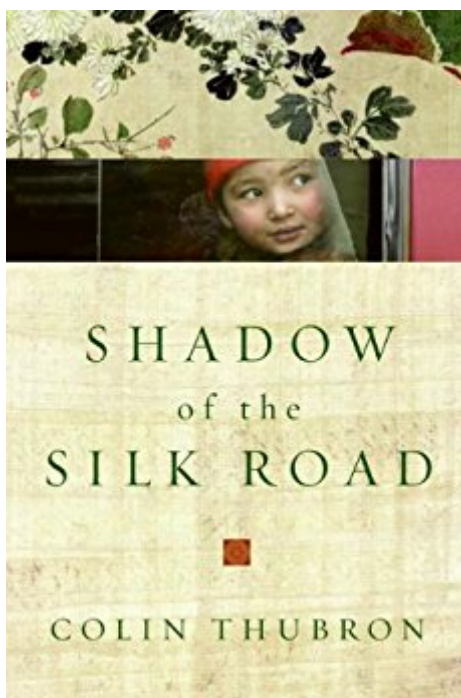


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Shadow Of The Silk Road (P.S.)



Synopsis

Shadow of the Silk Road records a journey along the greatest land route on earth. Out of the heart of China into the mountains of Central Asia, across northern Afghanistan and the plains of Iran and into Kurdish Turkey, Colin Thubron covers some seven thousand miles in eight months. Making his way by local bus, truck, car, donkey cart and camel, he travels from the tomb of the Yellow Emperor, the mythic progenitor of the Chinese people, to the ancient port of Antioch – in perhaps the most difficult and ambitious journey he has undertaken in forty years of travel. The Silk Road is a huge network of arteries splitting and converging across the breadth of Asia. To travel it is to trace the passage not only of trade and armies but also of ideas, religions and inventions. But alongside this rich and astonishing past, Shadow of the Silk Road is also about Asia today: a continent of upheaval. One of the trademarks of Colin Thubron's travel writing is the beauty of his prose; another is his gift for talking to people and getting them to talk to him. Shadow of the Silk Road encounters Islamic countries in many forms. It is about changes in China, transformed since the Cultural Revolution. It is about false nationalisms and the world's discontented margins, where the true boundaries are not political borders but the frontiers of tribe, ethnicity, language and religion. It is a magnificent and important account of an ancient world in modern ferment.

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Customer Reviews

Fascinating, well written

Fascinating read about one person's adventures in traversing the old Silk Road. Most of the book is in a stream of consciousness mode of writing. The author has a myriad of factual details that enliven the account of his travels. In my humble opinion, the book is marred by very poor maps -- this may be due to my reading the book on a Kindle, which did not allow the maps to be expanded to the point where they could be useful. I wound up using my own Atlas to follow the route and found considerable differences between what the book was saying and what I could find in the atlas. At times this left me fairly frustrated in understanding the adventures.

Fabulous. The writing is visual and excellent, the individual vignettes are touching, the research is invigorating. I'm thrilled that I found this travel piece, as much a personal memoir as a tour guide. There's no way I could make this journey myself, so I'm grateful to be carried along on his return trip. I especially appreciate his humane thoughts on the lasting impact of the Red Guards, the black heart of China that stripped so many lives. I've already ordered his book on Tibet.

I completed my read of *Shadow of the Silk Road* last night after having enjoyed a three-week read of this wonderfully enjoyable book. I decided after reading a book about Tamerlane that I owed it to myself to expand my knowledge of Central Asia. I have studied the bookends, Europe and China but I, in truth, never even thought about the land in between. I read travel books, but I had never read such delicious travel writing as that typing out by Thubron. He ends his account of his east to west journey along the Silk Road with the comment that the Silk Road itself was about one-quarter of the Equator. Then when considered that he has passed through so many different countries in this one man quarter Equatorial expedition a person can but be intrigued enough to begin a read. I have read Paul Theroux's many travel books, and I admire him and his vision of the countries that he passes through; however, Thubron brings a new dimension to his passage through these, to me, unknown lands. Thubron's frequent conversations with people on trains, buses and the odd person that guards a particular historical site or piece of a site to which there has been little interest until the author shows himself and displays some interest in something that time has forgotten. If you

have any interest in the "stans" or the land at both ends read, "Shadow of the Silk Road", you will be enlightened as well as entertained by Thubron's weighty yet informative prose.

Fascinating on many levels. Enormously informative about the history of Central Asia from antiquity to the present with particular insight into the impact of the Soviet incursion. Also a fascinating account of an intrepid person's attempt to understand this often impenetrable region. The descriptions of crumbling cultures in the face of successive cultural invasions in the modern era are moving and beautifully written. The pace is sometimes somewhat ponderous but the story is powerful and entertaining.

A beautifully written, extremely well researched account of the author's travels along the ancient silk road from China to the Mediterranean. I don't usually read travel books, but this was enthralling: from the historical research to his own adventures and encounters with people of many nationalities all along the way, Colin Thubron's touch is non-judgmental, delicate and always interesting.

Colin Thubron paints a colorful picture of his travels, but I can't escape the thought that his reported conversations in China are largely fabricated. He says he traveled alone, without a translator. Thubron describes his Mandarin as "half-forgotten" (p. 158). From reading Thubron's "Behind the Wall" book, I remember him saying that he studied Mandarin for a year in Taiwan. Also, the Uyghurs of NW China are a Turkic minority people who have their own Turkic language, and Thubron gives no indication that he's ever studied it. Yet, his limited language ability does not stand in the way of him having deep conversations with countryside Uyghurs (e.g., a middle-aged, female camel-driver and an old taxi-driver) on a host of topics. Neither Chinese nor Uyghurs freely jump into sensitive conversation topics with strangers. Yet, they freely open up to this Brit about the Chinese Communist party, ethnic tensions, the state of Islam among the Uyghurs, SARS, prostitution and their own personal secrets (like the female camel-driver's breast cancer). This just does not happen. People don't open up to strangers about topics like these (especially to strangers who don't speak their languages well). Even if they had, he wouldn't have been able to understand them unless he himself had good language skills. And don't tell me he ran into English-speakers in these remote places. I reached the same conclusion reading Thubron's "Behind the Wall: A Journey Through China", where every time he turns around, Chinese people want to share a story with him about their own experiences in the Cultural Revolution. In my 10+ years of living in China, I had perhaps 2 conversations about this dark period in China's history. People just don't want to talk about it. But,

they were dying to open up to Colin, after his one year of Mandarin study in Taiwan. It would never happen.

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