

BOOK REVIEW

The New Silk Roads: The Present and Future of the World

By Peter Frankopan

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In *The New Silk Roads*, Peter Frankopan, Professor of Global History at Oxford University, defines the notion of Silk Roads as a network of globalization in which people, cultures and continents interact. This conceptualization provides an understanding of the spread of religions and languages throughout history. The kind of globalization Silk Roads represent allows us to comprehend history as a whole, not in pieces, by emphasizing the bigger picture of the interactions between actors throughout the territory of Silk Roads. Frankopan connects the past, present and future of the Silk Roads; he argues that the notion explains the proliferation of actors and other entities like walnut trees throughout history, earning Silk Roads the nickname ‘gene corridors’.

Frankopan argues that the twenty-first century is the century of the countries of the Silk Roads. Just as the phenomena that shaped the past occurred around Silk Roads, the future will also be shaped around Silk Roads. Silk Roads crisscross a territory that includes countries from Türkiye to China, from Israel and India to Russia. *The New Silk Roads* aims to update recent history and reinterpret it. For example, Frankopan accepts the year 2015 as a turning point due to the Brexit vote, the election of Donald Trump, bold moves in Russian foreign policy, issues in Afghanistan and Syria, problems between Iran and Saudi Arabia, issues between India and Pakistan, and a coup attempt in Turkey. Apart from the problematic issues, the intensifying economic cooperation among the Silk Roads countries, the agricultural and resource-based wealth of the states of the Silk Roads, and the use of the phenomenon of the Silk Roads by different actors and institutions are also crucial for recent history. Concerning all of the positive and negative issues, Frankopan claims that ‘we are living in the Asian century already’ and heralds the rising of the Silk Roads by emphasizing the decline of the West, especially the U.S. Geopolitically, he refers to the area of the countries of the Silk Roads as ‘the heart of the world’.

Regarding the timing and context of the book, Frankopan had previously published another book on the topic, titled *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World*, in 2015. Amid the feedback he received, he gathered that readers desired to learn more about the ‘other’ part of the world—the story of Asia and the East—rather than Europe and the West. Thus, he decided to write *The New Silk Roads* to present a more comprehensive view.

The book consists of five chapters. In the first chapter, Frankopan examines the problematic issues and improvements taking place in the countries of the Silk Roads from the 1990s to the present, and the impact of Asian-led globalization, i.e., the rise of Asia, especially from an economic perspective. In addition to the positive aspects of this trend, Frankopan also mentions the instability, democratic deficiencies and failed states in this region. In the second chapter, Frankopan analyzes the speeches, acts and policies of Trump, former President of the U.S.; the rise of far-right parties and movements in Europe and the questioning of the EU’s reason for existence as proof of the West’s decline. In contrast, he points out the developments in the region of the Silk Roads in terms of working institutions, resource-rich states, increased cooperation among states, especially in the energy field, and the wide-ranging contributions of the new Silk Roads to the countries in the region in terms of energy pipelines, infrastructure projects, improving military relations and the resolution of border disputes. At the same time, Frankopan mentions the problematic relations of the countries in the region, the economic crises occurring in some states and democracy problems. He adds that he is heralding a *rising* new world from Asia—not a *free* new world.

Frankopan shapes the third chapter along axis of Xi Jinping’s speeches. Jinping has called upon the countries of the Silk Roads for friendship, cooperation and a new way of thinking under China’s facilitation and leadership against the hegemony of the U.S. by touting the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative. The early benefits, like the economic and geopolitical improvement of the Silk Roads, and the negative sides of the project—its ambiguity, the asymmetrical economic and territorial opportunities for China and Chinese businesses, and the poor business practices of the countries involved—are depicted. The fourth chapter addresses the business activities of the countries of the Silk Roads in more detail. According to Frankopan, the corporations of the Silk Roads countries are taking over Western companies. He claims that China and the U.S. are on opposite sides, and that they create a dichotomy. In his view, the rule-breaker and manipulator of this dichotomy is the U.S. The decline of the U.S. and the rise of China are proofs of the new world under the impact of the new Silk Roads.

In the fifth chapter, Frankopan evaluates the actors in the international system and their potential for cooperation with China, citing an economic center of gravity shift from West to East. The most prominent obstacle to the Silk Roads project, he notes, is China's economic growth and resulting credit boom; the countries interested in making an investment in OBOR do not have the money to do it. China supports those countries via loans, but they are not in a situation to repay the loans. Thus, these countries fall into a debt trap while expecting an improvement.

In conclusion, Frankopan claims that the changing world—or changing the world—is indispensable, and that no one can prevent this change. He envisions a new world in which liberal democracy and modernization in the Western sense are ending, and the Silk Roads countries cooperate against global problems such as poverty. This changing world is a bipolar one, with China at the helm. History repeats itself, and Asia is rising again like a phoenix.

The diversity of sources on which Frankopan draws are adequate to analyze the new phenomenon he depicts. He uses articles from journals and magazines, as well as news, reports and books in German, English, Turkish, Russian, French, Chinese and Azeri. Frankopan also benefits from the speeches of political leaders, especially those of Trump and Xi Jinping. He does a simple qualitative discourse and content analysis and a descriptive analysis as a historian. Furthermore, while the language of the book is quite simple and straightforward, the style of the book is literary and embellished with idioms. Frankopan evaluates the international system and its actors in a broad sense and presents the basic economic characteristics of the countries of the Silk Roads.

Although Frankopan underpins his assertions with reference to various phenomena and discourses, he repeats himself many times to prove the rightfulness of his argument. Yet this repetition has the opposite effect, diminishing the book's credibility. While emphasizing the economic aspects of the countries and their relations makes the book one-dimensional, getting stuck in the idea that Asia is rising and trying to validate this idea strengthens this one dimension and makes the book overly subjective. At the same time, using the speeches of Trump as an evaluation criterion for the foreign policy of the U.S. is not sufficient. Even though he was the President of the U.S., it is not right to take his speeches as the sole criterion due to his irrational remarks. Similarly, flatly considering China as the opponent of the U.S. creates a dichotomy, restricts the analysis and prevents the enrichment of other perspectives.

Nevertheless, the criticisms mentioned above cannot reduce the importance of this book. Frankopan's argument is clearly stated and constantly supported;

the sources are sufficient, and the wording is explicit and impressive. Therefore, *The New Silk Roads* can be considered an important contribution to the alternative historiography literature that sheds light on recent Asian history. The book is strongly recommended for students and academics of the Social Sciences who would like to broaden their way of thinking.

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