).

From the introductory pages, Robert N. Spengler III’s *Fruit from the Sands: The Silk Road Origins of the Foods We Eat* sets out on an ambitious endeavor. An archaeobotanist who synthesizes the latest biological science, plentiful historical scholarship, and his own field work in the region, Spengler seeks to paint a picture of the Silk Road as not merely a conduit for luxury goods but also one of the principal channels through which crops, agricultural knowledge, and culinary traditions spread between societies. Beyond a historical ar-

chive, Spengler looks to connect across time and terrain to the present day, revealing the origins of the plants, spices, herbs, and foods that are found in our kitchens today.

I'll address early on that the book's introduction includes some lofty poetic statements on what it can analyze and reveal, perhaps beyond the scale and volume of the book itself and likely limited by the state of current research. As Professor Emeritus Fred H. Lawson notes in his review for *The Key Reporter*, there is not as much analysis of the systematic progress of certain agricultural products as one might expect, and the book at times places little attention on questions such as, "Where did the crop in question originate? Approximately when did it show up somewhere else? What route did it take to get there?" (2019). Whether readers consider this an acceptable consequence of the limits of current historical evidence is ultimately up to them. Another review, written in *Ethnobiology Letters*, notes a few errors on certain topics, such as the translation of the Chinese word *fan* as rice

- when fan means any cooked grain used as a staple food, such as millet - and the oversight that saxaul trees grow in hot, dry deserts where fruit and nut trees cannot survive (Anderson, 2019). In fairness, the review notes that errors are few and far between, and the book is largely scientific and accurate.

What Spengler does display in abundance is an ability to write for engagement and accessibility. His inclusions throughout the text of his own archaeobotany research in the region engross the reader to almost follow in his footsteps as he traces the paths of each agricultural item he focuses on. In his chapter on grapes and apples, he remarks on the seeming historical gap between how apples could be revered in the time of the Roman Empire, while “the archaeological evidence of apples in Central Asia before the medieval period consists of one possible apple seed recovered at Gonur Depe...and a single apple seed that I recovered from the late-first-millennium BC town of Tuzusai” (pp. 202). This helps to whet the reader’s appetite for further exploration, hoping

that Spengler will reveal what evidence might exist to fill these existing holes.

The book labors, if not always successfully, to avoid dense academic writing and heavy scientific terminology, with a clear eye towards a more general readership. Peppered throughout the book is a collection of illustrations, photographs, and drawings of the plants and artifacts that Spengler focuses upon, alongside detailed maps and charts to illustrate the geography, political boundaries, and routes of travel along regions of the Silk Road. He also cleverly links the behaviors and actions of the traders and growers of the Silk Road across their historical contexts to modern understandings; he describes the exorbitant sums that people paid to procure new flavors and textures as forms of “commodity fetishism” that were occurring centuries before Karl Marx defined the concept (pp. 4). Spengler evidently wants the Silk Road to be understood as more than just an artifact of stuffy historical research, but as an evolving route of exchange between diverse peoples that links to us today, and that we may not be

as uniquely modern as we think.

Credit must be given to Spengler for the unique focus and presentation of his research. Rather than a chronological, point A to point B narrative of the Silk Road, the book instead is organized by chapters focused on specific plants and crops and their histories, neatly split into two distinct parts. Part I, “How the Silk Road Influenced the Food You Eat,” covers Chapters 1-3 and examines both the silk and spice routes that ran throughout Central Asia, and the early plant species that leave a legacy in our foods today. Much is discussed of the genetic origins of those early plants and the Islamic geographers who first wrote of them. Still, the most illuminating feature of Part I is Spengler’s narrative of the Silk Road; a collection of primary archaeological evidence is used to present the case of the Silk Road existing far earlier than is generally understood, as far back as 2800 BC, rather than as an invention in the time of the classical and Han dynasties (pp. 40, 47). Part II, “Artifacts of the Silk Road,” covers Chapters 10-13 and devotes each to an exploration of food

items, from grains such as barley and rice, to fruits and vegetables, to spices and teas. Spengler establishes his argument by connecting the evidence of Part I to the historical journeys of how these items proliferated across Asia, then the world, to arrive at our kitchens today. This section comes as an easier read than the first section, which had to include more of the academic terminology necessary to cover the genetic structures of early plants and to define the routes, time periods, and political entities he would be analyzing.

Spengler demonstrates that archaeobotany is more than just an interesting diversion for a few people interested in food. Demonstrating that Central Asians cultivated and domesticated apples, for example, or showing how they learned to rotate barley and wheat to increase yields, also shows that they were agriculturalists who necessarily stayed in one place for extended periods and were far less nomadic than we sometimes think. As Spengler notes, “in many ways, the Roman Empire or the Han Dynasty in China could not have formed without the mingling of these very differ-

ent crops into a complex agricultural system, and that complex agricultural system originated in Central Asia, allowing all the major empires of the ancient world to feed their dense populations in these growing cities” (Voices).

Fruit from the Sands is an important contribution to Silk Road scholarship, even if it sometimes seems to make claims that outrun the consensus based on current evidence. Spengler does a great job both showing the importance of archaeobotanical research and making it understandable, helping us see how the movement of crops, tastes, and agricultural knowledge across the Eurasian landmass shaped everyday foods that many of us probably take for granted.

Whether interested in history, food, or cultural exchange, a reader will find this book an enjoyable reminder of the ways in which the Silk Road transformed both global trade and daily life. Despite the concerns noted by reviewers, Spengler’s book shows us how modern cuisine is rooted in humanity’s multiple histories of migration, contact, and environmental change.

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Kashgar, Jewel of the Western Regions



Cristina Zhou

Kashgar, 喀什 (Kashi) in Chinese, is a shortened version of 喀什噶尔 (Kashi-ga'er), a phonetic translation of its Uyghur name, probably meaning “a jade-like place”. On the map, it really looks like a marvellous jewel made of jade – the most elegant and cherished precious stone in Chinese traditional culture – settled in a junction point of the Pamir mountains, the Tian Shan, the Himalayas and the Hindu Kush. For the ancient Silk Roads, Kashgar was extremely important: northern and southern routes all converged at this oasis town. Always an entry point to China, even to today, as the westernmost city of China it is a well-connected international

port of entry, proud of its identity as “five gates leading to eight countries, one route linking Europe and Asia” (五口通八国，一路连欧亚); the eight countries being Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, India, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Its magnificent connectivity reflects its ancient history of being part of an interwoven world, where China met and mingled with the steppes.

Today’s Kashgar is not only a vibrant international bazaar of Central Asia, but also a popular tourist destination. For the Chinese who comes from the Eastern Coast, like me (my hometown is Wuxi: 130km from Shanghai, 4200km from Kashgar), Kashgar means the quintessential experience of the western regions, or Xiyu (西域) in Chinese, a place inevitably associated with the expansion of the Han dynasty (202 BC – AD220), famously lead by the Marquis of Bowang Zhang Qian (博望侯张骞, 195-114B) and by Ban Chao (班超32-102), both adventurers and diplomats with remarkable military talent. More than a concrete and strategic place, however, the Xiyu/western regions are also a literary

place, being beautifully immortalized by generations of poets. Anyone who reads classical Chinese poetry is familiar with the charm of Xiyu.

Today's Xiyu/western regions are known as Xinjiang (新疆), meaning “new Frontierland”, linked with the Chinese inner land through the Hexi corridor, or Gansu corridor (河西走廊), a route dotted by legendary oasis towns as Zhangye (张掖) and Dunhuang (敦煌). In the Tang dynasty (618-907), the Golden Age of the ancient Chinese poetry, a genre of “frontier poetry” (边塞诗) emerged, represented by sublime poets like Wang Wei (王维, 699-761) and Wang Changling (王昌龄, 698-756). This “frontier poetry” usually sings the wild and desolate natural landscape of the western regions, inspiring awe for the natural beauty as well as for the frontier soldier-guardians. In the cosmopolitan Tang dynasty, Kashgar (at that time still called Shule, 疏勒, its ancient name) was already renowned for its musicians, some of them surely stunned Chang'an (长安, today's Xi'an, 西安), the capital of the empire, with their splendid skills and also unique,



Fresco from Mogao caves near Dunhuang (unknown painter from Mid-Tang Dynasty 762-827 CE), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons)

somehow “exotic” charm. Li Bai (李白, 701-762), the “immortal poet” (诗仙) of the Tang dynasty and arguably the greatest in the whole of Chinese poetry, also wrote memorable verses about the sweet beauty of ladies from Xiyu (胡姬). Some say that even Li Bai himself was born in Xiyu, possibly in the ancient Suyab (碎叶城), located in today’s Kyrgyzstan, the ruins of Ak-Beshim. Be that as it may, myth, legend, and history are always mixed in Xiyu, as diverse peoples crossed and are still crossing paths in Kashgar, carrying their own memories,



Afaq Khoja Mausoleum

(Photo: CC BY-SA, <https://commons.wikimedia.org>)

exchanging their stories, and writing new chapters.

The Silk Roads, as we know, have always been more than routes of trade, but also of cultures and religions. In this sense, Kashgar is a perfect example. Today's Xinjiang is the Uyghur Autonomous Region and Uyghur people are mostly Muslims. One of the most visited cultural sites in Kashgar is the Afaq Khoja Mausoleum, including a functioning mosque and madrasa. According to the legend, this is the final resting place of the beautiful Iparxan, the beloved Fragrant Concubine (香妃) of Em-

peror Qianlong (乾隆帝, 1711-1799).

However, in ancient times Kashgar was also a sacred Buddhist site. The Sogdian travelling merchants, taking with them the practices and ideas of Buddhism from northern India to China, encountered and sometimes competed with traditional Chinese Confucianism and Taoism. The emperors of Northern Wei dynasty (386-534), who were originally from the steppes, adopted and vigorously promoted Buddhism. That's why in central-northern China there are colossal statues of Buddha with dazzling shrines, as we can see in Luoyang (洛阳) and Yungang (云冈).

Yungang grottoes (xiquinhosilva, CC BY 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0> via Wikimedia Commons)



With the rapid expansion of the Sasanians in the 3rd century CE, stretching to the east as far as Kashgar and Tashkent, Zoroastrianism also joined the robust confrontation of religions and cults. Afterwards, by the mid 6th century, Christianity entered Central Asia as well, and with astounding success. As Peter Frankopan pointed out in the bestseller *The Silk Roads* (Bloomsbury, 2015), “Cities like Merv, Gundeshapur and even Kashgar (...) had archbishops long before Canterbury did. These were major Christian centres many centuries before the first missionaries reached Poland or Scandinavia” (p. 55). Thus, the spirituality of Kashgar was surprisingly multilayered, and though some elements may be forgotten, its complexity is still there.

Empires rise and fall, good stories remain. In the vigorous Xinjiang tradition of story-telling, Kashgar also shines like a jewel, as in the long, loosely rhythmic narrative poem “Song of Kashgar”. Some of these long poems about Kashgar were composed by Sibe people in Xinjiang, who originally came from the northeast

of China. During the tumultuous years of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), many Sibe young men were relocated to Xinjiang as soldiers. In the stories, they fell in love with local Uyghur girls. Perhaps, in a place like Kashgar, a multi-ethnic cultural melting pot, we can more easily find the wisdom of love. Because it is only through love that the barriers between different cultures can truly be eliminated, and a completely equal dialogue made possible.

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Flat Bread along the Silk Road



Se-won Park



A small bakery making flatbread in Bukhara, Uzbekistan in the morning. photo by Euihwan Cho

While living in Cairo as an exchange student, I often saw people baking bread on the streets. The bread they baked was, in most cases, Aish Baladi (عيش بلدي). Interestingly, this reminded me of my childhood in Uzbekistan, where every morning men would bake Lepyoshka (Лепёшка), filling the neighborhood with the smell of freshly baked bread. The scent always made me look forward to the start of a new day, and those memories came flooding back as I walked through the streets of Cairo. It also led me to wonder: although Egypt and Uzbekistan are separated by thousands of kilometers, why do they share such similar food



Uzbekistan Bukhara flatbread. photo by Euihwan Cho

traditions?

Flatbreads can be found in many parts of the world, including Egypt's Aish Baladi, Uzbekistan's Lepyoshka, and India's Naan. Their origins can be traced back to the Neolithic period, when humanity transitioned from hunting and gathering to agriculture (Pasqualone). As people began cultivating grains such as wheat and corn and learned to cook with fire, flatbread naturally emerged. Grinding grain into flour, mixing it with water, and baking a thin piece of dough required no advanced technology, making flatbread one of humanity's earliest prepared foods. The Silk Road fur-

ther accelerated the development and spread of flatbreads (Spengler). More than just silk, it facilitated the exchange of ovens, wheat varieties, baking techniques, and spices, giving rise to breads with similar forms and baking methods, such as Uzbekistan's Lepyoshka, India's Naan, and the Middle Eastern Pita. In this sense, flatbread can be regarded as one of humanity's earliest shared foods.

Egypt is often considered one of the birthplaces of bread (Samuel) Blessed by the fertile Nile River, ancient Egypt was able to cultivate large quantities of wheat, laying the foundation for a rich bread-making tradition that has continued for thousands of years. The name Aish Baladi itself reflects the importance of bread in Egyptian society. In Arabic, aish (عيش) literally means “life,” while baladi (بلدي) means “of our country” or “traditional.” Thus, the name may be understood as “the bread of our country” or, more symbolically, “the life of our country” (Anwar). This illustrates that bread in Egypt is far more than a staple food—it is synonymous with life itself. History offers striking examples of this significance. In 1977, when

the Egyptian government attempted to reduce bread subsidies following recommendations from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), nationwide protests erupted, forcing the government to reverse its decision. Likewise, during the 2011 Arab Spring, one of the protesters' most famous slogans was "Bread, Freedom, and Social Justice," demonstrating the central role bread continues to play in Egyptian society (Ghomeim).

Turning to Uzbekistan, Lepyoshka is the representative flatbread of Central Asia. In Uzbekistan, it is commonly called Non, while the Russian-speaking world knows it as Lepyoshka (Kasimova). It is characterized by its round shape, thick rim, and slightly depressed center. One of its most distinctive features is the decorative pattern stamped into the center using a traditional tool called a Chekichi. Beyond its aesthetic appeal, this pattern prevents the center from rising excessively during baking. Like many other flatbreads, Lepyoshka is baked in a traditional oven, but in Uzbekistan it is specifically cooked in a clay oven known as a Tandyr. The dough is pressed directly onto the inner wall of the oven, where it slowly

bakes to perfection. Uzbek culture places great respect on bread. Guests are almost always served Lepyoshka, and it is often presented as a gift on special occasions. Interestingly, it is considered inappropriate to cut the bread with a knife; instead, it is traditionally broken apart by hand. Another unique aspect of Uzbek bread culture is that Lepyoshka is frequently enjoyed not only as a staple food but also alongside fruits such as watermelon and melon, reflecting a distinctive culinary tradition.

Although the flatbreads found along the Silk Road share many similarities in shape, baking methods, and cultural significance, closer examination reveals important differences. Comparing Egypt's Aish Baladi and Uzbekistan's Lepyoshka illustrates this well. Both are round flatbreads that serve as staple foods and are commonly shared among family members and guests. However, Aish Baladi develops a hollow interior, making it ideal for stuffing with various fillings, whereas Lepyoshka has a dense interior and is distinguished by its decorative center, emphasizing both function and artistry. Their baking tech-

niques also differ. Aish Baladi is baked rapidly in an extremely hot oven to create its characteristic pocket, while Lepyoshka is baked more slowly by adhering the dough to the walls of a Tandyr oven.

Traveling the world offers countless opportunities to discover new foods, but an equally rewarding experience is recognizing the similarities and differences between those foods and the culinary traditions of one's own culture. Flatbread is far more than a simple food; it is a living legacy that has connected people, cultures, and civilizations along the Silk Road for thousands of years. Originating from the same basic ingredients—grain, water, and fire—these breads evolved into distinct regional traditions shaped by local environments, ways of life, and cultural values. Today, a single piece of flatbread allows us to glimpse the footsteps of merchants and travelers who once journeyed across the Silk Road, carrying not only goods but also knowledge, technology, and traditions. Ultimately, flatbread stands as one of the Silk Road's most enduring cultural legacies, reminding us that the exchange of food has always been insepa-

rable from the exchange of civilizations.

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Woven across Borders: The Story of the Keffiyeh



Min-ju Sung

Beyond a National Costume

Before starting, one simple question came to mind: Does traditional clothing really belong to only one country? We often associate traditional dress with a single nation. Hanbok belongs to Korea, the kimono to Japan, and the áo dài to Vietnam. In many cases, this understanding is true. However, not every traditional garment can be explained within the history of just one country. Some have spread across different regions over centuries, taking on new meanings through the movement of people

and the exchange of cultures. The keffiyeh is one of those examples.

On the way to Iran for an exchange program last year, there was a chance to spend some time in Dubai. One of the most memorable sights was seeing many men wearing white kanduras with white or red headscarves in Dubai Mall and on the streets. At first, it simply seemed like traditional Arab clothing. Later, a friend majoring in Arabic explained that these garments represented more than protection from the desert climate. They also reflected history, tradition, and the identity of local communities.

Life in Iran gave another opportunity to think about the meaning of clothing. Seeing hijabs and chadors every day showed that what people wear is closely connected to religion, culture, and history. A few months later, I noticed the keffiyeh again during the 10th SUN General Assembly in Uzbekistan. At the closing ceremony, participants wore their traditional clothing, and the red Jordanian shemagh immediately caught my attention. Although it looked similar to the headscarves seen in Dubai, it



Mutah University President in Jordanian shemagh

Photo by Euihwan Cho

clearly carried a different meaning. That moment naturally led me to wonder whether one traditional garment could really belong to only one nation.

One Scarf, Many Meanings

The keffiyeh is a traditional headscarf that

has been worn across the Middle East for centuries. Originally, it was used to protect the head and face from strong sunlight, wind, and sand, but over time it became a symbol of community identity.

The style most familiar in the Gulf region is the ghutra. Worn with a black cord called an agal, the white or red headscarf remains everyday and formal attire in countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. In Jordan, the red-and-white shemagh represents Bedouin heritage and a sense of belonging, while the black-and-white keffiyeh in Palestine has become a symbol of national identity and resistance.

Even more interesting is that this tradition does not stop within the Arab world. In parts of southwestern Iran, a similar headscarf called the chafiyeh can also be found. This region has long been a meeting point between Arab and Persian cultures, where the same style of clothing developed its own local meaning. Similar forms also appear across nearby regions like Lebanon, Iraq, Oman, Pakistan, and India.

Regional Styles of the Keffiyeh



Photo Courtesy of
“The Shemagh –
Signature Yashmagh”



Photo Courtesy of
“Folklore – Omar Alajlouni”



Photo Courtesy of
“White Black Palestinian
Nabulsi Kuffiya –
From From Palestine”



Photo Courtesy of
“Product Page – Maahed.ir”

A Borderland of Culture

One of the most noticeable things about the keffiyeh is that the same piece of clothing carries different meanings across the region. This connects well with the concept of Borderland. While a border separates countries politically, a borderland is a space where different cultures meet, influence one another, and create something new.

Today, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Palestine, and Iran are separate countries. Yet for centuries, merchants, travelers, nomads, and pilgrims moved across these regions, sharing languages, customs, food, and clothing. Among them, the Silk Road was one of the historical networks that made these exchanges possible.

Rather than being simply copied, traditions are reinterpreted according to local history, environment, and ways of life. That is why the keffiyeh represents everyday tradition in the Gulf, Bedouin heritage in Jordan, national identity in Palestine, and the cultural connection between Arab and Persian communities in southwestern Iran.

More Than a Headscarf

Looking back, the keffiyeh offers a different way of understanding traditional clothing. Rather than belonging to a single nation, it can be seen as a cultural record shaped through long-term exchange between different communities.

Previously my webzine articles explored saffron as a product that traveled along the Silk Road and the qanun as an instrument shaped through cultural exchange. The keffiyeh adds another layer, showing that cultural meanings themselves also move and change across regions.

Through these examples, what remains clear is that cultural exchange is not only about movement, but also about reinterpretation. The keffiyeh remains a reminder of how culture continues to be shaped through connections across borders.

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Silk Road Music Festival in Azerbaijan: Where History Meets Music



Amali R. Thanthrige

The Silk Road Music Festival is one of Azerbaijan's most celebrated cultural events, bringing together musicians, artists, and visitors from different countries to celebrate the rich heritage of the ancient Silk Road. Held in the historic city of Sheki, the festival serves as a bridge between past and present, promoting cultural exchange through the universal language of music.



A performance at the Yukarı Kervansarayı hotel complex in Sheki
(Promotional photo from Baku International Multiculturalism Centre)

The Origin of the Festival

The Silk Road Music Festival was established in the early 2010s in Sheki, one of Azerbaijan's oldest cultural centers and an important stop along the historic Silk Road trade network. The festival was created through the cooperation of Azerbaijan's cultural institutions and local authorities with the aim of preserving traditional music while encouraging international artistic collaboration. Since its launch, the festival has welcomed performers from numerous countries across Asia, Europe, and the Gulf Countries, becoming an important platform for intercultural dialogue.

Connection to the Ancient Silk Routes

For centuries, the Silk Road connected East and West through trade, travel, and cultural exchange. Merchants, scholars, and artists carried not only silk and spices but also ideas, traditions, and music across continents. Sheki was one of the key caravan cities along this route and remains a symbol of Azerbaijan's Silk Road heritage. The festival reflects this historic legacy by bringing together diverse musical traditions, creating a modern cultural crossroads similar to the role Silk Road played in ancient times.

Modern Application and cultural impact

Today, the silk road music festival is much more than a music event. It promotes

- International cultural cooperation and friendship.
- Preservation of traditional and folk music
- Support for emerging artists and musicians
- Cultural tourism and economic development in the region
- Multicultural dialogue among differ-

ent ethnic and cultural communities

The festival features concerts, folk performances, dance programmes, and collaborations between artists from different countries. Recent editions have included performers from Azerbaijan, Turkiye, China, and other nations, highlighting the festival's growing international significance.

Why the festival is important

The importance of the festival lies in its ability to preserve cultural heritage while fostering global understanding. In a rapidly changing world, such festivals help protect traditional arts and pass them on to future generations. They also strengthen Azerbaijan's position as a meeting point of civilizations and showcase the country's rich history, music, and hospitality to international audiences. The festival contributes significantly to the promotion of Sheki as a cultural and tourism destination.

Why people should join the festival

Attending the Silk Road Music Festival offers a unique opportunity to experience the spirit of the ancient Silk Road in a

modern setting, Visitors can enjoy performances by world-class musicians and folk ensembles, discover the historic beauty of Sheki and its architectural landmarks. Also there are potentials for exploring authentic Azerbaijani cuisine and beautiful landscapes.

Whether you are a music enthusiast, a cultural explorer, or a traveler seeking unique experience, the Silk Road Festival offers an unforgettable journey through history, art, and human connections.

The Silk Road Music Festival in Azerbaijan is a remarkable celebration of cultural diversity and artistic excellence. Inspired by the historic Silk Road, it continues to unite people through music, promote mutual understanding, and preserve valuable cultural traditions. As a symbol of friendship and intercultural dialogue, the festival remains one of the most inspiring cultural events in the region and an experience that every visitor should enjoy at least once in their lifetime.

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Odeon of Herodes Atticus Photo supplied by ALLOVERGREECE

TRAVEL

Under the Starry Sky of Athens and Epidaurus



Maria Pourliot

In 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 the show begins. The lights are already on and the actor steps on the stage. In the theater there is absolute silence, a sense of awe that moves the audience. In front of their eyes the glorious

past merges with the vibrant present, a combination that leads to a promising future. The area is filled with the mature words bequeathed to us by ancient Greek poets, and the audience shivers. The stars and the moon participate, as they gently illuminate the chorus and guide the actors safely on stage. The revitalizing breeze and the summer warmth raise the pulse and create an atmosphere of anticipation for the next summer's festival.

In excellent preserved ancient theaters, the Athens Epidaurus Festival opens its curtains annually every summer to audiences of all ages, not only in Athens but also in the Peloponnese. From 1955, when it was first founded, until 2005, the Odeon of Herodes Atticus in the shadow of the sacred hill of the Acropolis was used. This structure was built in the post-Christian period between 160 and 165 AD and is a typical example of Roman architecture. In addition the theater of Epidaurus, dedicated to Asclepius, the god of medicine, which was built around the 4th century BCE for the god's worship rituals, is also used. Finally, performances were also held at the



Theatre of Epidauros Photo supplied by Athens Epidauros Festival



Theatre of Lycabettus Photo supplied by in.gr

Lycabettus Theater, a recent creation on the imposing hill of Lycabettus. However, since 2006, other venues in Piraeus and Athens have opened to host music and dance events.

The festival's goal is cultural development through the promotion of art and the quality it supports. This year, the Festival celebrated its 70th anniversary and the celebration was indeed very festive. In a tribute-documentary on the festival's long journey, directors, set designers, and other contributors shared their experiences, while a commemorative volume with 730 pages was published, including 846 documents from catalogs, programs, posters and photos collected over the years.

During the festival, performances are staged of works by ancient Greek poets,



Promotional photo supplied by To Vima

such as Aeschylus' *The Persians*, or modern adaptations of these, such as *Antigone* directed by Ulrich Rasche, a work that emphasizes personal freedom and the distinction between social and moral propriety. The productions are not only by Greek teams of actors but also international productions based on works of global significance, such as *The Vegetarian*, the theatrical adaptation of Han Kang's novel directed by Daria Deflorian. Besides performances, spectators also enjoy music and dance shows by Greek and international musicians, choreographers, and dancers. The range of choices varies from classical artists like Beethoven and Puccini to contemporary and perhaps more alternative ones. The Festival is a huge chance for promoting Greece, because through these, the reputation of great and significant Greek composers, such as Mikis Theodorakis or Dionysis Savvopoulos, who have captivated audiences of all ages for decades, spreads internationally.

The stage transforms into a wild celebration that respects human creation and the creativity that leads to each unique



Dionysis Savvopoulos (right) and Giorgos Ntalaras (left)

Photo by Thomas Daskalakis/MusicCity

work. Artists gain a voice and win over an audience that eagerly awaits the next summer to allow themselves to cultivate their spirit and ultimately find peace under the starry sky of spectacular Athens and mystical Epidaurus.

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The Grand Egyptian Museum
(Promotional Photo by The Grand Egyptian Museum)

TRAVEL

A Journey Through the Grand Egyptian Museum: A Voyage into Ancient Egypt



Se-won Park

On November 1, 2025, the world welcomed a new cultural landmark: the Grand Egyptian Museum (المتحف المصري الكبير). Its grand opening was broadcast live around the globe, accompanied by spectacular fireworks that celebrated not only the inauguration of a museum but also the beginning of a new era in cultural heritage. In 2026, the museum continues to attract worldwide attention, inspiring countless travelers to choose Egypt as their next destination. For me, however, the Grand Egyptian Museum represents something far more personal. As someone who has always been fascinated by history, I decided to study abroad in Egypt the moment I heard the news of the museum's opening. That decision led me on an unforgettable journey—one that felt like traveling back thousands of years into the heart of ancient Egyptian civilization.

A New Home for Ancient Egypt

Before the Grand Egyptian Museum was built, Egypt's primary archaeological mu-

seum was the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Although it had long been admired by visitors from around the world, its aging facilities could no longer accommodate Egypt's ever-growing collection of priceless antiquities. Recognizing the need for a modern institution worthy of one of the world's greatest civilizations, the Egyptian government launched an ambitious project in 1992 to construct a new museum near the Giza Pyramids. After more than three decades of planning and development, that vision finally became reality in 2025. Even before stepping inside, the museum itself is an attraction. Inspired by the geometry of the pyramids, its monumental architecture is decorated with hieroglyphic motifs that immediately evoke the grandeur of ancient Egypt. Located just steps away from the three pyramids of Giza, the building was carefully designed so that its architectural axis aligns with the iconic monuments, creating a seamless dialogue between the ancient and the modern.

Welcome By Ramesses II, The Pharaoh of Pharaohs

Upon entering the museum, visitors are welcomed by the colossal statue of Ramesses II (رمسيس الثاني), one of the greatest pharaohs of Egypt's New Kingdom. Renowned for his military achievements and monumental building projects, Ramesses II immortalized his reign by inscribing his royal cartouche on temples, obelisks, and monuments throughout Egypt. One such example is the obelisk displayed in front of the museum, where his name remains clearly visible.

Another remarkable architectural feature lies at the museum's entrance. Visitors may notice a narrow opening in the ceiling—a design element that echoes the famous Abu Simbel Temple, one of Ramesses II's greatest architectural achievements. Abu Simbel was ingeniously designed so that sunlight reaches the sanctuary only twice a year, illuminating the king's statue on the anniversaries of his birthday and coronation. Although relocating the temple to save it from flooding altered this precise alignment, the Grand Egyptian Museum recreates this extraordinary phenomenon through modern architectural design. It is



Statue of Ramesses II (Photo by Se-won Park)

a fascinating example of how contemporary architecture pays tribute to the ingenuity of ancient Egyptian engineering.

Inside the Museum

The museum complex consists of three main exhibition areas. The first houses an

extraordinary collection of Egyptian antiquities spanning thousands of years. The second is dedicated entirely to Tutankhamun (توت عنخ آمون), while the third displays the magnificent Solar Boat, believed to have carried the pharaoh on his journey to the afterlife.

The Legacy of Tutankhamun, The Weakest Ruler, The Greatest Legacy

Among these, the Tutankhamun galleries undoubtedly attract the greatest attention. Thousands of artifacts—including his famous golden funerary mask, ceremonial chariots, royal throne, jewelry, and personal belongings—offer visitors an unparalleled glimpse into the life and death of the young king. Ironically, Tutankhamun was not one of Egypt's most powerful rulers. He ascended the throne during a period of political instability and died before reaching the age of twenty, leaving behind enduring speculation surrounding the circumstances of his death. Yet he became Egypt's most famous pharaoh because his tomb was discovered almost completely intact. Furthermore, because it was ex-



The Golden Mask of Tutankhamun (Photo by Se-won Park)

cavated after Egypt had enacted laws restricting the export of antiquities, most of his treasures have remained in their homeland, profoundly shaping the development of Egyptian archaeology. As I stood before these dazzling golden artifacts, I could not help but wonder how extraordi-

nary the tombs of legendary rulers such as Ramesses II might have been had they survived untouched through the centuries. It is a thought that leaves both admiration and a quiet sense of melancholy.

The Grand Egyptian Museum, More Than a Museum

The Grand Egyptian Museum contains an overwhelming wealth of history. From the Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom to the New Kingdom and the Ptolemaic Dynasty, the galleries trace more than three millennia of Egyptian civilization. For history enthusiasts, every exhibit reveals another fascinating chapter of the past. For first-time visitors unfamiliar with Egyptian history, however, the sheer scale of the collection can be overwhelming. For that reason, I strongly recommend learning some Egyptian history before visiting and, if possible, exploring the museum with a professional guide during your first visit. Understanding the stories behind the artifacts transforms the entire experience. Walking through the galleries after hearing their histories, I felt as though I was

no longer touring a museum but traveling through ancient Egypt itself.

The Importance of Cultural Heritage

More than anything else, the Grand Egyptian Museum reminds us how we should value cultural heritage. Egypt has endured centuries of archaeological looting, during which countless treasures were removed from their original context and scattered across museums around the world. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many excavators prioritized transporting artifacts to their own countries, often with little regard for preserving archaeological sites in their entirety. As a result, remarkable Egyptian antiquities can now be found in institutions such as the British Museum and the Louvre. Although these collections are undeniably impressive, experiencing Egyptian artifacts in their homeland is profoundly different. Surrounded by the desert landscape and with the pyramids rising in the distance, the objects seem to reclaim the stories they were meant to tell. They no longer appear as isolated masterpieces but as living piec-

es of a civilization deeply connected to the land that created them.

As I left the museum, I felt as though I had just listened to a conversation across thousands of years of history. The Grand Egyptian Museum teaches us that cultural heritage is not merely a collection of beautiful objects but a shared legacy that deserves our respect and protection. Today, cultural heritage continues to face threats from war, natural disasters, accidents, and religious conflict. The story of Egypt reminds us that we all share a responsibility to preserve our own cultural treasures while respecting those of others. Only through such collective commitment can we ensure that humanity's history endures for generations to come.

Se-won Park is a student of Ingenium at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul, Republic of Korea.

SUN NEWS

SUN to Hold 11th General Assembly in Algeria; SUN Welcomes New Advisors & IASS Leadership; SUN Empowers a Student-Driven USSUN



Yu-jeong Lee

We are pleased to bring you the major news from the Silk-Road Universities Network (SUN). We are glad to share the inspiring news of the new Advisors and leadership of the IASS in 2026, alongside information regarding the upcoming 11th General Assembly to be held in Algeria this November. Further-

more, we invite you to explore a variety of global programs from our member universities.

Four Algerian Universities Join SUN: Ferhat Abbas University of Sétif 1, University of Sciences and Technology Houari Boumediene, University of Aboubekr Belkaid Tlemcen, Abderrahmane Mira University of Béjaïa

We are delighted to welcome four distinguished universities from Algeria as new members of SUN and co-hosts of the upcoming 11th General Assembly this November: Ferhat Abbas University of Sétif 1, University of Sciences and Technology Houari Boumediene (USTHB), University of Aboubekr Belkaid Tlemcen, and University of Bejaia (Abderrahmane Mira).

Established in 1978, Ferhat Abbas University of Sétif 1 is one of Algeria's leading public universities, recognized for its excellence in science, technology, and medical education. The University serves more than 40,000 students and has earned a strong reputation for

its research output and international collaborations in engineering, natural sciences, and health sciences.

Founded in 1974, the University of Sciences and Technology Houari Boumediene (USTHB) is Algeria's premier science and technology institution and one of the largest universities in the country. Located in Algiers, USTHB is renowned for its cutting-edge research and education in engineering, computer science, mathematics, and life sciences, playing a pivotal role in advancing scientific innovation both nationally and across the region.

The University of Aboubekr Belkaid Tlemcen, located in the historic city of Tlemcen, is one of Algeria's major multidisciplinary universities. With approximately 50,000 students, the University offers a wide range of programs spanning science, engineering, medicine, humanities, and social sciences. Through numerous international partnerships, it actively promotes academic exchange and collaborative research initiatives.

Established in 1983, the University of Bejaia (Abderrahmane Mira) is one of Algeria's leading prestigious national universities, currently home to over 45,000 students and 1,700 faculty members. The University offers multidisciplinary education across eight faculties, including Engineering, Natural Sciences,

Medicine, Humanities, and Economics. Notably, it houses nearly 30 national research laboratories and a business incubator, achieving outstanding results in system optimization, environmental engineering, and sustainable development research.

With active exchange agreements and partnerships with universities and institutions worldwide, including numerous international cooperation networks, these four universities are committed to further strengthening academic and cultural ties with fellow Silk-Road universities through their membership in SUN.

Please join us in warmly welcoming our new Algerian member universities as they showcase Algeria's rich history, vibrant culture, and academic excellence at this November's 11th General Assembly!

**The 11th SUN General Assembly
to be Held in Algeria November
2026 - Theme of Annual
Gathering: International and
Trans-disciplinary Research
Collaboration and Student
Mobility - Carrying Forward the**

Spirit of the Ancient Silk Roads

The 11th General Assembly (GA), the most significant annual event of the Silk-Road Universities Network (SUN), will be held in Algeria from November 14 to 19. Bringing together presidents, professors, and students from member universities worldwide, this official event will serve as a platform to share the Silk-Road spirit and deepen academic and cultural exchange.

The agenda of 11th GA is “International and Trans-disciplinary Research Collaboration and Student Mobility - Carrying Forward the Spirit of the Ancient Silk Roads”

The official itinerary begins on November 14, as participants from around the globe arrive in Oran, Algeria. They will then be transported to the venue for the Opening Ceremony. After completing their respective schedules, the event will officially conclude on November 19 with the Closing Ceremony, followed by check-out and departure on November 20.

Registration for the General Assembly will be conducted in two rounds: the first round closes at the end of July, and the second round closes at the end of August. We encourage active participation from all member universities looking to expand their global net-

work and academic dialogue.

SUN Welcomes New Advisors

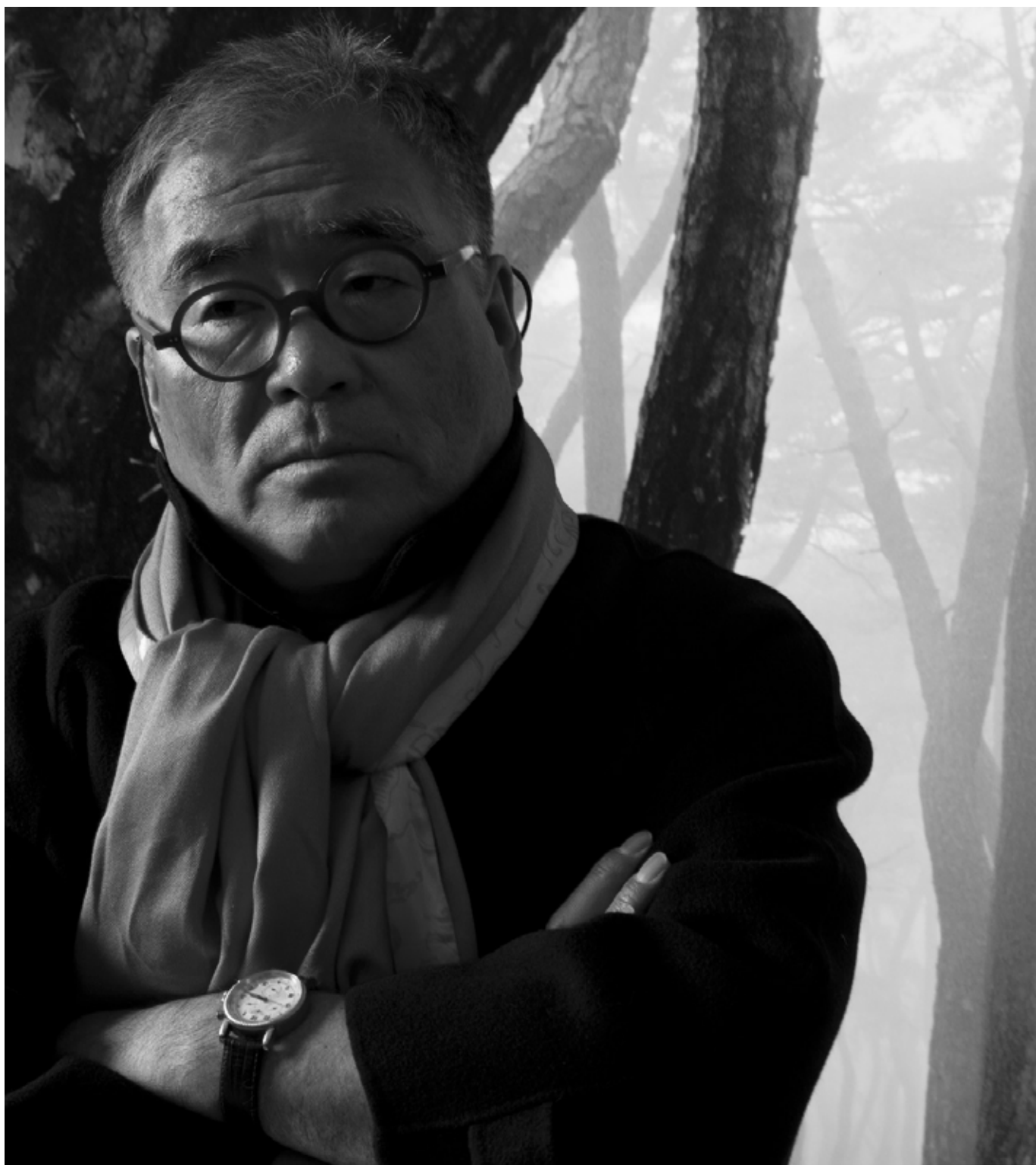


Dr. Adam Fenech

Advisor for Climate and Sustainability Projects

Dr. Adam Fenech is an internationally recognized leader in climate change science, policy, and applied climate solutions. He earned his

PhD from the University of Toronto and spent 25 years as a climate researcher with Environment and Climate Change Canada, the Government of Canada's principal environmental agency. Throughout his career, Dr. Fenech has authored and edited 14 books on climate change, contributing extensively to global understanding of climate science and environmental challenges. His research in climate visualization has received recognition from MIT for work in communicating coastal erosion, highlighting his contribution to innovative approaches in climate communication and public engagement. In addition, Dr. Fenech led the largest research fleet of drones at any Canadian university, which includes the largest drone in Canada, demonstrating his involvement in advancing the use of emerging technologies in environmental research. Dr. Fenech was also a contributing member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which was awarded the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for its global efforts in advancing climate science and policy cooperation.



Bae Bien-U,

Advisor for Photography & Arts

Bae Bien-U is one of Korea's most internationally acclaimed contemporary photographers, renowned for his poetic and contemplative images of pine forests and natural landscapes that explore the relationship between nature, time, and human spirituality. Born in Yeosu, Korea, he graduated from Hongik University and later conducted research in the Department of Photo Design at the University of

Bielefeld in Germany. Over the course of his distinguished career, Bae served as Professor of Photography at Seoul Institute of the Arts for more than three decades and later as Distinguished Professor at Sunchon National University. His artistic achievements have earned him numerous prestigious honors, including the Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters from the French government in 2023, the Lee Jung-seop Art Award in 2016, and the Ok-gwan Order of Cultural Merit from the Korean government in 2009. Bae's works have been exhibited extensively at leading museums, galleries, and international art events around the world, including exhibitions in France, Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States, Belgium, China, and Spain. His photographs have been featured at prominent venues such as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Venice Biennale, Paris Photo, and numerous solo exhibitions at Galerie RX in Paris and other internationally renowned institutions.

Professor Qian Long Kweh Inaugurated as 2026 IASS President



In 2026, Professor Qian Long Kweh from the School of Management at Canadian University Dubai was inaugurated as the new President of the International Association for Silk-Road Studies (IASS), an affiliate of the Silk-Road Universities Network (SUN). A world-renowned expert in performance analytics and sustainability (ESG) research, Professor Kweh has long served as a bridge between academia

and policy contexts.

In his inaugural statement, President Kweh shared his vision: "IASS will move beyond being a platform for exchange and position itself as a system that delivers measurable academic and policy outcomes." He pledged to strengthen the association's global impact by establishing focused thematic clusters and prioritizing joint publications in reputable journals.

WRICOS 2025–2026

The Silk-Road Universities Network (SUN) has announced WRICOS 2025–2026, an international writing contest designed to promote linguistic diversity and cultural exchange along the Silk Roads. Through poetry and essay writing, the contest aims to encourage students to express their ideas, experiences, and perspectives while celebrating the rich linguistic heritage of the regions connected by the Silk Roads. The competition is open to students from SUN member universities, while students from non-member institutions are also welcome to participate and receive certificates of recognition. Further details regarding

the contest themes and schedule will be announced in the near future. One of the unique features of WRICOS is that winning entries will be translated into multiple languages and published in e-books, making them accessible to a global audience. Submitted works will be translated into multiple languages under the coordination of Uzbekistan State World Languages University. Outstanding participants will also have the opportunity to attend the 11th General Assembly of SUN in Algeria through various award programs. By bringing together young writers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, WRICOS seeks to strengthen mutual understanding and foster intercultural dialogue across the Silk Roads.

PHOCOS 2025–2026

The Silk-Road Universities Network (SUN) has announced PHOCOS 2025–2026, its international photography contest under the theme “Taste of the Silk Roads: Food, Table, and Culture Shared along the Silk Roads.” The contest invites participants to capture the rich culinary traditions, dining cultures, and human connections that have developed across the Silk Roads throughout history. The competition is open to students of SUN member universities, while students from non-member in-

The 9th Photo Contest of SUN Silk-Road Universities Network **PHOCOS** **2025-2026**

Grand Prize Winning Photo of PHOCOS 2023–2024,
taken in Iran, by Mehdi Dadkhah, Mohajer Technical
and Vocational University, Iran

Theme of the Contest

TASTE OF THE SILK ROADS

Food, Table, and Culture
Shared along the Silk Roads

Submission due

August 31, 2026

Result Announcement

September 21, 2026

Email

phocos@sun0822.org

(Please CC both secretariat@sun0822.org and
ussunstudents@gmail.com)

Website

www.sun-silkroadia.org



SCHEDULE OF CONTEST

Submission due: August 31, 2026 (by 23:59 GST)

Result Announcement: September 21, 2026

ELIGIBILITY

Students of member universities of the Silk-Road Universities Network (SUN)

** Students of non-member universities are eligible for application, but no additional award other than certificate will be given.*

HOW TO APPLY

Fill out the application form available on the website of SUN (www.sun-silkroadia.org).

PRIZE & PRIVILEGE

Grand Prize (1 Awardee)

Certificate and invitation to the 11th General Assembly of SUN and the award ceremony to be held at Abderrahmane Mira University of Béjaïa, Ferhat Abbas University of Sétif 1, University of Aboubekr Belkaid Tlemcen, and University of Sciences and Technology Houari Boumediene, Algeria with full coverage of the cost for round-trip flights, accommodations (hotel and meals), and the official culture tour by the organizer.

Excellence Award (2 Awardees)

The same as for the Grand Prize mentioned above except that the recipients of this award are supposed to take care of the cost for flight by themselves.

Special Selection (5 Awardees)

The same as for the Excellence Award mentioned above except that the organizer will provide only the official culture tour and meals for the recipients of this award.

Citation (10 Awardees)

Certificate of merit only.

* All of the award-winning photos will be published in a booklet or e-book and displayed in the exhibition during the General Assembly as well as at the digital exhibition gallery in the website of SUN for a year.

* Privileges for the awardees and the schedules may change depending on the circumstances.

Organized by



THE SILK-ROAD
UNIVERSITIES
NETWORK

stitutions are also welcome to participate and receive certificates of recognition. Submissions will be accepted until August 9, 2026, and the results will be announced on August 31, 2026. Outstanding participants will receive various awards and opportunities, including invitations to attend the 11th General Assembly of SUN in Algeria. Winning photographs will also be published in a booklet or e-book

and showcased at both the General Assembly exhibition and SUN's website, promoting cultural exchange and mutual understanding among students across the Silk Roads.

Announcement: 2026 Global Education & Innovation Programs by Member Universities

We are pleased to introduce the major special lecture and summer camp programs organized by the member universities of the Silk-Road Universities Network (SUN) for the second half of this year. We encourage all students across the network to take an active interest in these diverse platforms for academic exchange, covering topics from global sustainability and future innovation to humanism in medicine.

1. CUD Special Lecture - SUN Special Training Program on Global Sustainability: Silk Road Climate Futures Research Project (Canadian University Dubai)

Hosted by Canadian University Dubai (CUD), the SUN Special Training Program on Global Sustainability, titled “Silk Road Climate Fu-

tures Research Project,” offers an advanced learning and research experience focused on climate change and sustainability in the context of the Silk Road region. The program was led by Professor Adam Fenech, a world-renowned climatologist and co-recipient of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize as part of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). His leadership brings exceptional academic depth and global expertise to the program. Under Professor Fenech’s guidance, participants engaged in multidisciplinary research exploring climate futures, working with real data and analytical frameworks to better understand and address regional climate challenges. The program aimed to strengthen students’ global research capacity and applied understanding of sustainability issues.

2. YICGG 2026 (Youth Innovation Competition on Global Governance)

Youth Innovation Competition on Global Governance (YICGG) 2026 is hosted by Fudan University, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, and the Shanghai Longcheer Welfare Foundation, and co-hosted by the Silk-Road Universities Network (SUN). Under the theme “World Cultural Heritage and Human Civilization,” YICGG 2026 brings together outstanding young minds from around the world to

examine global governance challenges and propose innovative solutions. The competition provides a collaborative platform where talented students from across the Silk Road network can exchange ideas and develop creative concepts that contribute to international progress. Students from SUN member universities are invited to share their original insights and participate in this prestigious global competition. The Final Round and Award Ceremony took place in Venice, Italy, from 20 to 24 July 2026, offering participants an exceptional opportunity to broaden their global perspectives, engage with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds. We warmly encourage students from all SUN member universities become part of the next generation of global innovators and leaders.

3. UDG Summer School 2026 (University of Donja Gorica)

UDG Summer School 2026 was hosted by the University of Donja Gorica. Under the theme “The History of the Future,” the program brings together open-minded and globally oriented students from around the world, offering a unique opportunity for academic learning, cultural exchange, and international collaboration. The Summer School was offered free of charge, including tuition, accom-

modation, meals, and research excursions. Participants are only responsible for their own airfare. SUN warmly encourages students from all member institutions to take advantage of this exceptional opportunity and apply for the program.

4. Barcelona International Summer School 2026 (University of Barcelona)

Barcelona International Summer School (BISS) 2026 was hosted by Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF). A key feature of this year's program is a plenary lecture on Medicine and the Environment delivered by Professor Adam Fenech, a world-renowned climatologist and co-recipient of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize as part of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). His participation brought exceptional academic depth and a strong interdisciplinary perspective to the program. BISS 2026 brings together global faculty from the United Kingdom, United States, and Portugal, offering an interactive and multidisciplinary learning experience. The program included hands-on workshops on Planetary Wellbeing, Narrative Medicine, and the use of AI in healthcare, encouraging students to explore the intersection of humanism, medicine, and emerging technologies. The two-week intensive program provides 4 ECTS credits

and was conducted in English, with a focus on academic engagement, discussion, and applied learning. BISS welcomed undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students from healthcare-related fields, as well as students from other disciplines interested in empathy in medicine and interdisciplinary approaches to health.

*Detailed schedules and application guidelines for each program can be found on the official SUN website.

Yu-jeong Lee is a student of East African Studies & Portuguese at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Korea.

USSUN NEWS

USSUN Elects New Vice President Ettore Grasso of Italy - Committed to Development of SUN Student Body

Meet our new USSUN Vice President, Ettore Grasso!

With his passion for USSUN and unwavering dedication, Ettore is ready to help lead our community toward an even brighter future. We are thrilled to have him on board and can't wait to see all that we will achieve together.

Let's give him a warm welcome and support him on this exciting journey!



Briefly introduce yourself?

I'm Ettore Grasso and I am from Italy. I'm 26 and I was a student of the University L'Orientale from Naples. My Master degree was in languages and cultures from East Asia with a focus on Japanese, while my bachelor degree was in English and Japanese culture.

What motivated you to take on this position?

I was part of the organization team when the GA was held in Naples. During the time of the GA I was honestly impressed by the whole SUN-USSUN organization. I met many amazing people, from students to professors,

and even though I was working, I had a lot of fun and learned many things. The next year, I also had the opportunity to be a student in the GA held in Uzbekistan, and it was an amazing experience too. My objective is to make every year an amazing experience to everyone, as it was for me.

What are your main goals for the organization during your team?

I really like when things are clear and easy to understand, and I want to translate that as I do activities in USSUN. For organization I'm very pragmatic and my strengths are finding easy solutions that are applicable to the situation. I also enjoy meeting new students and cultures and making them feel comfortable during the GA.

“I’m determined to be a valuable asset to them, and even though I’m the newest member I want to make myself useful.”



USSUN WORKSHOP – in DUBAI

The USSUN Executive Board and professors will come together to discuss the future of USSUN and explore new opportunities for growth and collaboration. We are excited about what lies ahead and look forward to creating an even brighter future for USSUN!

WHERE: Canadian University in Dubai

WHEN: 23–27 August 2026

PARTICIPANTS:

- Prof. Karim Chelli, Chairman of SUN
- Prof. Sungdon Hwang, Secretary-General of SUN
- Prof. Dorota Sylwia, USSUN Advisor

- USSUN Secretariat (Secretary-General, President, and Vice Presidents)
- SUN Secretariat Coordinators
- Students of Canadian University Dubai

USSUN Instagram

@ussun_

Stay up to date with the latest news, activities, and events from USSUN and SUN on our Instagram account!

Follow us now and never miss out on exciting updates from the USSUN and SUN community!



NEWS FROM **MEMBER UNIVERSITIES**

Compiled by Min-ju Sung

University of Aboubekr Belkaid Tlemcen, Algeria

How Tlemcen Connects to the Spirit of the Silk Road



A view of Tlemcen

(Photo courtesy of the University of Aboubekr Belkaid Tlemcen)

Tlemcen, known as the Pearl of Andalusian Heritage in Algeria, reflects the spirit of the Silk Road through its long history of cultural exchange and coexistence. Located at the crossroads of North Africa, the Mediterranean, and trans-Saharan trade routes, the city welcomed merchants, scholars, and travelers

from different civilizations for centuries. Influenced by Andalusian, Arab, Berber, African, and Mediterranean cultures, Tlemcen became an important center of knowledge, arts, and commerce. Its rich architectural heritage, traditional music, and craftsmanship illustrate this cultural diversity. Like the great cities of the Silk Road, Tlemcen promoted dialogue, tolerance, and intellectual exchange. Today, the University of Tlemcen continues this legacy through international cooperation and Erasmus partnerships. In this way, Tlemcen remains a bridge connecting cultures, histories, and people across continents.

When Literature Becomes Conscience: Yasmina Khadra in Dialogue with the University World February, 2026



**Mohammed
Moulessehouli**
(Photo courtesy
of the University
of Aboubekr
Belkaid Tlemcen)

On Tuesday, February 3, 2026, the University hosted a distinguished literary and intellectual meeting with the internationally renowned Algerian writer Yasmina Khadra. The event was dedicated to reflecting on the role of the novel and the responsibility of the writer in the context of contemporary cultural and intellectual transformations. Yasmina Khadra is the pen name of Algerian writer Mohammed Moulessehoul, internationally acclaimed for his novels exploring themes of identity, conflict and the human condition. He spent part of his childhood in Tlemcen, where he first discovered his profound love for literature, began learning the French language, and started writing his earliest prose. His works have been translated into numerous languages and have received global recognition for their literary depth and social insight. Through his writing, he offers a powerful reflection on contemporary society, bridging cultures and perspectives

PAU 2025 International Conference: Africa's Path Toward Sustainability, December, 2025

The University of Tlemcen hosted the Pan African University (PAU) 2025 International Conference, bringing together leading researchers, policymakers, and experts from



Participants in PAU 2025

(Photo courtesy of the University of Aboubekr Belkaid Tlemcen)

Africa and beyond to discuss key sustainability challenges. The event focused on critical thematic areas including water security, renewable energy, climate resilience, digital transformation, and food systems. Through plenary sessions, keynote presentations, and scientific panels, participants explored innovative solutions and interdisciplinary approaches to support Africa's sustainable development. The conference also provided a platform for scientific exchange and networking, strengthening collaboration between African and international institutions.

Research and Innovation at the University of Tlemcen: A Growing Scientific Ecosystem in North Africa

As part of the implementation of its vision to promote innovation, entrepreneurship, and strengthen academic partnerships, the University of Tlemcen has marked by several significant milestones which reflect the University's continued commitment to supporting students and encouraging entrepreneurial initiatives. Among the most active efforts is the Laboratory of Nonlinear Analysis and Applied Mathematics, directed by Prof. Boumedienne Abdellaoui, which focuses on mathematical modeling and differential equations applied to engineering and physics problems. Another prominent program is in

A research lab at Tlemcen

(Photo courtesy of the University of Aboubekr Belkaid Tlemcen)



physics, the Laboratory of Theoretical Physics, which works on condensed matter, plasma physics, and fundamental theoretical models. In engineering sciences, the Laboratory of Automatic Control of Tlemcen (LAT), develops research in control systems, robotics, renewable energy systems, and biomedical applications .

9th General Assembly of SUN - The International Position of the University of Tlemcen: Integration into the Silk Road Universities Network (SUN)

From 11th to 14th November 2024, Professor Djawad ZENDAGUI attended the 9th General Assembly of SUN (Silk Road Universities Network) held at University of Naples “L’Orientale”. The SUN association is a non-governmental association that aims to restore the spirit of Silk Road by enhancing bilateral and multilateral cooperation of universities. As July 2024, 72 universities are members of this association covering 30 countries. The participation of University Abou Bekr Belkaid Tlemcen (UABT) aims to join this network through actions that have been presented during the meeting of Naples. At the end of the meeting, UABT has been accepted as a full member of SUN.



SUN General Assembly

(Photo courtesy of the University of Aboubekr Belkaid Tlemcen)

By joining SUN, the University of Tlemcen positions itself as an active contributor to the revival of the Silk Road spirit in its modern academic form. It serves as a bridge between cultures and knowledge systems, reinforcing its role as a regional hub for education, research, and international cooperation.

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

AUTh Innovation Chronicles: The Success of the 1st Aristotle Innovation Forum

The Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTh) achieved a historic milestone with the successful organization and hosting of the 1st Aristotle Innovation Forum (AIF), which took place from May 17 to May 23, 2026. Under the central theme “From Aristotle to AI,” this ambitious institutional initiative transformed Thessaloniki



into a thriving global hub of academic excellence, technological breakthrough, and profound philosophical dialogue. Over the course of seven days, the Forum brought together the global academic elite, pioneering tech innovators, international researchers, students, and institutional leaders to bridge the gap between classical knowledge and modern technology.

The primary goal of the AIF is to act as an annual, structural tool connecting the foundational knowledge produced within the public university with the cutting-edge demands of an algorithmic world, fostering real-time convergence between science, technology, entrepreneurship, and civil society. With more than 70 distinct events and over 100 internationally renowned speakers, the Forum's programming spanned multiple disciplines and went far beyond pure engineering to explore the ethical, political, and socio-economic dimensions of the technological revolution. The



At the parallel event
**“A Century of Global
 Bridges”**
 (Photo courtesy of AUTH)



overarching theme provided a rich framework for looking at modern computing through the lens of classical philosophy. Specialized panels debated the global governance of algorithms and the urgent need for human-centric guardrails, while a highly attended cross-disciplinary session explored the spiritual and metaphysical questions raised by artificial intelligence through the lens of Orthodox



Panel on “Universities in the Digital Age” at the Thessaloniki International Fair (Photo courtesy of AUTH)

theology. Practical applications were also highlighted at Pavilion 15, where the Faculty of Medicine demonstrated how machine learning and emotional intelligence assist cardiac surgeons and clinicians in real-world patient care.

A significant portion of the Forum focused on how higher education must adapt to the evolving European landscape. Experts mapped out the future of European university alliances, discussing the implementation of micro-credentials, cross-border student mobility, and personalized, flexible learning pathways designed to support modern students. Keynote speakers shared best practices on institutional transformation, focusing on quality assurance in teaching and the integration of digital tools without erasing the vital element of human mentorship.

Another standout pillar of the Forum was its

active outreach to the Greek scientific diaspora, focusing heavily on the concept of “brain circulation” rather than “brain drain.” The Forum hosted specialized networking events designed to link young AUTh researchers directly with established Greek scientists working abroad. A prominent highlight of this initiative was a special session celebrating the international achievements of Greek female scientists leading major tech and artificial intelligence research teams worldwide.

Innovation at AUTh also extended deep into sustainability and the primary sector during sessions held at the Emilios Riadis Hall. In collaboration with industry experts, researchers demonstrated the implementation of digital product passports using blockchain and IoT technologies to secure food supply chains and verify the environmental footprint of agricultural goods. Additionally, presentations detailed how AUTh campus operations are transitioning toward a net-zero carbon footprint through green energy grids developed by the Faculty of Engineering.

The innovation forum expanded across the entire city and campus through diverse parallel programming. The Central Library of AUTh opened its doors to present its Rare Collections, illustrating how high-resolution digital imaging and AI-driven manuscript translation are preserving centuries-old texts for the global public. Public debates analyzed the upcoming

disruption of the job market to examine how AI will shift employment demands and identify the specific skills modern graduates need to stay competitive. True to the spirit of a public university, the logistics, execution, and coordination of these 70+ events were powered entirely by the passion of student volunteers managed by the AUTh Volunteer Coordination Office.

The University leadership concluded the event with a clear commitment to turn the Aristotle Innovation Forum into a lasting annual institution that will continue on a larger scale with even stronger global footprints.

Moving forward, the University administration is already executing its post-forum action plan. Full video recordings, panel transcriptions, and white papers from the main AI and higher education sessions will soon be published open-access on the official portal. Furthermore, interdisciplinary committees are being formed within AUTh to implement the Forum's findings on AI ethics regulations, micro-credentials, and diaspora networking, while preliminary focus groups will begin meeting next semester to outline the core themes for the Aristotle Innovation Forum 2027.

The University of Jordan, Jordan

UJ Launches Korea–Jordan Training Institute for Engineering and Technology with a Total Cost of USD 15 Million

The University of Jordan (UJ), in collaboration with the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), officially launched the Korea–Jordan Training Institute for Engineering and Technology (KJTiet) on Feb. 16, 2026.

The official launch ceremony was held under the patronage of UJ President Prof. Nathir Obeidat and attended by key dignitaries, including Secretary-General of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation Marwan Al-Rifai; Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Jordan

Inaugurating the Korea–Jordan Training Institute for Engineering and Technology (Photo courtesy of UJ)



Kim Pil-woo; and Country Director of KOICA Jordan Kim So-young, alongside prominent leaders from the engineering and technology sectors.

The launch marks the beginning of a project that aims to strengthen specialised training for Jordanian engineers, enhance their practical skills in modern technologies, and transfer technological expertise to Jordanian industries. The initiative seeks to bridge the gap between academia and industry, create job opportunities for graduates of engineering and IT disciplines, and promote innovation and productivity within industrial sectors.

In his address during the ceremony, President Obeidat expressed the University's pride in launching this project, describing it as a vital bridge for transferring advanced technology from Korea to Jordan. He emphasised that it reflects the University's commitment to enhancing applied education, aligning its outcomes with labour market needs, empowering youth with the skills necessary to compete at both regional and international levels, and supporting national development efforts. He affirmed that the project elevates cooperation between the two sides to a strategic partnership by investing in human capital, facilitating knowledge transfer, and strengthening institutional capacities.

He added that the University's selection to host the Institute reflects not only its size

but also its competence, given its academic expertise, advanced infrastructure, and steadfast commitment to reform and modernisation. He noted that the Institute comes at a critical time, as Jordan continues to advance sectoral reforms and strengthen its position in the global knowledge economy.

In turn, Secretary-General Al-Rifai highlighted the project's importance in supporting development efforts and building national technical and engineering capacities, in line with Jordan's modernisation priorities. He added that the Institute reflects the strength of bilateral relations between Jordan and Korea, noting that this cooperation will contribute to tangible progress beyond education, including in water management and green energy in the Kingdom.

For his part, Ambassador Kim Pil-woo stated that "education and vocational training have been central pillars of the Korean government's efforts to support Jordan's socio-economic development," reaffirming Korea's strong commitment to investing in Jordanian youth and their future opportunities. He added that this joint project will help address key challenges, including youth unemployment, and contribute to Jordan's efforts to create high-value jobs and enhance national industrial competitiveness under the Economic Modernisation Vision.

The establishment of the Institute aims to strengthen Jordan's technical competencies in

line with the requirements of modern industries and support the national economy by fostering collaboration between the university and the industrial sector. It will prepare well-qualified technical personnel for the job market in fields such as green energy, cybersecurity, industrial automation, and artificial intelligence, and will train over 200 specialised professionals annually to meet growing industry demands.

The project is implemented by a specialised Korean consortium led by the Korea Productivity Centre (KPC) and Sungkyunkwan University (SKKU). The consortium comprises experts in curriculum development, industrial automation, cybersecurity, green energy, and quality assurance, dedicated to advancing Jordan's technical education.

A central focus of the partnership is capacity building for Jordanian staff through advanced training programs. These initiatives include administrative and academic fellowships in South Korea, "train-the-trainer" programs at the University of Jordan, and the establishment of the University of Jordan Convergent Technology Forum, a sustainable platform for collaboration between academia and industry to foster innovation, joint projects, and support startups.

The Institute's facilities will be constructed on a site of approximately 4,000 square meters within the University of Jordan campus. The total project value is estimated at USD 15 million, with the Korean government

contributing USD 11 million and the University of Jordan contributing USD 4 million.

UJ Expands Global and Industry Partnerships Through Strategic Agreements

The University of Jordan (UJ) continues to strengthen its international presence and industry engagement through a series of academic, research, and training agreements with leading universities and institutional partners worldwide. These initiatives reflect the University's strategic vision to expand global collaboration, enhance research excellence, and align academic programs with evolving labour market needs.

In the context of its international outreach, UJ signed an academic and research cooperation agreement with Ain Temouchent University – Belhadj Bouchaib in Algeria during an official visit by UJ President Prof. Nathir Obeidat. The agreement aims to promote joint research projects, as well as faculty and student exchange programs, while supporting the development of academic programs and enhancing teaching quality at both institutions. It also emphasises aligning educational outcomes with labour market demands, building on UJ's expertise in digital transformation and the digitisation of educational content.

UJ also signed a memorandum of

understanding with Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) in Brunei. The agreement establishes a framework for cooperation in student and staff exchanges, joint research initiatives, and academic program development. It also encourages the establishment of joint research groups and publication in internationally indexed journals, contributing to enhanced research quality and global academic visibility. The partnership highlights UJ's role in promoting cultural dialogue and offering Arabic-language programs for non-native speakers through its Language Center.

In North America, UJ signed a student exchange agreement with Queen's University at Kingston, Ontario, Canada, to establish a joint graduate exchange program. The agreement provides structured academic exchange opportunities, ensuring recognition of coursework and effective coordination between the two institutions. This collaboration supports UJ's efforts to provide its graduate students with international academic and research exposure while strengthening cross-cultural understanding.

At the national level, UJ has also reinforced its collaboration with the healthcare and pharmaceutical sectors through a package of agreements signed at the School of Pharmacy under the theme, "Strengthening Partnerships and Supporting Excellence." The agreements, concluded with leading partners including

the King Hussein Cancer Center, Dar Aldawa Development & Investment Co., the Jordanian Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Co. (JPM), and the Arab Drug Store Co. (ADS), aim to expand student training opportunities, support applied research, and enhance graduate employability.

These partnerships include training placements, joint applied studies, and a Postgraduate Year One (PGY1) pharmacy residency program in collaboration with the King Hussein Cancer Center. They also provide structured practical training for Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) students and support community-based learning, guest lectures, and career development initiatives. Additionally, the University inaugurated a new computer laboratory for postgraduate students at the School of Pharmacy, supported by ADS, to strengthen digital learning and research capacity.

Through these agreements, UJ continues to consolidate its position as a leading academic institution regionally and globally, fostering impactful partnerships that advance education, research, and community service.

UJ Marks Major Progress in Innovation, Education, and Infrastructure

The University of Jordan (UJ) continues to achieve significant milestones across



Inauguration of the Zain Esports and Game Development Academy (Photo courtesy of UJ)

digital innovation, academic excellence, and infrastructure development, reinforcing its position as a leading institution at both the national and regional levels.

In a major step toward supporting the digital economy, UJ inaugurated the Zain Esports and Game Development Academy in partnership with the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship and Zain Jordan. Opened under the patronage of HRH Prince Omar bin Faisal, the academy represents a state-of-the-art hub for training, competition, and innovation in esports and game development. The facility offers specialised programs in digital content creation, live streaming, and event management, while connecting students with mentorship and startup opportunities through the Zain Innovation Campus network.

This initiative aligns with Jordan's Economic Modernisation Vision and aims to prepare a new generation of professionals in the rapidly growing gaming and esports sector.

In the field of information technology, the King Abdullah II School of Information Technology marked its 25th anniversary, celebrating a legacy of academic excellence and technological leadership. The School has achieved notable progress in global rankings, with Computer Science and Information Systems placed among the top 100 worldwide. Over the past three years, it has produced more than 450 Scopus-indexed research publications, while eight of its faculty members have been ranked among the top 2% of scientists globally. The celebration also featured the inauguration of advanced Artificial Intelligence and Robotics laboratories, reflecting the School's commitment to cutting-edge education and research.

Further advancing its digital transformation efforts, UJ launched the Digital Learning Content Project, with 50 digitised courses set for implementation in the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The initiative builds on the university's progress in producing 200 digital courses to date and aims to enhance teaching quality, modernise learning methods, and expand access to innovative educational content. The project reflects strong collaboration between academic and technical

teams and supports UJ's vision for a flexible and technology-driven learning environment.

In parallel with its digital and academic achievements, UJ continues to invest in modernising its infrastructure, particularly in the medical field. The university inaugurated a series of advanced laboratories at the School of Dentistry, including a Clinical Simulation Lab and a specialised Endodontics Laboratory equipped with 3D imaging technologies and advanced training tools. A new postgraduate lecture hall was also opened to support advanced learning. These developments aim to enhance students' clinical skills, align with international standards, and strengthen the university's capacity to deliver high-quality medical education and research.

Through these achievements, the University of Jordan reaffirms its commitment to innovation, excellence, and continuous development. By integrating advanced technologies, strengthening academic performance, and upgrading its facilities, UJ continues to prepare its students for future careers while contributing to national development and the global knowledge economy.



Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (Photo courtesy of KazNU)

Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan

Al-Farabi Kazakh National University: Sustainable Development Strategies and Innovative Initiatives on the Great Silk Road

Al-Farabi Kazakh National University confirms its status as a leading center for science and education in Central Asia, actively transforming the principles of sustainable development into practical achievements. As a vital node within the Silk-Road Universities Network, the University demonstrates consistent progress in implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals, creating a platform for international academic cooperation and technological exchange.

One of the most significant events in the University's research activities was the opening of a joint bioconversion laboratory on May 29, 2026, established in partnership with the Xi'an University of Science and Technology. This project, which combines the potential of KazNU and its Chinese partners, focuses on developing technologies for coal biodesulfurization, biomethane production, and plastic waste recycling. The laboratory's activities directly contribute to the implementation of Kazakhstan's 2060 Carbon Neutrality Doctrine. The effectiveness of this collaboration is evidenced by the publication of more than eight scientific articles in the prestigious international databases Scopus and Web of Science.

In the sphere of educational policy, the University continues to strengthen its position in global academic rankings. Its inclusion among the top 166 universities in the world according to QS and its recognition as the country's best multidisciplinary university in 2025 attest to the high competitiveness of its educational programs. In June 2025, twenty-nine of the University's educational programs successfully passed international accreditation by the ACQUIN agency, confirming that KazNU's educational standards meet global requirements. Furthermore, the active implementation of online courses on the Coursera platform promotes the democratization of access to high-quality higher

education.

The University's technological development spans a wide range of areas, from aerospace research to artificial intelligence. The successful launch of a nanosatellite developed in collaboration with partners, along with the opening of the International Institute of Digital Technologies and Robotics, highlights the University's innovative development vector. The use of a supercomputer to develop artificial intelligence systems in the Kazakh language and the operation of an unmanned aviation center demonstrate the University's readiness for the challenges of the digital age.

KazNU's environmental agenda is realized through the concept of a green campus. The introduction of the AI-based virtual eco-advisor, EcoFarabi AI, allows for increasing environmental literacy among students and staff. The installation of solar panels on University buildings and the implementation of the Zero Waste Campus program—which includes the operation of an eco-hub and a system of reverse vending machines for plastic collection—are aimed at reducing the anthropogenic impact on the environment. The landscaping of the campus territory, including the planting of more than a thousand trees, creates a favorable ecosystem for the educational and scientific process.

Social responsibility remains a priority area for the University. The institution provides

comprehensive support to young scientists through state grants and housing certificates. The functioning of the Inclusive Environment scientific and practical center guarantees equal access to education for students with special needs. Social initiatives, such as the provision of free meal vouchers and the creation of specialized mother-and-child rooms, foster a supportive atmosphere within the University community.

Thus, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University acts not only as an educational institution but as a key driver of sustainable progress. By integrating scientific achievements, environmental initiatives, and social programs, the University makes a significant contribution to the prosperity of the region and the strengthening of intellectual ties within the global Silk Road network.

University of Coimbra, Portugal

University of Coimbra General Library receives donation of 80 volumes of Buddhist sacred texts from Thailand

The 80 volumes of the World Tipitaka Saj-jha-ya Phonetic Recitation, King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Queen Sirikit Commemorative 2016 Edition,



Presentation of the Buddhist sacred texts

(Photo courtesy of UC | DCM)

a special edition of the Buddhist sacred texts dedicated to King Bhumibol Adulyadej (1927–2016) and Queen Sirikit (1932–2025) of Thailand, have joined the collection of the University of Coimbra General Library (BGUC) as of Tuesday, 28 October 2025. Donated by the Embassy of Thailand in Portugal and the World Tipiṭaka Foundation, the volumes were received by the UC Vice-Rector for Culture, Communication and Open Science, Delfim Leão, and BGUC Director, Manuel Portela, in a ceremony held in the São Pedro Hall.

The rare edition of the Tipiṭaka (the canon of Buddhist scriptures), which Thailand is donating to institutions in 30 countries, was launched in 2016 to mark the 70th anniversary of the reign of King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Queen Sirikit.

It consists of a 40-volume edition dedicated to the King (Pāli Phonetic Reference) and a 40-volume edition dedicated to the Queen (Pāli Monotone Music Notation). At Tuesday's ceremony, the works were presented to BGUC by the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand to Portugal, Kanokwan Pengsuwan, and the President of the World Tipitaka Foundation, Thanpuying Varaporn Pramroj Na Ayudhaya.

For more information, see <https://noticias.uc.pt/en/articles/university-of-coimbra-general-library-receives-donation-of-80-volumes-of-buddhist-sacred-texts-from-thailand/>

University of Coimbra among world's best in 29 subject areas

The University of Coimbra (UC) once again stands out in the latest edition of the QS World University Rankings by Subject, released in March 2026, ranking among the world's top higher education institutions in 29 subject areas. The prestigious ranking, which evaluates universities based on academic reputation, research output and employer reputation, identifies UC as the top national institution in five of these subject areas and places it among the world's top 150 in Petroleum Engineering and Classics & Ancient History.

In addition to these two areas, the University

of Coimbra is also ranked as the leading national institution in Anthropology, Archaeology, and Law, while placing in the national top three in 20 subject areas. These results — with most subject areas ranked within the global top 300 — reinforce UC's position in the annual ranking produced by the global higher education analyst Quacquarelli Symonds (QS).

In this edition, UC improved its position in 11 subject areas and was ranked for the first time in four: Anthropology, Classics & Ancient History, Geography, and Politics & International Relations.

The QS World University Rankings by Subject provide an independent comparative analysis of around 2,000 universities' performance worldwide across 55 subjects, grouped into five broad areas: Arts and Humanities; Engineering and Technology; Life Sciences; Natural Sciences; and Social Sciences and Management. Harvard University tops this year's global ranking, placing first in 14 of the evaluated subjects.

For more information, see <https://noticias.uc.pt/en/articles/university-of-coimbra-among-worlds-best-in-29-subject-areas/>



University Palace of the University of Coimbra

(Photo courtesy of UC | Hugo Faria)

University of Coimbra and Renmin University of China launch joint research centre for civilisational exchanges and mutual learning

The University of Coimbra (UC) and Renmin University of China (RUC) have launched the RUC-UC Joint Research Centre for China-Portugal Civilisational Exchanges and Mutual Learning, to be jointly managed by UC's Sino-Lusophone Academy and RUC's School of Arts. The Centre was formally established at a ceremony held on Wednesday, 8 April 2026, in the UC Senate Room, attended by the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Portugal, Yang Yirui.

The new Centre is the third joint centre with Chinese institutions established under

UC's Sino-Lusophone Academy — the first was set up in 2018 with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), and the second in 2019 with Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU). Its mission is to promote civilisational exchanges and mutual learning between China and Portugal, supporting the development of cultural ties between the two countries. Planned activities include joint academic research, seminars and international conferences, as well as performances and exhibitions related to Chinese culture, art and research themes.

“The new Joint Centre of the Sino-Lusophone Academy with Renmin University — one of the world's leading higher education institutions — reinforces the central role of the University of Coimbra in relations between the Portuguese-speaking world and the People's Republic

Inauguration of the Centre for China-Portugal Civilisational Exchanges and Mutual Learning

(Photo courtesy of UC | Hugo Faria)



of China, as reflected in the presence of the Chinese Ambassador at the ceremony,” said UC Vice-Rector for External Relations and Alumni João Nuno Calvão da Silva, who formalised the agreement alongside RUC President Ma Huaide.

For more information, see <https://noticias.uc.pt/en/articles/university-of-coimbra-and-renmin-university-of-china-launch-joint-research-centre-for-civilisational-exchanges-and-mutual-learn/>

University of Coimbra and Macao Polytechnic University launch joint laboratory in digital humanities and language sciences

The University of Coimbra (UC) and Macao Polytechnic University (MPU) are establishing a joint laboratory dedicated to advanced research in digital humanities, applied language sciences and digital dimensions of Intercultural Communication. The collaboration agreement establishing the MPU–UC Joint Research Laboratory in Digital Humanities and Applied Language Sciences was signed on Tuesday, 5 May 2026, at a ceremony held in the UC Senate Room.

The new lab strengthens scientific cooperation between UC and MPU, serving as a strategic platform for joint research projects,



Inauguration of the MPU–UC Joint Research Laboratory

(Photo courtesy of UC | Hugo Faria)

competitive funding applications, academic mobility and the training of early-career researchers. It will also contribute to knowledge transfer in Portuguese-speaking countries and territories, with a particular focus on strengthening academic and cultural relations between China and the Lusophone world.

Hosted at MPU's Faculty of Languages and Translation (FLT), the project will be led by Zhang Yunfeng, lecturer at FLT-MPU, and Manuel Portela, Director of the UC General Library. The agreement — signed by UC Rector Amílcar Falcão and MPU Vice-Rector Vivian Lei Ngan Lin — reinforces UC's presence within the Asia-Pacific scientific community, continuing to foster scientific and cultural links across continents through internationalisation, innovation and academic cooperation.

For more information, see
<https://noticias.uc.pt/en/articles/university-of-coimbra-and-macao-polytechnic-university-launch-joint-laboratory-in-digital-humanities-and-language-sciences/>

93 University of Coimbra scientists among the most cited in the world

The new edition of the World's Top 2% Scientists List, released annually by Stanford University in collaboration with Elsevier, features 93 scientists from the University of Coimbra (UC) among the most cited in 2024. Separate data were also published for the career-long impact list, with 62 UC researchers among the most cited throughout their careers.

In both rankings, UC's presence continues to grow compared to 2023, with two more scientists included in the single-year impact list and ten more in the career-long impact list.

The study was coordinated by John Ioannidis, Professor at Stanford University (USA), who is currently collaborating with UC as leader of the ERA Chair EXCELSIOR. The team analysed data from 236,313 scientists worldwide for the 2024 single-year impact list and from 230,303 scientists for the career-long impact list.

Compiled by Stanford University using Scopus data provided by Elsevier, the World's Top 2% Scientists List serves as a powerful tool



Tower of the University of Coimbra

(Photo courtesy of UC | Ana Bartolomeu)

for identifying global scientific leaders. The results, published annually by Elsevier, take into account the indexing, publications, and citations of scientists worldwide. Researchers are classified into 22 broad scientific fields and 174 sub-fields, allowing for a comprehensive representation of various disciplines. This classification is based on data from Stanford University and Elsevier, used for the ranking.

For more information, see
<https://noticias.uc.pt/en/articles/93-university-of-coimbra-scientists-among-the-most-cited-in-the-world/>

Canadian University Dubai, UAE

Canadian University Dubai media graduates rewrite the rules of modern marketing

Two graduates of Canadian University Dubai (CUD) are proving how human creativity remains a driving force in modern marketing, as they blend advanced technology with their talent for communication to rewrite the rules in audience engagement. Both alumni of the university's BA Communications in Advertising program, Hala Nsour and Mahdi Shafiei have emerged as pioneers in fields that barely existed when they graduated and are now transforming their respective domains of artificial intelligence and TikTok marketing.

Always looking to be part of the next big thing, Hala joined nybl, an AI startup that deploys science-based artificial intelligence solutions across sectors that underpin society, such as energy, healthcare and agriculture. She explained, "AI was still a misunderstood technology that people didn't yet trust. That's exactly why I wanted to be part of it, I knew I could help tell the story in a way that made it relatable. Our goal as a company is to democratise AI, and to do this, we use strategies that demystify the technology, building trust in our founders as thought leaders to educate



Hala Nsour (Photo courtesy of CUD)



Mr. Mahdi (Photo courtesy of CUD)

rather than defend, and frame AI not as a threat, but as a force for good.”

Having climbed the ladder from Marketing Manager to Director and then Chief Marketing Officer within two years, Hala credits her involvement in CUD clubs like the Model United Nations, the Student Council and the Poetry Society for giving her the soft skills that now underpin her career. As the business goes

global, the company's early endorsement of AI now speaks for itself, since nybl has partnered with giants like ADNOC, IBM, BP, and Microsoft, and its solutions have achieved remarkable results, including a 97% reduction in industrial downtime and a 3200% return on investment.

While Hala leads the conversation on the future of AI, fellow CUD advertising graduate, Mahdi Shafiei, is redefining the world of digital marketing. As the founder and CEO of Trifid Media, Mahdi took a risk, building an agency around TikTok before it became a marketing giant. His instincts proved right and Trifid Media now boasts over 100 billion views across social channels and has helped clients generate more than \$100 million in sales.

Mahdi explained, "In 2018, everyone thought TikTok was just a dancing app for kids, but I saw that this platform would be the future of communication and seized the opportunity before it was fully understood by the mainstream. We became the first agency in the region to sign up and start hosting exclusive TikTok workshops."

Combining his creative instincts, emerging technological tools and the confidence and curiosity he says he developed during his time at CUD, Madhi has built one of the region's most disruptive marketing agencies. Now with nearly 200 full-time staff with an average age of 23, Mahdi is backing the next generation of talent to combine their human creativity with

emerging technology to write the next chapter in successful audience engagement.

CUD showcases cross-cultural design excellence at Hong Kong's Belt & Road Fashion Gala

The School of Architecture and Interior Design at Canadian University Dubai (CUD) has taken center stage at the Chinese Culture Festival, transporting design innovation from Dubai City Walk to the global catwalk. As a member of the Silk Road Universities Network (SUN) and at the invitation of Hong Kong Polytechnic University, CUD joined participants to explore themes reflecting diverse cultural contexts through fashion design, engaging alongside creative institutions and communities from

CUD designs at the Chinese Culture Festival

(Photo courtesy of CUD)





CUD designs at the Chinese Culture Festival

(Photo courtesy of CUD)

over 30 countries and regions. In collaboration with international artist Charlie Koolhaas, CUD faculty developed a series of garments that build upon Koolhaas's ongoing Foto-Couture project, transforming elements of the built environment into wearable archives.

The first design, known as Reflected Futures — The Sheikh Zayed Line, signifies a modern abaya; a defining symbol of cultural identity, paying tribute to the garment's enduring significance, representing dignity, continuity, and heritage. While its form has adapted aesthetically over generations, it remains a powerful expression of national identity. The garment, printed with Koolhaas' photograph of Dubai's Al Attar Tower on Sheikh Zayed Road, aims to transform architecture into an embodied repository of memory. The

tower, an emblem of early 2000s postmodern Dubai, marks a pivotal moment when global modernism began to merge with regional expression.

The second design, The Irrigated Desert, reflects the Chinese qipao, a garment rooted in refinement and cultural tradition. The outfit is printed with Koolhaas' photograph of irrigated desert plants in Dubai, in the form of geometric fields of green sustained by drip-feed systems. The image reflects water's central role in shaping life in the UAE, from ancient aflaj irrigation to today's invisible technological networks. Transferred onto silk satin, the photograph becomes a metaphor for hybridity, linking desert cultivation with the qipao's history of cultural reinvention.

Reflecting on the interdisciplinary nature of the project and its academic context, artist Charlie Koolhaas said, "This collaboration offered me the opportunity to cross-pollinate my practice in photography, architecture, and fashion within a design-focused academic context, where Dubai's built environment and wearable forms converge to position heritage as an active driver of innovation."

Speaking about the broader impact of this initiative, Dean Massimo Imparato, explained, "The Belt & Road Fashion Gala exemplified the global perspective that defines our School. The dialogue between UAE national and

international participants enriched the project with a spectrum of cultural insight and creative intelligence. Engaging in initiatives of this scale is essential to shaping globally minded designers and strengthening our identity as a cross-disciplinary platform where academia and industry converge to drive the future of design innovation.”

Arash Behforooz, Creative Designer in the Marketing & Communications Department, assisted the team in the design process, translating Charlie Koolhaas’ concepts into clear visual directions during the selection process and the development of the project. “My background in architecture and interior design helped me interpret complex ideas quickly, with AI-enabled workflows. This project shows how design, technology, and cultural storytelling can come together to shape new creative possibilities,” he concluded.

Canadian University Dubai and Dubai Media Academy forge strategic alliance to shape future of Marketing Communications sector

Canadian University Dubai (CUD) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Dubai Media Academy, the training arm of Dubai Media, to enhance cooperation in education, training, and research. The new collaboration aims to accelerate the growth



Signing ceremony between Canadian University Dubai and the Dubai Media Academy
(Photo courtesy of CUD)

of a skilled and future-ready workforce in the domains of marketing, media relations and advertising.

Under the leadership of CUD's School of Management, the collaboration aligns with the university's mission to deliver career-focused, industry-relevant education that prepares graduates to lead and innovate. It will enable students exploring the marketing, media and advertising industries to gain hands-on experience through practical internships and field visits. With a strong emphasis on digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and emerging content technologies, the collaboration is designed to equip talent with the critical, technical, and creative skillsets required to lead in an evolving global media landscape.

The MoU was signed by Muna Busamra, Director of Dubai Media Academy, and Mr. Buti Saeed Al Ghandi, Chancellor of CUD, and sets the framework for the delivery of joint academic and training programmes, complemented by specialised workshops, panel discussions, and professional seminars across media and communications disciplines. The partnership will see the development of a portfolio of collaborative research initiatives and advanced academic engagements focused on the development of future-ready media and marketing professionals.

Mr. Buti Saeed Al Ghandi, Chancellor of Canadian University Dubai, said, “At Canadian University Dubai, we are committed to delivering an education that is deeply connected to industry and responsive to the future of work. This partnership with Dubai Media Academy reflects a shared vision to equip the next generation of marketing and communication professionals with advanced, future-ready capabilities. By integrating academic excellence with real-world application, we are empowering talent to shape the future of these industries and contribute to the UAE’s continued leadership in innovation and creative industries.”

Muna Busamra, Director of Dubai Media Academy, added, “This agreement represents a strategic step in bridging academic learning with applied, industry-driven training, in

line with the rapid transformation of the media sector. It enables us to equip future professionals with the skills, tools, and digital fluency required to create impactful content that reflects the UAE's ambitions."

Canadian University Dubai honours Class of Pride and Glory at 15th graduation ceremony

On May 24th, 2026, Canadian University Dubai (CUD) honoured the achievements of the class of Pride and Glory at its 15th graduation ceremony, staged at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC). The convocation was held under the patronage of His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, UAE Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence, who awarded certificates to 600 graduates across the University's Schools of Management; Health Sciences, Digital Innovation and Sustainability; Communication; Creative Industries; Engineering, Applied Science and Technology; and Architecture and Interior Design. The event also celebrated the 20th anniversary of the university's establishment in Dubai.

This year's graduating class of Pride and Glory honoured the remarkable confidence, resilience and clarity of direction driving Dubai's momentum during a time of global uncertainty. It paid tribute to the nation's visionary



Convocation staged under the patronage of His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan

(Photo courtesy of CUD)

leadership, as the UAE continues to rise stronger, bolder and more globally influential. The graduation was presided over by University Chancellor and Chair of the University Board of Trustees, Mr. Buti Saeed Al Ghandi; President and Vice Chancellor, Prof. Karim Chelli; alongside members of the Canadian University Dubai Board of Trustees.

Opening the event's speeches was graduating student, Shaima Alhai, who has made history as the first female Emirati President of the CUD Student Council. She said, "As an Emirati woman, this is more than just a title; it reflects how far our nation has come. Our founding father, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, believed that education is the foundation of the nation and that Emirati women should stand side by side with men in building the future



Scenes from the 15th CUD graduation ceremony
(Photo courtesy of CUD)

of the country. Because of his vision, Emirati women today are empowered to lead, innovate and contribute to every field.”

In his graduation address, His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan said, “In the UAE, we firmly believe that education is the true foundation for the advancement and prosperity of nations, and that investing in people is the most important and enduring investment.” He further affirmed: “The naming of this year’s cohort as the ‘Class of Pride and Glory’ reflects the deep sense of pride in the remarkable achievements attained by the UAE across all sectors. It also reflects great confidence in the future of this nation and in the ability of its sons and daughters to continue the journey of progress and excellence. Today, you represent an inspiring model of ambitious youth capable of transforming challenges into

opportunities and achieving success through knowledge, hard work, and determination.”

The Chancellor’s address, delivered by Mr. Buti Saeed Al Ghandi, reflected on the University’s twenty-year journey, paying tribute to the guidance and vision of H.E. Sheikh Nahyan when CUD’s founding leadership sought the blessing of His Excellency to first establish the University. Mr. Al Ghandi recalled how His Excellency emphasized that the institution should aspire to stand among internationally benchmarked universities and contribute meaningfully to science, knowledge creation, and innovation on a global scale, affirming that these guiding principles became embedded within the University’s institutional framework, philosophy, and long-term development journey.

The Chancellor also reflected on the significance behind naming this year’s graduating cohort “دفعة المجد والعز” – The Class of Pride and Glory – explaining that the inspiration stemmed from the words of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates: “لا تشلون هم” – “in the UAE, no one carries a burden”. He concluded by assuring graduates that CUD will always remain a platform for opportunity, growth, and future success, while reminding them that achievement ultimately comes through commitment, effort, and

continuous hard work.

Prof. Chelli went on to reflect on the University's history and milestones across twenty years. Addressing the Class of Pride and Glory, Prof. Chelli said, "Whatever path you choose to pursue – entrepreneurship, leadership, public service, or further education – I encourage you to remain guided by the principles that have shaped our journey here at CUD; to place humanity at the centre of everything you do. In a world where opportunities in technology and innovation sit alongside challenges around climate change and human coexistence, you are now equipped to harness those skills and values to lead with purpose, to shape what comes next."

Delivering the speech on behalf of the students was architecture graduate, Danica Ferreira, who said, "I would like to express our sincere gratitude to the leadership of the UAE, a country that welcomed us, inspired us and showed us what becomes possible when people are empowered to grow and contribute. Wherever life takes us next, I hope we move forward with the same openness, ambition and resilience that shaped this city, this university, and this graduating class."

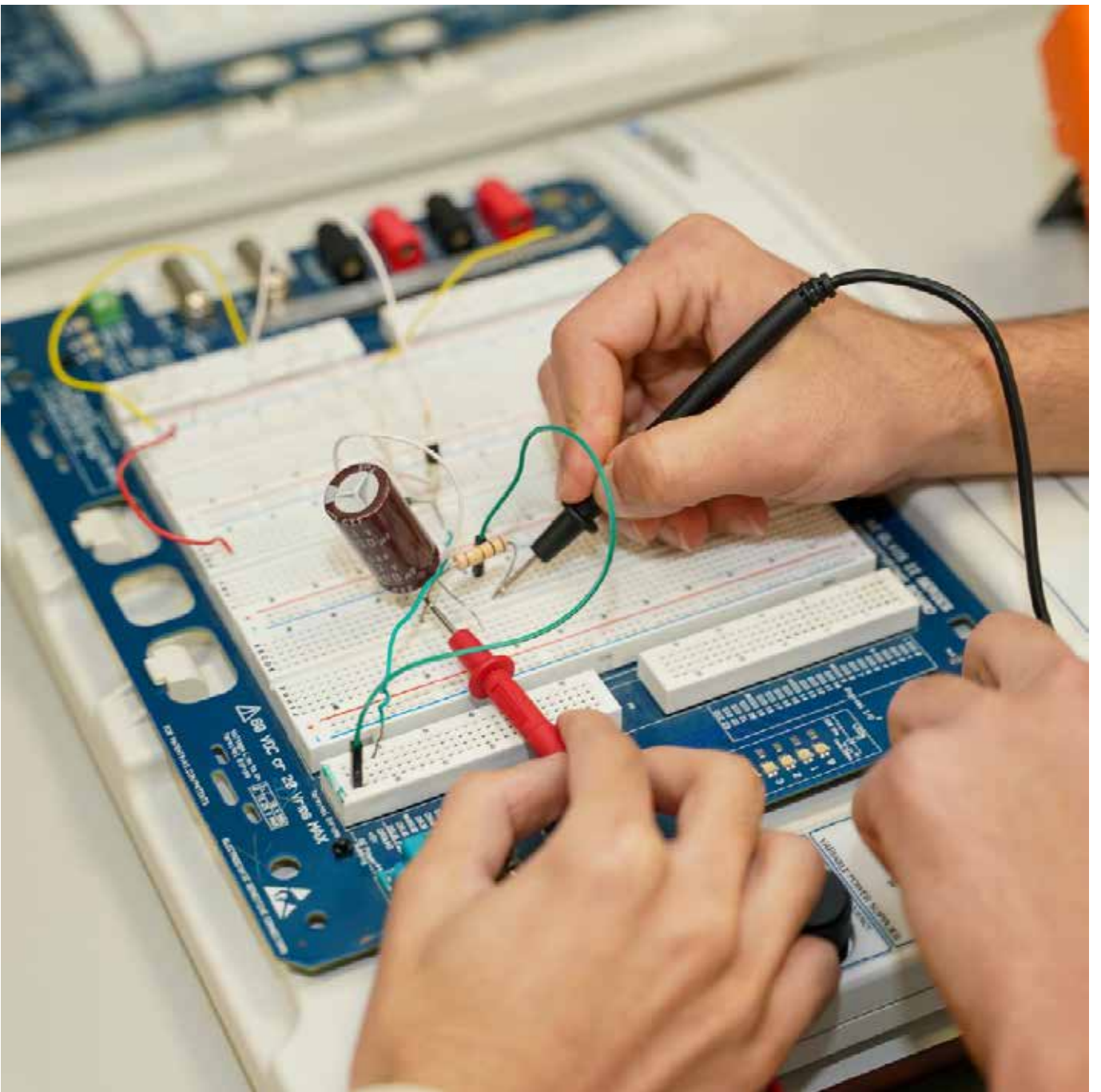
Alongside this year's graduating class, the event saw the presentation of the CUD Awards, recognizing the talent and achievements of the University's faculty and support teams across various academic and engagement activities. As

a mark of appreciation to the UAE leadership, the ceremony also featured a unique musical performance representing the convergence of artificial intelligence and artistic impression, developed in collaboration with the University's School of Engineering, Applied Science and Technology.

Canadian University Dubai Launches future-focused programs in AI, smart technology and engineering

Canadian University Dubai (CUD) has launched a portfolio of new programs across disciplines in Artificial Intelligence (AI), smart technology and advanced engineering to equip students with the skills needed to shape the future of industry. Aligned with the UAE's strategic priorities in technology, sustainability, digital transformation, and ESG-driven innovation, the new programs strengthen CUD's position at the forefront of future-focused education, while preparing graduates for the rapidly evolving demands of the global economy.

Among the newly introduced programs are the Bachelor of Science in Environmental Sciences and Sustainability, alongside the Master of Science and Postgraduate Diploma in Environmental Artificial Intelligence, reflecting Canadian University Dubai's commitment to preparing graduates for the sustainability-



Lab work in the new academic programs
(Photo courtesy of CUD)

driven economy of the future. The bachelor's program provides students with a strong interdisciplinary foundation in environmental science, climate change, sustainability systems, environmental policy, and data-driven decision-making, with specialized pathways in Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation and Sustainable Development and Systems. Complementing this offering, the graduate programs in Environmental Artificial Intelligence combine sustainability with advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, geospatial technologies, and data analytics to equip students with the

expertise needed to address complex challenges related to climate change, biodiversity, resource management, and environmental monitoring. Together, these programs align with the UAE's sustainability agenda and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, reinforcing CUD's position at the forefront of educating the next generation of sustainability leaders, innovators, and changemakers.

CUD has also launched two innovative programs within the School of Management: the Bachelor of Business Administration in Business Analytics and the Master of Science in Financial Technology. Responding to the increasing demand for data-driven and digitally enabled business expertise, the programs integrate business strategy with advanced analytics. Through a combination of theoretical instruction and hands-on learning, students gain the analytical and technological capabilities required to lead innovation and strategic decision-making across finance, consulting, technology, and business intelligence sectors.

Reinforcing the University's focus on future industries, CUD has introduced the Bachelor of Science in Industrial and Engineering Management and the Bachelor of Science in Cloud Computing, both designed to support the UAE's ambitions in advanced technology, digital transformation, and Industry 4.0. The Industrial and Engineering Management program aligns with national priorities in smart

manufacturing, logistics, and operational innovation, offering specialization pathways in Smart Manufacturing and Industry Systems and Logistics and Supply Chain Engineering. Combining engineering principles with data-driven technologies, applied projects, and industry-based learning, the program prepares graduates to optimize complex systems and contribute to the advancement of sustainable, technology-enabled industries. Complementing this offering, the Bachelor of Science in Cloud Computing addresses the growing demand for expertise in cloud infrastructure, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and enterprise technology solutions. Through a curriculum that integrates cloud architecture, cloud security, DevOps, virtualization, big data analytics, and AI-driven cloud operations, students gain the skills needed to design, manage, and secure modern cloud ecosystems. Together, these programs reflect CUD's commitment to developing highly skilled graduates equipped to lead innovation across engineering, manufacturing, logistics, and the digital economy.

The launches reflect CUD's strategic vision to develop future-ready graduates equipped with interdisciplinary skills that support innovation, sustainability, and long-term economic growth. Applications for all programs are now open for Fall 2026 entry.

Chapman University, USA

Chapman Professor Joins UN Climate Assessment Effort

Dr. Hesham El-Askary, professor of Remote Sensing and Earth Systems Science at Chapman University's Schmid College of Science and Technology, has been selected as a co-author for the United Nations' latest major climate assessment report. Dr. El-Askary formerly served as the Vice-President of the Egyptian Space Agency, and is now a co-author on the UN's latest report on climate change.

Dr. El-Askary, who leads Chapman's Earth Systems Science and Data Solutions Lab, studies the atmosphere, environmental systems, and the effects of climate change. His appointment to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Seventh Assessment Report (AR7) places him among 664 experts from 111 countries chosen from more than 3,700 nominees worldwide.

The AR7 is a multi-year scientific review that compiles current climate research for the UN and helps inform global policy discussions. El-Askary is contributing to the working group focused on impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability.

He described the appointment as both an honor and a major responsibility, noting that



Dr. Hesham El-Askary

(Photo courtesy of Chapman University)

the work allows scientists not only to advance research but also to help shape decision-making on urgent global issues.

Dr. El-Askary said his role also reflects well on Chapman, highlighting the university’s scientific expertise and the opportunities available to students who want to engage with problems of global significance.

During his recent sabbatical in Saudi Arabia he continued his studies on arid habitats, and Dr. El-Askary emphasized that climate change is not a distant concern but a present reality already visible in worsening droughts, floods, wildfires, and other extreme events.



WORLD
METEOROLOGICAL
ORGANIZATION

International Workshop on Aviation Meteorology, Hosted by Chapman University, June 2026

“Chapman University hosted a meeting of the International Workshop on Aviation Meteorology, bringing together experts from academia, operational agencies, and industry to advance predictive capabilities, foster cross-sector collaboration, and explore innovative approaches to aviation meteorology. The workshop also strengthens international collaborations and promotes the exchange of knowledge, tools, and best practices across the aviation meteorology community.

Organizers include representatives from the U.S. National Center for Atmospheric Research, Seoul National University, and University of Reading. Other expert presenters came from Yonsei University, Pukyong National University, Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology, Kyungpook National University, Korea Maritime & Ocean University, U.S. National Weather Service (NOAA), Tohoku University, Kyoto University, UCLA, University of

California-Santa Barbara, NASA Ames Research Center, and elsewhere.

Aviation meteorology encompasses a broad spectrum of atmospheric processes, ranging from large-scale climate variability to small-scale weather phenomena that critically affect both long-term and day-to-day aviation operations. Safe and efficient Air Traffic Management (ATM) systems depend on continual advances in high-resolution numerical weather prediction (NWP) models, the expansion of global observational networks, and the effective integration of emerging technologies.

Improving our understanding and prediction of these hazards through the integration of observational data, high-resolution modeling, and state-of-the-art artificial intelligence (AI) techniques is essential for enhancing aviation safety, resilience, and operational efficiency. In addition, improving the predictability of aviation weather hazards and optimizing flight routing to reduce aircraft emissions have become increasingly important research priorities.

At Chapman, Grace Fong Connects Music and Service

Chapman University professor and concert pianist Grace Fong, D.M.A., is using music to build connection and comfort far beyond the concert hall. A professor and director of piano



Dr. Grace Fong, Professor and Director of Piano Studies

(Photo courtesy of Chapman University)

studies at Chapman's Hall-Musco Conservatory of Music, Fong has performed on major stages around the world, yet she remains deeply committed to bringing live music directly to people in hospitals, schools, libraries, cultural centers, and other community spaces across Southern California.

Fong's commitment to service began in childhood, shaped by a Taiwanese-American family background in both music and medicine and inspired by lessons in generosity from her grandmother. Over time, she developed a vision of using performance not only as an artistic practice but also as a way to meet people where they are. In spaces marked by illness, stress, or isolation, she has seen music create moments of calm, joy, and recognition for patients, families, and healthcare staff alike.

That mission also shapes her teaching. Fong encourages her students to see artistry and human connection as inseparable, challenging them to move beyond technical mastery and engage the emotional life of the music they perform. Through partnerships such as the Ryan Seacrest Foundation's Seacrest Studios at Rady Children's Health, Chapman students have begun performing for young patients as well, extending Fong's long-held goal of bringing high-level performance into healing environments.

Fong also collaborates across disciplines, working with artists in dance and other fields to broaden the reach of these performances. Her work reflects a larger philosophy: that music is not only meant to be heard, but shared. By connecting excellence in performance with community engagement, she offers a model of how the arts can enrich public life while helping students become not only stronger artists, but more thoughtful and compassionate people.

Dr. Amy Zeng Announced as Dean of Chapman's Argyros College of Business & Economics

A new leadership appointment at Chapman University highlights themes that resonate across the Silk Roads university community: interdisciplinary learning, global engagement,



Dr. Amy Zeng, Dean of Chapman's Argyros College of Business & Economics

(Photo courtesy of Chapman University)

and innovation in higher education. Dr. Amy Zeng, an internationally recognized scholar and academic leader, has been named the next dean of Chapman University's Argyros College of Business & Economics. She brings nearly three decades of experience in business education and a record of building programs that connect classroom learning with real-world challenges.

Previously dean of the Sawyer Business School at Suffolk University and the Barney School of Business at the University of Hartford, Dr. Zeng is known for expanding experiential learning, strengthening partnerships with industry and community organizations, and supporting student success through career-ready curricula. Her leadership has also emphasized service learning, cross-sector collaboration, and international engagement.

Dr. Zeng earned a doctorate in business administration from Penn State University, a master's degree in industrial engineering from University of Washington – Seattle, and a bachelor's degree in industrial management engineering from Beihang University in Beijing, China.

Her recent work integrating generative AI into business education has drawn particular attention, reflecting a broader conversation across universities about how to prepare students for a rapidly changing global economy. Zheng's appointment reflects a continued investment in academic innovation, applied learning, and international collaborations.

University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Viet Nam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Academic Excellence and Regional Integration: USSH-VNUHCM Officially Hosts Landmark International Symposium and Joins CHSS Phase II

On January 30 and 31, 2026, the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City (USSH-VNUHCM), hosted an international symposium titled “Empowering the Margins during Conflicts and Environmental Crises”. This prestigious event, co-organized with the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) and funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), brought together hundreds of scholars to address the vulnerabilities of marginalized communities in South and Southeast Asia. While the symposium served as a vibrant forum for sharing interdisciplinary research, it also marked a historic institutional turning point. During the Collaboration and Coordination Committee (CCC) meeting, which is the project’s core governance and decision-making platform, USSH-VNUHCM was formally established as an official partner for Phase II of the multi-year



Participants at the International Symposium:

Voices from the Margins

(Photo courtesy of USSH-VNUHCM)

AAS project, “Cultivating the Humanities and Supporting Underrepresented Scholars of South and Southeast Asia (CHSS).”

An Opening Ceremony on the morning of 30 January featured welcome speeches by USSH-VNUHCM President Prof.Dr. Ngô Thị Phương Lan and AAS President Prof. Dr. Nancy Peluso of the University of California-Berkeley, as well as remarks by University of Toronto Professor Emeritus, VNUHCM Honorary Professor and Visiting Professor and former AAS President Prof.Dr. Lương Văn Hy. Two days of symposium sessions followed on the theme “Empowering the Margins During Conflicts and Environmental Crises.” The eight panel sessions included 32 presentations by scholars from countries across South and Southeast Asia. Representatives from the AAS Secretariat and Board of Directors, as well as CHSS participating institutions in Pakistan and India, joined faculty from USSH-VNUHCM and other universities in Vietnam in



Prof.Dr. Ngô Thị Phương Lan, Prof.Dr. Nancy Peluso, and Prof.Dr. Lương Văn Hy delivering speeches and remarks
(Photo courtesy of USSH-VNUHCM)

leading the symposium.

Building on successful gatherings in Chiang Mai (2022), Seoul (2023), and Yogyakarta (2024), the fourth annual symposium convened early-career faculty and students from Southeast and South Asia for two days of dialogue, collaboration, and exchange. The event created a regional platform for emerging scholars to engage with pressing political, social, and environmental challenges facing communities at the margins.

The symposium featured roundtables, panel discussions, and a writing workshop focused on how marginalized communities navigate national and regional conflicts and respond to transnational climate crises, including heatwaves, droughts, and floods. Speakers from India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Vietnam, and across Southeast



Participants at the International Symposium: Voices from the Margins (Photo courtesy of USSH-VNUHCM)

Asia examined how political instability and environmental change deepen existing inequalities. Discussions also highlighted strategies for resilience, emphasizing the role of inclusive policies, community-based approaches, and institutional support in mitigating these impacts.

Continuing the mission of previous symposia, the event centered the perspectives of under-resourced scholars and institutions in South and Southeast Asia, placing marginalized voices at the forefront of knowledge production and regional dialogue.

Within the framework of the symposium, the exhibition titled “Interdisciplinary Approach to Local Environmental and Social Issues” was organized to highlight and promote research conducted by USSH–VNUHCM students, as



Panel sessions on “Sociocultural Pluralism and Wellbeing” and “Gendered Ecology” (Photo courtesy of USSH-VNUHCM)

early-career researchers. The exhibition offered a vivid and comprehensive overview of multi-level academic engagement and served as a platform for amplifying young scholarly voices, thereby contributing to the symposium’s broader mission of fostering knowledge exchange and encouraging active participation

by emerging scholars in the fields of social sciences and humanities.



Delegates and USSH-VNUHCM's students at the exhibition on Interdisciplinary Approach to Local Environmental and Social Issues
(Photo courtesy of USSH-VNUHCM)

The Collaboration and Coordination Committee (CCC) Meeting: A Strategic Hub for Regional Integration

The CCC meeting confirmed the University's transition into a pivotal role for the project's second phase, which focuses on consolidating operations and expanding the network for greater regional impact. As the project's governance heart, the CCC serves as a coordination mechanism where implementing partners synchronize efforts, share strategic initiatives, and manage project resources. Represented by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Luu Van Quyet, USSH-VNUHCM now holds a key position in this transnational network alongside partners from Thailand, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, and Timor-

Leste. This collaborative structure encourages “ownership” of the project by local institutions and allows partners to share strategies for navigating challenges such as censorship, regional conflicts, and environmental disasters.

Designated as a new Focal Point for mainland Southeast Asia, the University is tasked with providing outreach and training opportunities to underrepresented researchers. This role is strategically vital for supporting scholars from Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia, as well as those in remote parts of Vietnam who are often affected by resource constraints and environmental change. By acting as a strategic gateway, the University plans to partner with smaller institutions in the Mekong Delta, the Central Highlands, and Northern regions to enhance their research and publication capabilities.

On the same day as the CCC Meeting, USSH-VNUHCM also held a courtesy reception for representatives of the AAS and SIDA. The reception provided an opportunity for the University’s leadership and international delegates to exchange views on future cooperation, reaffirm mutual commitment to the CHSS Phase II, and discuss USSH-VNUHCM’s role as a regional focal point in promoting academic publication, research capacity building, and support for underrepresented scholars in South and Southeast Asia.



Collaboration and Coordination Committee (CCC) Meeting
(Photo courtesy of USSH-VNUHCM)

By joining CHSS Phase II, USSH-VNUHCM is poised to enhance the research capacity of a new generation of humanists. The University will utilize the project's resources to organize research training sessions, foster international conferences, and encourage publications in high-impact journals. This collaboration not only elevates the academic standing of USSH-VNUHCM but also ensures that the humanities and social sciences in Vietnam contribute

meaningfully to the Sustainable Development Goals. As the University moves toward its 70th anniversary, its role as a strategic Focal Point in the CHSS network reaffirms its status as a premier institution dedicated to global integration and the empowerment of the underserved.



Representatives of AAS and SIDA
(Photo courtesy of USSH-VNUHCM)

Write for us

SILKROADIA is the official webzine of the Silk-Road Universities Network (SUN). We have more than 800,000 subscribers including professors, researchers, students, presidents, rectors, and chancellors of universities & research institutions located along the land and maritime Silk Roads. We welcome your articles and images on any of the topics related to the Silk Roads. The topics are those mentioned below but not limited to:

Culture on the Silk Roads: religion, local cuisine, artwork, jewelry, toys, pottery, dance, music, musical instruments, traditional / contemporary dress, types of dwelling, festivals, rituals, weddings, funerals, taboos.

Heritage on the Silk Roads: archaeological / historical heritage sites, literature, paintings, statues and sculptures.

Travel on the Silk Roads: natural wonders, markets, hotels, caravan-serais, transportation.

Any interesting and diverse stories about people, places and events in your area, including the life of ordinary people and interview.

*All articles and images shall be original and not infringe upon copyright rules. The working language is English and contributors' contact information must be included.

Please send to sunwebzine@sun0822.org

SILKROADIA seeks student reporters

SILKROADIA is looking for students who are willing to write articles about the Silk Roads and other topics of their interest.

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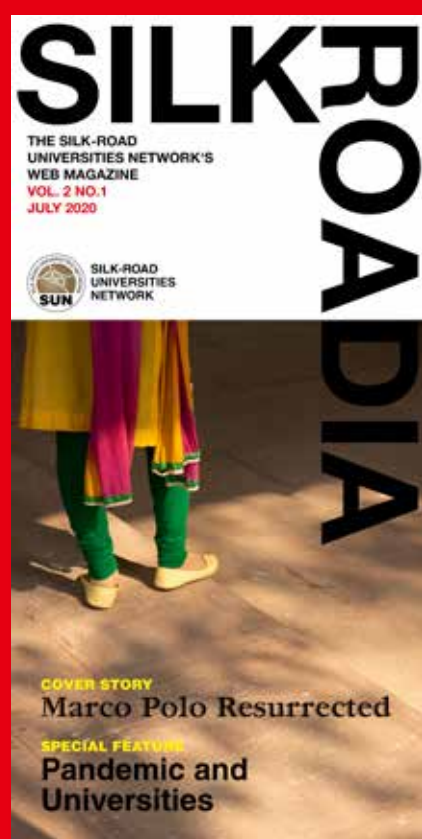
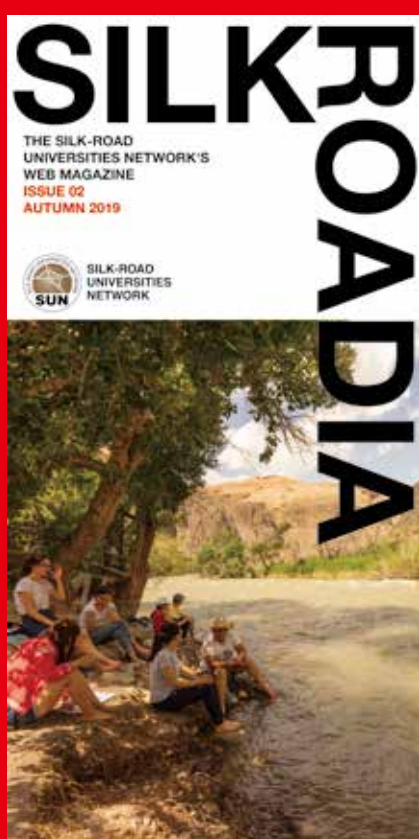
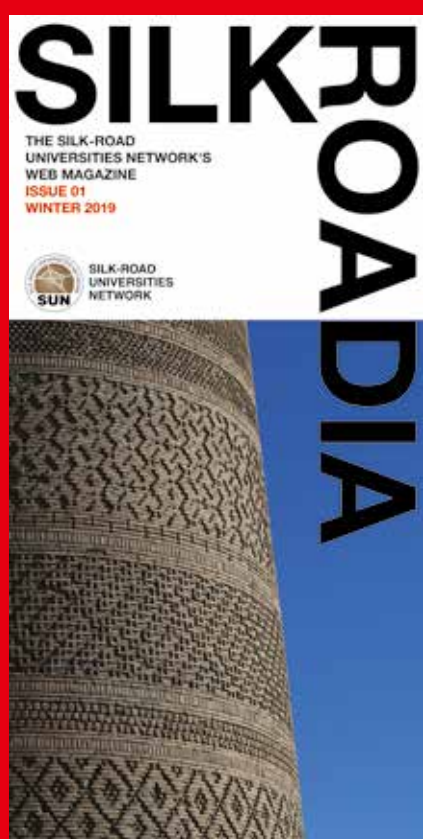
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**The official webzine of SUN
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SILKROADIA, the official webzine of the Silk-Road Universities Network, is a biannual publication which was launched in 2019. All the editions published so far are available at the SUN website.

As the official publication of SUN, ***SILKROADIA*** aims to serve as an effective medium of communications among the SUN Family members and between SUN and the outside world.

In order to fulfill its mission, ***SILKROADIA*** features a variety of interesting, informative and insightful articles and images, most of them provided by professors and students of the SUN member universities and institutes. The contents vary from in-depth academic articles and com-

mentaries authored by experts to easy-to-enjoy stories on heritage and travel on the Silk Roads. We are proud of having published genuinely original contents – like the imaginary interview which highlighted people like Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta, the legendary travelers and adventurers who are identified with the ancient Silk Roads.

Such an abundance of interesting contents on **SILKROADIA** draws a lot of readers from around the world. The webzine already boasts of a regular audience of about 800,000 people, including the faculty members and students of the 82 member universities and institutes in 65 cities of 28 countries along the Silk Roads. This is one of the reasons we began thinking about the potential of **SILKROADIA** as a potential place for advertisements.

Carrying advertisements on **SILKROADIA** has two objectives: First, advertisement revenue will certainly help SUN stand on its own financially, which has become more urgent in the wake of the ceasing of support from the Gyeongsangbuk-do Provincial Government. Second, advertisements on **SILKROADIA** will help the webzine raise its standard to a higher level. Good publications draw good advertisers and a genuinely popular publication cannot go without advertisements.

It is against this backdrop that **SILKROADIA** will carry advertisements from the next issue, which is expected to be published around June 2021. The first potential advertisers could be member universities and institutes of SUN who wish to promote their academic programs, exchange of students and other international programs and events. The advertisement pages of course will be open to those outside SUN, including educational associations, organizations and companies.

Details, including the rates and formats, will be released soon, which will be delivered to member universities and institutes and outside organizations through the official communication channel of the SUN Secretariat and **SILKROADIA**.

We expect active support from SUN members. Thank you.

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Page size	Price	Submission due
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