

CHINA CROSSROADS

Saturday, February 6th, 2021, 16:30 – 18:00

Inventing the “Maritime Silk Road”

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This presentation examines the origins and the popularity of the term “Maritime Silk Road.” It focuses on three key aspects associated with the beginnings and the current usage of the term: (1) the interest in studying historical interactions between China and foreign regions during the 1980s, with a special interest in the Indian Ocean exchanges; (2) the role of UNESCO in internationalizing the term through various events and conferences during the 1990s; and (3) the recent Belt and Road Initiative of the People’s Republic of China, which has led to a flurry of publications on the “Maritime Silk Road” in China and elsewhere. Intended as an intellectual history of the term, this presentation attempts to decentralize the elite commercial exchanges and the state-centric ideas embodied in the conceptualization of the “Maritime Silk Road” by demonstrating the complexities, multiplicities, and the multidirectional facets of maritime interactions of the past and the present.

[Tansen Sen](#) is Professor of History and the Director of the Center for Global Asia at NYU Shanghai, and Global Network Professor at New York University. Previously he taught at the City University of New York and was the founding head of the Nalanda Sriwijaya Center at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore. He is author of [Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600-1400](#) (2003) and [India, China, and the World: A Connected History](#) (2017). He has co-authored (with Victor H. Mair) [Traditional China in Asian and World History](#) (2012), edited [Buddhism across Asia: Networks of Material, Cultural and Intellectual Exchange](#) (2014), and co-edited (with Burkhard Schnepel) [Travelling Pasts: The Politics of Cultural Heritage in the Indian Ocean World](#) (2019), and (with Brian Tsui) [Beyond Pan-Asianism: Connecting China and India, 1840s-1960s](#) (2021). He is currently working on a book on Zheng He’s maritime expeditions in the early 15th century, a monograph on Jawaharlal Nehru and China, and co-editing (with Engseong Ho) the Cambridge History of the Indian Ocean, Volume One.

[China Crossroads](#) hosts talks on all topics related to China, including business, foreign policy, and other areas as they relate to China, the idea being that China is both already a “crossroads” of the world and itself at a “crossroads” in terms of its future global influence. For more information, contact Frank Tsai at editor@shanghai-review.org.