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## **SILK ROUTES OF TURKEY**

*By Professor Pulat Otkan*

Mr. Chairman, distinguished participants and guests, ladies and gentlemen. Before my presentation, on behalf of our scientific team, I would like to bring my heartfelt thanks and greetings again to the organizers of these meetings for their cooperation and hospitality during our four day visit to your beautiful country Philippines.

In our presentation, I will briefly try to evaluate the Silk Routes and silk heritage of Turkey and eminent expert M. Mitsugi will show some selected slides from his collection and enlighten us on Chinese and Japanese porcelain collection of Topkapi Palace Museum in Turkey. In the course of history, the fertility of civilization can be seen as a result of multiple encounters and dialogue between cultures.

As Professor Elisseef, Chairman of the Consultative Committee of the Silk Roads Project of UNESCO, pointed out: For much of human history the Silk Roads were the major arteries of an interrelated system circulating people, goods and ideas between the two worlds of east and west.

In this regard, Venice, Athens, Istanbul, Alexandria, Muscat, Karachi, Madras, Bangkok, Manila, and so many other cities on the silk routes, form a galaxy in the sky of the history of mankind. Planted like a bridge between Asia and Europe, the peninsula of Asia Minor (Turkey) has been from the beginning of history a crossroads of civilizations.

The movements of armies and peoples and civilizations, which have caused a kind of synthesis between the Eastern and Western spirit in Turkey, have taken place along a few roads and some ports.

According to the historical data, if

- The historical periods of the silk routes,
- The Turkish caravanserai chains,
- The halts which are both historically and actually important in the silk industry and trade, and monuments are taken into consideration; the outline of the Turkish silk routes may be drawn as follows:

1. The Silk Route of Alexander the great in Turkey (the 14th century B.C.)

2. The Silk Route of the Seljuks (between the 12th-13th centuries)
3. The Silk Route of Marco Polo in Turkey (the 13th century), and
4. The Ottoman Silk Routes (between the 14th. and the 19th centuries)

These land routes were also connected with the Maritime Silk Routes. The main ports were in Trabzon, Istanbul, Bursa, Izmir, Antalga, and Antioch, and they were also connected with Crimea, Venice, Florence, Dubrounik, Ancona in Europe, and by the way of Persian Gulf and Red Sea with the Southeast Asian countries.

We know that a busy road network-of trade in Anatolia spread widely after the Seljuk Turks won a victory over the Byzantines in 1071. Corresponding with these developments, the trade routes of Anatolia gained great importance especially in transit transportation. But, what have to be emphasized here is the caravanserais, which were not known earlier built by the Seljuks. Most of the caravanserais which aimed at contributing to the development of trade and culture were built in the 13th century. The caravanserais, which were at the service of the travelers with their baths, mosques, bakeries, libraries and physicians, veterinarians and repairmen, were also kept during the Ottoman time, but only 100 of them remained. These actually numbered in the hundreds, but most of them were simply swept away by the tides of time, leaving no remnants at all. (Cf. Appendix 1.)

It is known that silk weaving was practiced as a developed industry in Bursa and the surroundings during the Eastern Roman period Silk fabrics were woven especially in Kayser, and Sivas during the Seljuk period and these fabrics were exported to European countries.

When the Ottomans settled in Anatolia, they noticed the existence of an excellent silk industry on these lands and the importation of a great amount of raw silk from the East for weaving. In the Ottoman Empire the attractiveness of silk and the silk trade made silk textile industry, which laid its foundation in the late 14th century, make enormous strides at the beginning of the 15th century along with silk trade. In this century, Bursa was the center of both silk weaving and silk trade.

As a result of the geographical situation of the Ottoman territory, the art of weaving has been exposed to both eastern and western influences, as well as forming part of heritage of the Seljuks, who had carried the art of weaving to great heights. The Ottomans thus created their own peculiar art of weaving from a synthesis of the Eastern, Western and Seljuk traditions.

Silk rug-weaving is carried but on hand looms mainly in Kocaeli, Kaysen, Bhesik, Bursa and Baltkesir, and about 200,000 young people work in this industry now.

A considerable amount of the silk produced in Turkey is used for rug-weaving.

During 1986, Turkey exported about US\$ 18 million worth of silk carpets to the U.S., Europe and Arabian countries known for their beauty and strength over centuries, many of these carpets are displayed in museums around the world. Others are handed down from generation to generation; increasing in value with the passing years.

As well as silk, one of the cultural heritages of the silk routes of Turkey can be seen in Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul.

Topkapi Palace is the most important monument of Ottoman civil architecture which has survived to our time. It served as a residence for the House of Osman, from which the empire received its name, from the middle of the fifteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century, and continued to be used for practical purpose until it became a museum in 1924. Its foundation stone was laid in the 1460s by Mehmet II (1451-81), the conqueror of Constantinople.

Topkapi Palace was not only an imperial residence for the imperial family and their court, but the center of government as well. For almost five hundred years it was the nucleus of one of the largest empires the world has ever known. The frontiers of this empire stretched from the gates of Vienna in the west, comprising all Balkan countries, the Black Sea, Crimea, the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea and the Middle East, to the Persian Gulf, the Arabic Peninsula, and the whole of North Africa as far as Lake Chad, as well as the Mediterranean beyond the "Pillars of Hercules". All the Seven Wonders of the World were within the borders of the empire. Eighteen religions were practiced and twenty tongues were spoken, and this world was ruled by one absolute power, the Shadow of Allah on Earth, the sultan who lived in Topkapi Palace.

In Ottoman history, from 1299, the traditional date when Osman succeeded his father in Sogut in Western Anatolia, until 1922, when the last sultan Mehmet VI fled on a British gunboat, thirty six sultans, all being the descendants of Osman, the founder of the Ottoman State, ruled the empire at different times, and more than half of them lived in Topkapi.

With regard to its size and its rich variety and high quality, Topkapi Palace has the most valuable collection of Chinese and Japanese porcelain in the world. It can be challenged at present only by the former Chinese Imperial collections now in Taiwan, and was also previously challenged until the Second World War by the collections gathered together at Dresden by Augustus the Strong of Saxony, some items of which vanished during the war years.

The pieces in the Topkapi collection range in date from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries, and include 1,354 pieces of celadon ware, 3,209 pieces of Yuan, Ming and Vietnamese ware, and 579 pieces of Qing are a total of 10, 358 items.

An important feature of the Topkapi Palace collection is an archive of documents, which, despite its disorderliness throws light on the origins, usage, disposal, etc. of Chinese porcelain. The oldest records which refer to Chinese porcelain date from the end of the fifteenth century.

Experts tend to believe that the existing documentation concerning the routes used for the transportation of porcelain must be misleading because of the factor of its size, weight and fragility, would have affected its travelling overland. Unlike silk or spices, porcelain would have been very suitable for sea transportation and it is quite probable that much of the porcelain seen today was carried from the East to Ottoman territories by way of the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea.

The archives indicate that some of the pieces in the collection were received as gifts from foreign powers, Ottoman dignitaries, religious hierarchies and guilds.

Among the foreign powers, Persia was the leading country whose gifts often included porcelain. The presentation of valuable objects to the sultan when he ascended to throne was an Ottoman custom, and some of the porcelain seen today must have come in the form of gifts.

Up until 1976, the Topkapi Palace Museum had the largest collection of celadon ware in the world. In 1976 however, from a sunken ship off Sinon on the Korean coast, the largest collection in the world was recovered intact -- 9,500 pieces in all. Since then, pride of place has gone to the National Museums of Korea. However, although the amount of celadon ware in the Topkapi Palace Museum numbers 1,354 pieces, of which only 4 are of South East Asia origin, and therefore less than that in the Korea museums, it covers chronologically and typologically a very much wider range - namely from the late 13th century to the late 15th century, and comprises some very rare pieces.

Yuan porcelain was produced in the 14th and 15th centuries. During this period contacts and trade with foreign countries thrived and any foreigners lived in or visited China. Foreign influence is often discernable in porcelain at that time. The collection of the Topkapi Palace Museum contains 40 pieces of Yuan Dynasty blue and white wares. Yuan Dynasty porcelain can be divided into two groups: underglaze-blue painted wares, which is by far the largest group of which the collection at the museum contains 39 pieces, and a small number of blue glazed pieces of which the museum contains one piece. This is a very rare

type of dish with a white decoration and a blue glazed background. There are only 11 pieces of porcelain with this type of decoration in the world, and of these, the dish at Topkapi Palace has the most elaborate design: an animated design spread over its surface. In the larger group are vases and jugs in varying shapes which usually stand on low heavy feet, wide-mouthed bowls, each with a narrow straight foot and flat-rimmed dishes with a deep well and a low-foot.

The Ming Dynasty which succeeded the Yuan ruled from 1368 to 1644, and during this period abrupt and important changes in style, shape and design were observed in porcelain. The pieces which have survived to the present in the Topkapi collection are regarded as being among the finest Ming blue and white samples of this period.

The later Ming Dynasty covers the period from the early 16th to the mid-17th centuries. During this period foreign trade increased and to meet the growing demand the largest amount of Ming porcelain was produced. The Topkapi Palace Museum possesses more than 2,500 pieces from this period.

Jade was also sought after even though it was not readily available. First mentioned in an inventory in 1505, it seems to have captured Ottoman imagination and was used frequently compared to its scarcity. It was often made into small jeweled plaques for example, or was sewn onto objects like quivers and bow-cases. Over a period of 200 years, the styles remained little changed, apart from becoming more excessively entrusted in the later 16th and 17th centuries, and this suggests that these plaques and objects were continually being re-used.

Most of the jade is of Indian Mughal origin, but there is a small group of Chinese jade in the collection which is possibly Late Ming (mid-17th century), and was most likely presented in the form of gifts by heads of states. There are also a few small and delicate jade pieces which glitter more brightly than the others and are from the Qing Dynasty period.

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