YOUTH LENS
on the Silk Roads



7th Edition

Best photos from the International Silk Roads Photo Contest

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on the Silk Roads

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Silk Roads Programme

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SHORT SUMMARY

The Women behind the Silk Roads

For the seventh edition of the ***Youth Eyes on the Silk Roads*** international photo contest, UNESCO invited young photographers to explore the theme *Women, Guardians of Silk Roads Heritage*.

This photo album celebrates the women who preserve the living heritage of the Silk Roads through craft, storytelling, music, rituals, and everyday traditions. Across generations, they have safeguarded cultural knowledge and strengthened the identities of their communities, often away from the spotlight.

More than historic trade routes, the Silk Roads were networks of cultural exchange where ideas, skills, and traditions travelled across continents. Women played a vital role in this process, ensuring that languages, customs, and knowledge continued to flourish over time.

The edition received over 3,500 submissions from 85 countries

Young photographers aged 14 to 25 captured these often-overlooked stories through authentic and powerful images of daily life. Together, their photographs highlight resilience, memory, and cultural continuity, paying tribute to the women whose quiet dedication keeps the rich heritage of the Silk Roads alive for future generations.

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'Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed.'

Foreword



© UNESCO

Khaled El-Enany
Director-General of UNESCO

For more than 35 years, UNESCO's Silk Roads Programme has deepened our understanding of the exchanges that have shaped our societies while fostering dialogue across cultures.

Since 2018, the ***Youth Eyes on the Silk Roads*** contest has brought a new generation into this endeavour, inviting young people to explore this shared history through photography.

For centuries, the Silk Roads connected communities across continents, carrying not only goods, but also knowledge, beliefs, skills and traditions. Much of this rich heritage has endured because it has been passed from one generation to the next, notably through the knowledge, skills and voices of women.

This is the focus of the seventh edition of UNESCO's ***Youth Eyes on the Silk Roads*** international photo contest, dedicated to the theme *Women, Guardians of Silk Roads Heritage*. Through the eyes of young photographers, this collection pays tribute to women whose contributions to cultural life are too often overlooked.

Their stories remind us that heritage lives in everyday skills and practices of those who sustain and renew it. By highlighting women's vital role in this transmission, this edition celebrates their creativity and resilience and underscores the essential contribution they make to keeping the living heritage of the Silk Roads alive for generations to come.

The images gathered here show how closely the past and present remain connected. I hope they will inspire us to look differently at the women who keep cultural heritage alive, and at the young people who, by documenting it, are helping to carry it into the future.



Preface



© Beijing International Peace Culture Foundation

Dr Li Ruohong
Chairman of *Beijing International Peace Culture Foundation*

Shared ideals, yet shaped by different stories. The global photographic narrative unfolds through you, me, and them. Photography serves as a window through which young people observe and interpret both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Silk Roads through the lens of light and shadow. Ethnic customs continue to drive exchanges among Silk Roads communities, even in times of turmoil and uncertainty, carrying both historical and contemporary significance while representing a hope for peace.

Over the past seven years, numerous outstanding photographic works have emerged from the *Youth Eyes on the Silk Roads* International Photo Contest. Gathered in the *Youth Lens on the Silk Roads* photo album series, these works have been presented on the international stage of the "Peace Garden Peace Festival" and exhibited in many countries around the world. Thanks to the unwavering support of our global partners, who encourage young people from their respective countries to participate, a new vision for the Silk Roads continues to emerge. Each generation faces its own opportunities and challenges, and it is through the shared language of photography that these young voices collectively carry forward the melody of peace.

We will continue to support the ***Youth Eyes on the Silk Roads*** International Photo Contest, advocate for young people, and contribute to efforts of UNESCO to advance intercultural dialogue and peace. Guided by the spirit of the "Peace +1" initiative, we hope to further expand exchanges and mutual understanding.

With this preface, we pay tribute to all those who safeguard and celebrate the cultures of the Silk Roads.



Travelling and Shaping the World

History has taught us many valuable lessons, not least that one can neither survive nor flourish without interacting with others. On a global scale these interactions can become prolonged cross-cultural exchanges playing a crucial role in the development of new ideas, bodies of knowledge, beliefs, gastronomies, and artistic expressions. By linking regions across Asia, the Pacific, Europe, and Africa, the Silk Roads have played a key role in connecting cultures beyond borders.

Today, the term 'Silk Roads' is used to refer to an expansive network of trade routes, methods of exchange, and channels of communication across both land and sea including the 'Spice Routes' and the 'Incense Routes'. For more than two millennia, travellers explored the Silk Roads in pursuit of commercial and intellectual goals. In doing so they participated in exchanges of scientific knowledge on medicine, mathematics, and chemistry, and contributed to many of the arts, including literature, painting, calligraphy, music, architecture, and craftsmanship. The cross-border fluidity of the production techniques of various crafts including textiles and ceramics resulted in the emergence of cosmopolitan workshops creating products that mixed stylistic elements, materials, and designs from the different cultures of the Silk Roads.

Along the Silk Roads, moments of gathering, rites of passage, and festive traditions stood as profound celebrations of life. From the joy of new births to the solemnity of farewells, from vibrant festivals to the beauty of weddings, communities marked the passage of time and honoured existence. Enriched by music, dance, poetry, and culinary traditions, these celebrations became spaces where cultures met, memories endured, and the human spirit shone across borders. The Silk Roads thus became a living thread, weaving together solidarity and hope.

The rituals and intangible heritage inherited from these exchanges remind us that life reaches its deepest meaning when celebrated together. Beyond the exchange of goods and ideas, the Silk Roads nurtured a deeper current: the universal human desire to gather, commemorate, and pass traditions from one generation to the next. This enduring legacy shows that our globalized world is sustained by the celebration of life, where unity, understanding, and respect flourish as communities come together across differences and honour the richness of our shared humanity.

85 countries
Some 3,500 submissions

2 age categories

from 14 to 17 years old
from 18 to 25 years old

1 theme

Women, Guardians of Silk Roads Heritage

List of the participating countries

- AFGHANISTAN
- ALBANIA
- ALGERIA
- ARMENIA
- AUSTRALIA
- AUSTRIA
- AZERBAIJAN
- BANGLADESH
- BENIN
- BOTSWANA
- BURKINA FASO
- CAMBODIA
- CAMEROON
- CANADA
- PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
- CÔTE D'IVOIRE
- CROATIA
- CZECHIA
- DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
- EGYPT
- ETHIOPIA
- FRANCE
- GEORGIA
- GERMANY
- GHANA
- GUINEA-BISSAU
- HAITI
- HUNGARY
- ICELAND
- INDIA
- INDONESIA
- IRAN (ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF)
- IRAQ
- IRELAND
- ITALY
- JAPAN
- JORDAN
- KAZAKHSTAN
- KENYA
- KYRGYZSTAN
- LIBYA
- MALAYSIA
- MAURITIUS
- MEXICO
- MONGOLIA
- MOROCCO
- MOZAMBIQUE
- MYANMAR
- NEPAL
- NETHERLANDS (KINGDOM OF THE)
- NIGER
- NIGERIA
- NORTH MACEDONIA
- OMAN
- PAKISTAN
- PERU
- PHILIPPINES
- POLAND
- PORTUGAL
- QATAR
- REPUBLIC OF KOREA
- ROMANIA
- RUSSIAN FEDERATION
- RWANDA
- SAUDI ARABIA
- SERBIA
- SLOVAKIA
- SPAIN
- SRI LANKA
- SWITZERLAND
- SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC
- TAJIKISTAN
- THAILAND
- TIMOR-LESTE
- TUNISIA
- TÜRKIYE
- TURKMENISTAN
- UGANDA
- UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
- UNITED KINGDOM
- UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
- UZBEKISTAN
- VIET NAM
- YEMEN
- ZIMBABWE


The Silk Roads
The Silk Roads are part of a vast region comprised of a network of maritime and land routes. They pass through South Asia and Southeast Asia, crossing the Central Asian subcontinent, the Russian steppes, the Iranian and Anatolian plateaus, and the Arabian Peninsula. They stretch across North Africa and Northeast Africa, from Tanzania to Morocco. Moreover, they extend through Eastern and Southern Europe, before linking France and Spain.
Silk Roads
Maritime Silk Roads (Spice Routes)
Eurasian Steppe Routes
Incense Roads
Other Trade and Connecting Routes
Secondary Trading Routes
EURASIAN STEPPES
MONGOLIAN STEPPES
GOBI DESERT
CENTRAL ASIA
PLATEAU OF TIBET
IRANIAN PLATEAU
ANATOLIA
MESOPOTAMIA
ARABIAN PENINSULA
INDIAN SUBCONTINENT
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
BLACK SEA
CASPIAN SEA
ARAL SEA
PERSIAN GULF
GULF OF OMAN
RED SEA
GULF OF ADEN
ARABIAN SEA
BAY OF BENGAL
INDIAN OCEAN
PACIFIC OCEAN
YELLOW SEA
SOUTH CHINA SEA
BORNEO
JAVA
MOUNT FUJI
Prague
Krakow
Kiev
Paris
Loire
Rostov On Don
Elista
Astrakhan
Volga
Ural
Karakorum
Urumqi
Shanh-du (Xanadu)
Lyon
Venice
Genoa
Crimea
Danube
Turfan
Porto
Barcelona
Valencia
Lisbon
Cordoba
Seville
Granada
Rome
Istanbul (Constantinople)
Bursa
Trebizond
Tbilisi
Derbent
Shaki
Baku
Otrar
Khiva (Khwarezm)
Kuqa
Kokand
Ferghane
Xinjiang
Dunhuang
Beijing (Khanbalik)
Sardis
Ephesus
Konya
Athens
Erzurum
Tabriz
Nisa
Bukhara
Merv
Samarkand
Kashgar
Pyongyang
Penglai
Seoul
Gyengju
Busan
Osaka
Fukuoka
Nagasaki
Nara
Alanya
Antioch
Aleppo
Dara
Nisibis
Gorgan
Nishapur
Rayy
Balkh (Bactra)
Khotan
Fès
Palmyra
Tyre
Damascus
Bagdad
Ctesiphon
Ecbatana
Isfahan
Taxila
Loyang
Xi'an (Changan)
Yangzhou
Nanjing
Hangzhou
Ningbo
Tripoli
Jerusalem
Gaza
Petra
Alexandria
Cairo
Susa
Harappa
Chengdu
Wuhan
Qusair (Myos Hormos)
AlUla
Apologos
Siraf
Hormuz
Delhi
Foochow (Fuzhou)
Zaitun (Quanzhou)
Leuce Come
Medina
Karachi
Sohar
Muscat
Barbaricon
Canton (Ghuangzhou)
Macau
Jeddah
Mecca
Qalhat
Barygaza
Tamralipti
Cattigara (Haiphong)
Hanoi
Suakin
Goa
Pegu
Bolinao
Salalah
San'a
Muza
Aden
Cana
Hội An
Madras
Calicut
Pondicherry
Kochi
Oc-eo
Zeila
Anuradhapura
Bandar Seri Begawan
Malacca
Singapore
Sulawesi
Sriwijaya (Palembang)
Mogadishu
Zanzibar
Dar es Salam
Kilwa
Jakarta

Selection Committee



Emilio Morenatti | Photojournalist

Spain

Emilio Morenatti is a Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist with The Associated Press, based in Barcelona. With over 30 years of experience, he has reported from more than 60 countries, including extended periods in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Gaza, and Pakistan.

He received the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography in 2021 for his portraits of elderly Spaniards during the COVID-19 pandemic, and again in 2023 for Breaking News Photography in Ukraine. He was also a finalist in 2009 for his work in Afghanistan.

Morenatti's work has earned multiple other accolades, including World Press Photo, Pictures of the Year International, and NPPA awards.

He holds a Master's in Photojournalism from the University of the Arts London and currently oversees the AP's photography in Spain and Portugal.



Thandiwe Muriu | Artist

Kenya

Thandiwe Muriu is a Kenyan artist whose work explores identity, culture, and female empowerment through bold photographic portraits. Inspired by African textiles such as the Ankara and East African kanga, she celebrates womanhood and cultural heritage. Self-taught, she began photography at 14 and became one of Kenya's few female advertising photographers.

Her acclaimed *Camo* series reflects her experience challenging gender expectations, blending optic art with influences from Malick Sidibé. Through her work, she transforms overlooked traditions such as oral histories and everyday objects into proud expressions of identity.

Since 2020, Muriu's work has been exhibited globally, including at the Venice Biennale, the Musée de l'Homme and the Perrotin Gallery, and in 2024, she published her first monograph *Camo* and deepened her research on East African kanga fabrics through her series *Woven Voices*.



Hannah Reyes Morales | Photographer

Philippines

Hannah Reyes Morales is a Filipina photographer whose work explores how historical memory and current events shape daily life. Her long-term project *Living Lullabies* highlights the role of lullabies in creating safe spaces for children and caregivers in difficult environments, blending photography, audio, animation, and performance.

Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *National Geographic Magazine*, and *The Washington Post*. She is the recipient of the Tim Hetherington Visionary Award, the ICP Infinity Award for Documentary Practice, and was named a cultural leader by the World Economic Forum ASEAN.

In 2021, she was commissioned as the Nobel Peace Prize photographer, and more recently received a World Press Photo Award, a Pictures of the Year International Award, and a 2024 Pulitzer Prize nomination. She is a co-founder of Emerging Islands and a National Geographic Explorer.



Zeng Yi | Photographer

People's Republic of China

Zeng Yi is a renowned Chinese photographer, curator, and social activist with over 50 years of experience. He founded the *International Alliance of Photographic Organizations of Silk Road Countries* and serves as China's Chief Representative to the *International Federation of Photographic Art* (FIAP), alongside several advisory roles.

His numerous honours include China's Golden Image Award, the FIAP Medal of Honour, Italy's Michelangelo Gold Medal, and UNESCO's Asian Cultural Center Award. He was also named among the "Top 10 Global Chinese Photographers of the Year" and received the Daguerre Golden Statue Award in France.

Zeng's work has been exhibited internationally and is held in collections at Oxford, Cambridge, the Royal College of Art, and major museums across Europe and Asia. A key figure in cultural exchange through photography, he continues to promote global dialogue through his creative and curatorial work.

WINNERS of the photo contest

Category one
14-17 years old



1ST PRIZE

Yitian Zhang
15 years old,
People's Republic of China

2ND PRIZE

Manizha Pulodi
17 years old, Tajikistan





3RD PRIZE

Minh Anh Nguyễn
17 years old, Viet Nam

Category two
18-25 years old



1ST PRIZE

Farbod Bavehie
25 years old, Iran (Islamic Republic of)



2ND PRIZE

Ahsanul Haque Nayem
25 years old, Bangladesh



3RD PRIZE

Ahmad Fahriyadi
20 years old, Indonesia



Winner 1st prize | 14-17 years old

Yitian Zhang
15 years old, People's Republic of China



A moment of tranquillity

A grandmother rests on a hillside, in China, with her granddaughter in her arms, holding Buddha beads that glisten softly in the sun as symbols of fortune and faith. Culture and tradition are passed gently from one generation to the next, as they have been for centuries along the Silk Roads, where Buddhism continues to shape the spiritual life of communities.

Winner 2nd prize | 14-17 years old

Manizha Pulodi
17 years old, Tajikistan



Suzani embroidery across generations

A mother teaches her daughter the art of *suzani* embroidery, a tradition of Silk Roads heritage where every stitch carries the history and care of generations.



Winner 3rd prize | 14-17 years old

Minh Anh Nguyễn
17 years old, Viet Nam



The colourful patterns

In a village in central Viet Nam, the craft of weaving rush and sedge mats has been practised for centuries. In this photo, a woman artisan airs out rush strands after dyeing them in vivid green, purple, yellow, and red. These intricate handicrafts, once traded along the Silk Roads, highlight the significance of Vietnamese cultural heritage and the vital role of women in sustaining these traditions across generations.



Winner 1st prize | 18-25 years old

Farbod Bavehie
25 years old, Iran (Islamic Republic of)



Horseback rider at the Nowruz fire

A young woman on horseback rides past the fire while villagers and visitors observe during the Nowruz celebrations in Kurdistan Province, Iran (Islamic Republic of). Beyond symbolizing the renewal of nature and the start of the new year, the ceremony highlights the cultural traditions celebrated along the Silk Roads and the active role of women and youth in preserving intangible heritage.
The strong presence of the younger generation reflects the link between past and present and the importance of passing on local cultures to future generations.

Winner 2nd prize | 18-25 years old

Ahsanul Haque Nayem
25 years old, Bangladesh



Drying paddy

Five women workers use a traditional method to dry paddy in the sun, spreading and turning it with wooden rakes before dividing it into lines with palm branches. This daily practice, lasting up to ten hours, reflects both the vital role of women in sustaining agricultural life and the continuity of farming traditions along the Silk Roads.



Winner 3rd Prize | 18-25 years old

Ahmad Fahriyadi
20 years old, Indonesia



Sustaining the river's traditions: women of Lok Baintan

The Lok Baintan floating market in South Kalimantan, Indonesia, which has existed since the 14th century, is both a centre of trade and a place where communities gather and interact. Women traders paddle their boats across the river to exchange goods, sustaining local livelihoods while strengthening the social and cultural ties passed down through generations, echoing the vibrant exchange traditions of the Silk Roads.

Honourable Mention | 14–17 years old

Sona Vardanyan
17 years old, Armenia



Sun-born patterns

A young woman sits on the grass in a quiet park in Yerevan, Armenia, working on her embroidery. She is wearing a *taraz*, a traditional Armenian dress, and through her hands carries forward the living heritage of craftsmanship sustained along the Silk Roads for generations.

Honourable Mention | 18–25 years old

Morsal Hamidi
21 years old, Afghanistan/France



Echoes of the Silk Roads

A young Afghan musician, dressed in embroidered garments, plays a traditional bowed instrument surrounded by handwoven carpets. Music and craftsmanship merge, creating a timeless harmony that carries cultural traditions forward.



Honourable Mention | 18-25 years old

Nay Thurein
24 years old, Myanmar



Traditional umbrellas

A woman crafts delicate *Pathein* umbrellas, a traditional practice that is both an art form and a source of livelihood for her community. These beautifully made umbrellas provide calm, soothing shade and reflect the skills and cultural exchanges sustained along the Silk Roads.

BEST OF the photo contest



Hadis Saberian Deljavan
18 years old, Iran (Islamic Republic of)

Playing the travellers music

A young and talented oud player from the Roudaki Youth Orchestra in Tabriz, Iran (Islamic Republic of), plays an important role in preserving and passing on the oud, an iconic instrument of the shared musical legacy of the Silk Roads, which has been widely appreciated by various communities across the vast regions along these routes, from Central Asia to North Africa.

Shukria Rezaie
22 years old, Afghanistan

Heritage through generations

A grandmother teaches the traditional art of sewing to her granddaughter. The transmission of know-how Afghan skills from one generation of women to the next preserves the beauty and knowledge of the Silk Roads in the Indian Subcontinent and Central Asia.





Sarvinoz Mirpochoeva
23 years old, Tajikistan

A sun-like strength

Dressed in a traditional *chakhan* embroidered with sun motifs, a Tajik girl stands in strength, embodying her role as a true guardian of her homeland's heritage.



Yash Krishnanunny
25 years old, India

Onam celebration

In Kerala, India, women carefully set up *Pookalam*, a floral decoration made from flower petals, in celebration for the Onam festival.

Ziqing Wang
17 years old, People's Republic of China

Stories of tea farmers

In Zhejiang Province, China, a group of women tea farmers, dressed in simple tea-picking clothes and wearing conical hats, walk along a dusty path. Their bamboo baskets are heavy with the fruits of a long day's work and their backs show tiredness but also a steady calm, as if the rhythm of the land is part of them. Tea, far more than a simple beverage, travelled extensively along the Silk Roads, embodying values of hospitality and respect. Crossing mountains and deserts, it fostered connections between distant places and diverse communities. Now, these women follow those old paths in a different way, carrying forward a tradition that connects past and present.





Zhi Ying Goh
21 years old, Malaysia

Keeper of tradition

A woman at the historic rattan factory, highlights her role in keeping her people's identity alive. She carries forward the knowledge women have long preserved in Malaysia's craft, strengthened by the coastal exchanges of the Maritime Silk Roads.

Mobin Mayeli
25 years old, Iran (Islamic Republic of)

Woman of the sea

On Hormuz Island, Iran (Islamic Republic of), along the old Maritime Silk Roads, local women gather dried fish from the red-hued sand in the traditional way. Their work supports the household economy while keeping alive a coastal practice that has anchored community life for centuries in the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Red Sea and the Indian northwestern coasts of the Indian Ocean.



Ananto Biswas Utshow
24 years old, Bangladesh

Her day by the river

Every day, the woman fetches water, a task crucial for her family. As the people living along the riverbanks have always depended on it, they catch fish, bathe in its waters, and use the collected water for cooking and drinking. For generations, people have settled near water sources along the Silk Roads, relying on them for agriculture and trade.





Aqiq Mohabbat Fetnat
24 years old, Afghanistan

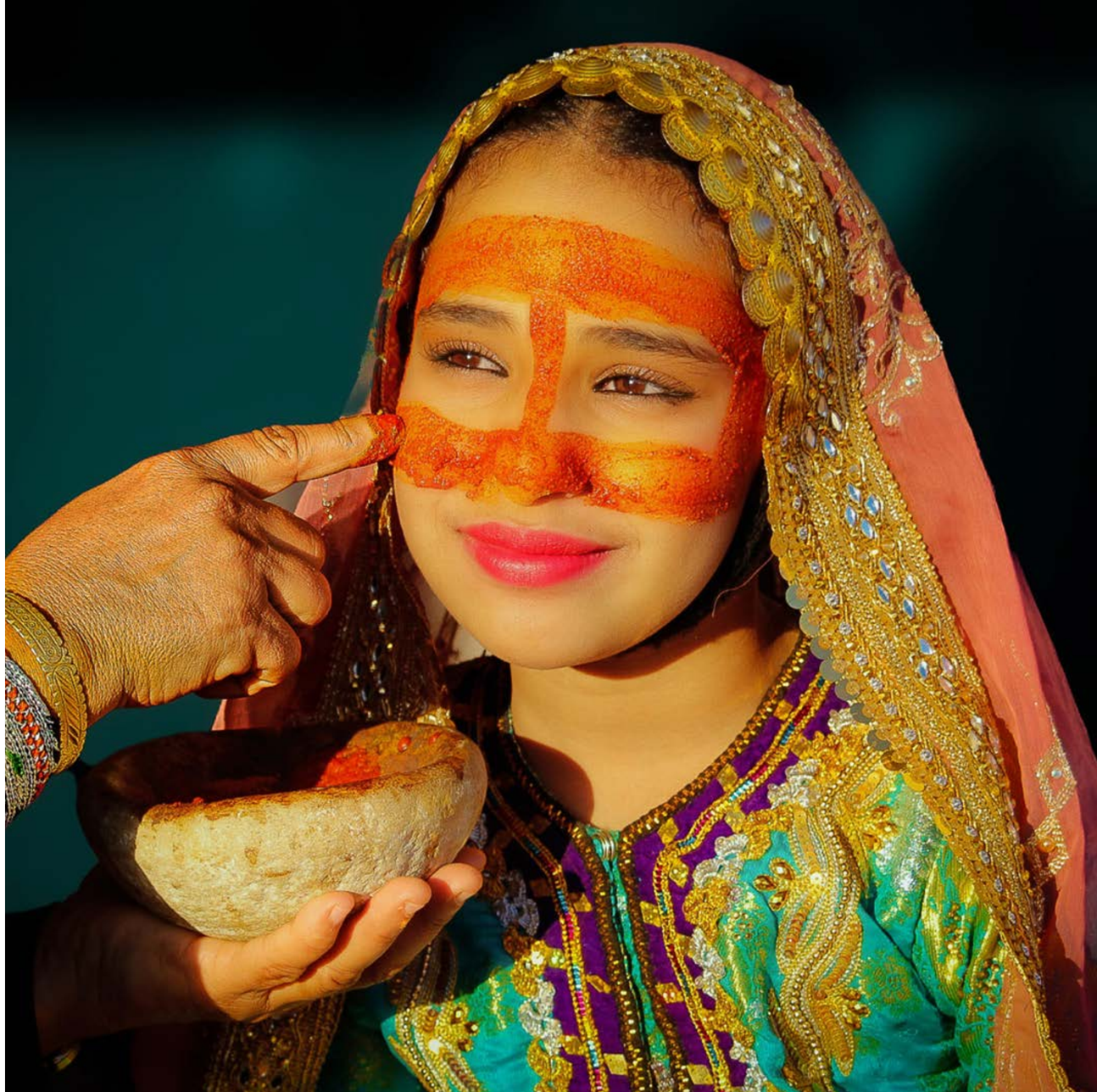
A deep thirst for learning

A young woman reads a book on ancient Persian history, driven by a love of learning and a passion to expand her knowledge. In Afghanistan, where girls are currently banned from secondary schools and universities, women rely on books to study and learn. Across generations, women have preserved the history of the Silk Roads and worked to educate future generations, making it possible for us to know and appreciate these historic routes.

Marwan Salim Aladhubi
25 years old, Oman

Timeless colours

Local traditional paint is made from mahlab or sandalwood, rose water and various spices linked to the Maritime Silk Roads in regions within Arabian peninsula, Indian-Subcontinent as well as East-Africa. Applied to young girls faces, it reflects the beauty of traditional Omani dress.



Indigo Larmour
17 years old, Ireland

From one woman to another

Women pass down cultural knowledge through their role in rituals and festivals, which have travelled along the Silk Roads. Their transmission mirrors the way ceremonial practices circulated between communities.





Gulmammet Chopanov
17 years old, Turkmenistan

Heritage in Silence

In Turkmen tradition, the *yasmak* is an element of women's national attire, used to partially cover the face in the presence of men outside the immediate family. Covering the lower part of the face, it reflects established norms of modesty, respect, and social etiquette. This practice is rooted in cultural tradition and should be understood within its historical and social context. Today, the *yasmak* is perceived as a symbol of dignity, identity, and continuity of cultural heritage. *Keche*, felt textiles made from sheep's wool, have historically played an important role in everyday life. Used in domestic settings and during travel, including along the Silk Roads, they provided warmth, protection, and comfort. These textiles remain an important expression of Turkmen craftsmanship and cultural heritage.

Avilash Ghosh
25 years old, Bangladesh

Stitch by stitch

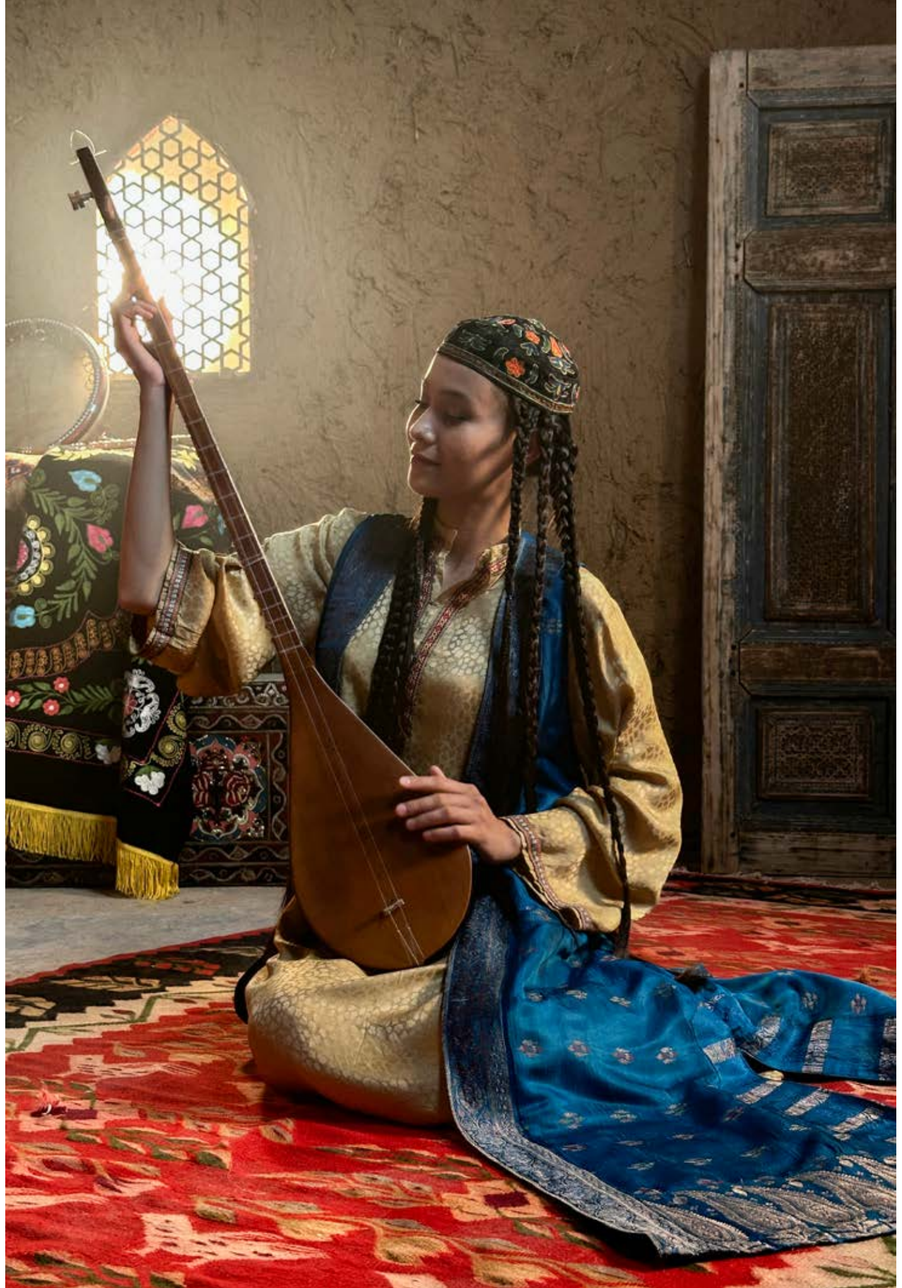
Threads of resilience, woven by women's hands, carry the heritage of their community. In each careful stitch, they preserve skills and traditions.



Jakhongir Eshnazarov
24 years old, Uzbekistan

Melodies of the Silk Roads

A young woman in traditional Uzbek attire plays the *dutar*, an ancient string instrument played across vast regions along the Silk Roads, from Central Asia to Iran (Islamic Republic of), Afghanistan, the Caucasus and Anatolia, bathed in the warm light of a traditional home, preserving melodies passed down through generations.



Kestrel Mamawag
15 years old, Philippines

Dance in abundance

During the early morning street-dancing competition of the Kaamulan Festival, women from the Talaandig tribe of Bukidnon, Philippines, perform dances in traditional clothes to celebrate a bountiful harvest, a common custom along the Silk Roads. The festival, whose name comes from the Binukid word *amul-amul*, meaning "to gather", unites indigenous communities in Thanksgiving and cultural celebration.



Bipul Ahmed
23 years old, Bangladesh

Threads of *shemai*

In rural Bangladesh, a woman carefully dries handmade *shemai* (vermicelli) beneath the scorching sun, a culinary tradition passed down through generations and deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of South Asia.





Md Sallim Mondal Rajon
23 years old, Bangladesh

Blooming colours

Women harvest marigolds in the fields of Jessore, Bangladesh, where rows of bright orange flowers stretch into the distance. Their work is central to local flower farming, a sector in which women have gained financial independence by earning wages based on the thousands of blooms they collect each day. Part of the wider Maritime Silk Roads, the fields supply much of the country's flower demand and continue agricultural traditions connecting local production to historic trade routes.

Quan Pham
23 years old, Viet Nam

Lotus: from cultural symbol to living craft

In Viet Nam, a woman works with lotus flowers, reflecting a rich tradition of craftsmanship and creativity. From the production of lotus silk to other innovative uses of natural materials, these practices illustrate the connection between local knowledge and living cultural heritage.



Noof Salim Alsiyabi
22 years old, Oman

Through heritage gates

In the old heritage neighbourhoods of Oman shaped by the architectural knowledge from the Silk Roads, a woman in traditional attire walks beneath a clay archway with a basket in her hands.



Asif Ahmed
23 years old, Bangaldesh

One of the last potter

At 109 years old, this potter from Naogaon, Bangladesh, still shapes clay with her hand. A skill she learned from her father. Her lifelong craft preserves the ancient traditions passed down along the Silk Roads.





Krishna Paul Bijoy
22 years old, Bangladesh

Whispers from hyacinth's water

A young girl in a bright red dress leans into a field of water hyacinths, her hands gently gathering the delicate flowers near an abandoned wooden boat in Bangladesh's rural life.

Pramit Das
22 years old, India

A daily life

Planting rice saplings in a flooded paddy field, reflects the essence of a daily rural life and harmony with nature along the Silk Roads. Beyond its cultural significance, this work also represents a vital source of income. Women support the livelihoods of their families but their communities as well.



Tanvir Ahmed
23 years old, Bangladesh

Harvesting hope with her hands

A woman bears bundles of harvested paddy in a sunlit golden field. Her red headscarf and traditional bangles reflect her cultural roots and marital identity, reflecting the responsibilities women have historically held in managing family resources, including livestock.



Pubarun Basu
24 years old, India

Rituals of the Garo tribe

The Garo tribes of Meghalaya in North-East India, are worshippers of Saljong, their sun deity. During Wangala, their post-harvest festival, they express gratitude through rituals and traditional games such as tug of war where women and men in vibrant attire pull together on the dusty valley floor. As a matrilineal community, Garo women inherit family property and choose their partners through a courtship dance. They remain one of India's few indigenous groups and are still preserving one of the Silk Roads's long-lasting ancestral traditions.



Hadis Zargarian Ahari
19 years old, Iran (Islamic Republic of)



The outdoor kitchen

In the nomadic countryside of north-western Iran (Islamic Republic of), a woman bakes local *yukha* bread, preserving the culinary traditions of her community.

Luckyshan Krishnaraj
20 years old, Sri Lanka

When time leaves traces

An elderly woman from Sri Lanka's upcountry Tamil community stands with decades of resilience and strength etched across her face. Her expression reflects the unspoken stories of generations that have lived and worked in the island's central highlands.





Huilin Shen
16 years old, People's Republic of China

Tea charm in ancient alleys

In a small village in Zhejiang Province, China, an elderly lady dries tea leaves picked from the nearby mountains. Inscribed in 2022 in the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, traditional tea processing techniques and associated social practices in China are carefully preserved. Far from the city and its automated machines, every step of preparing tea is handmade to safeguard the traditional methods of their community. Beyond its craftsmanship, tea holds a universal cultural value, symbolizing hospitality and respect. As such, it stands as a remarkable element of the shared gastronomic heritage of the Silk Roads, bearing witness to the long-standing connections among diverse cultures across Asia, Africa, Europe, and beyond.

Pau Terés I Teixiné
24 years old, Spain

Mastery of her craft

In northern Viet Nam, a local farmer works in a vast field on a chilly morning, surrounded by endless weeds. Years of experience shows in every precise swing of her tool, a skill honed for the benefit of the community. Her work underscores the vital role women play in sustaining local agricultural know-how, influenced by the discoveries made through centuries.





Hein Min Soe
24 years old, Myanmar

Floating market

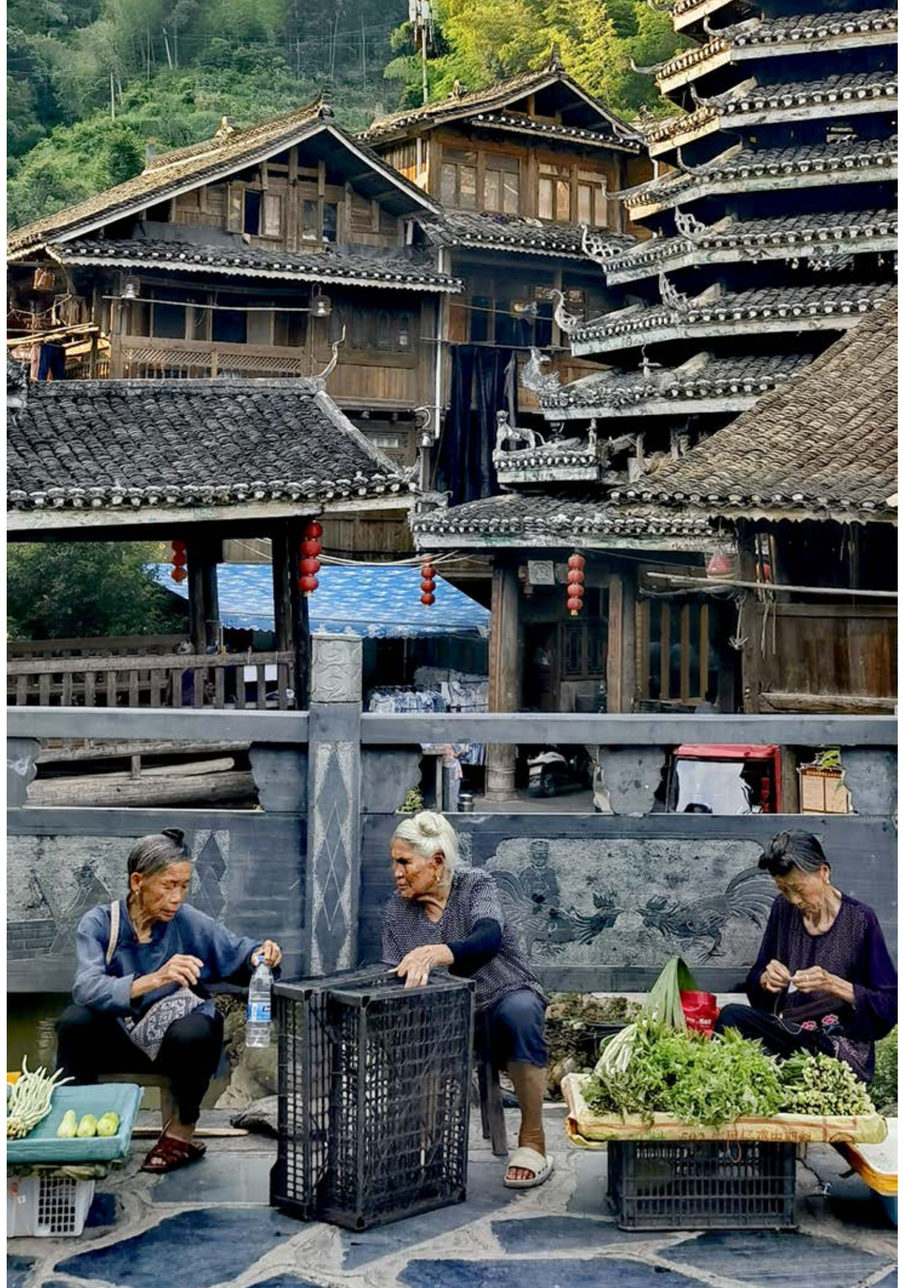
The floating market at Inle Lake, in Shan State, Myanmar, reflects the lifestyle and primary economic activities of the local people. Every five days, women return by boat and rowboat, bringing vegetables and fruits from floating farms and gardens, as well as traditional handicrafts from the surrounding villages. This unique floating economy offers a vivid glimpse into the enduring connections between trade, culture and daily life in the region and stands as remarkable expression of the shared legacy of the Silk Roads across the vast regions in Southeast Asia.

Yixiao Dai
20 years old, People's Republic of China

Dancing on a hill

At an altitude of 2,300 meters, Sichen and Huichen dance on the roof dressed in traditional Mosuo attire. Their belts and backpacks, handmade by their mothers, carry the skills passed down through generations.





Baoyi Hu
16 years old, People's Republic of China

Where the river meets life

As the sun sets over an ancient bridge in Guizhou Province, China, a group of elderly women gather in conversation, their hands arranging fresh vegetables harvested that morning from their mountain plots. Bundles of leafy greens rest from their woven baskets, their earthy tones contrasting with the women's indigo-dyed clothes. The bridge, worn smoothly by generations of footsteps, carries the sound of laughter, the clink of coins, and the scent of soil and woodsmoke drifting through the air. In this daily rhythm where work and community meet, these women stand as keepers of their land and culture, turning each sunset into a celebration of resilience.

Zurab Tsirekidze
24 years old, Georgia

Stretching time

In a village in western Georgia, a woman skillfully stretches *elarji*, a traditional Megrelian dish made of cornmeal and cheese. Through cooking, she passes culinary knowledge from one generation to the next, keeping ancestral memory alive.





Zhenbo Zhang
17 years old, People's Republic of China

Prayers of continuity

In Nepal, a woman prays during the Saka Dawa festival, quietly upholding a centuries-old Buddhist custom preserved and passed down to worshippers along the Silk Roads.

Ahmad Qasim Mirzaie
20 years old, Afghanistan

In silence, they weave

Two young women weave a traditional carpet in Kabul, Afghanistan. They show patience and dedication as they preserve an ancestral craftsmanship passed down through generations, using techniques and geometric patterns historically exchanged within vast regions along the Silk Roads, connecting Afghan weavers to markets and artisans across Central Asia. In the quiet rhythm of their work, they carry forward this living heritage.



Yijun Monica Liu
24 years old, Australia

Strings of the Silk Roads

In Xinjiang, China, a young girl plays the Tajik *rubab* inside her home. This instrument's craftsmanship and sound carry centuries of cultural blending between Persian influences, Central Asian rhythms, and Pamir Mountain traditions. In her hands, it becomes a link between past and present, echoing the artistic exchange that once defined the Silk Roads and highlighting the vital role of women in preserving cultural memory.





Ashinpyinnya Siri
24 years old, Myanmar

Boat race

Women are boating together in a race by perfectly using a leg-rowing technique on Inle Lake, Myanmar. As in the Maritime Silk Roads, their longstanding contribution to local lake economies acts as a testimony of a common heritage.

Min Ko Oo
23 years old, Malaysia

Life on the open sea

Bajau Laut women navigate in wooden boats across the waters of Semporna, Sabah, Borneo, Malaysia. These boats are central to their daily lives, used for fishing, movement and connection with nearby communities along the Maritime Silk Roads in Southeast Asia and beyond.



Ankit Ghosh
17 years old, India

The mystic woman

On the final day of Durga Puja, in West Bengal, India, a young woman performs the traditional *Dhanuchi Naach* dance, emerging through thick clouds of smoke rising from the incense-filled, a festival whose rituals reflect cultural and artistic influences that spread across regions via the Silk Roads in Indian subcontinent and beyond. Partially veiled by the mist, her silhouette evokes a serene and transcendent presence, where devotion and tradition merge into a single, powerful moment.





Yousef Naser
22 years old, Egypt

Pottery manufacturing

In Menoufia Governorate, Egypt, pottery is crafted inside the family house. With a sense of care and cooperation that brings everyone together, women play important roles in the production of pottery but also in keeping the finances of the household stable and steady.

Shubhodeep Roy
24 years old, India

Eyes of devotion

A hand-held mirror frames a woman's face marked with sacred symbols. Each painted lines tells of rituals preserved by women for generations, linking daily life to centuries of spiritual and cultural practices along the Silk Roads.



Amir Hossein Abazarian
24 years old, Iran (Islamic Republic of)

Carpet

The art of carpet weaving has a long and rich history in Turkmen culture and across the vast regions along the Silk Roads. Within this tradition, women have always played a central role as nurturers of future generations and transmitters of cultural heritage. Often working quietly behind the scenes of everyday life, they weave the essence of their heritage into the fabric of art.





Roméo Mulamba
19 years old, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Her resiliency

At Bakuadianga Market, a major commercial hub in Kasaï-Oriental Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo, a woman sells mortars and pestles, essential tools in Congolese households. Shaped from local wood and worn smooth by years of use, these implements trace a lineage of food preparation that predates the city itself. By trading them, she keeps a practical craft alive in the community while building her livelihood one carved piece at a time.

Shelzia Camal Antonio Suzana
18 years old, Mozambique

Seas of the Dusk

Two women moving through the shallow waters at sunrise are guiding their fishnets with steady gestures. They carry a tradition shaped by the Maritime Silk Roads, connecting their hard work and long-lasting heritage.





Adel Hikmatova
17 years old, Uzbekistan

Midnight nomad

A beautiful woman walks near the Kalyan Minaret, in Bukhara, Uzbekistan, a structure that has overlooked Silk Roads travellers for centuries.

Safy Nasiet
24 years old, Cambodia

Keeping fire alive

Cambodian women carry the weight and customs of their heritage by performing and preserving traditional dances which are among the common element of the Silk Roads shared legacy in Southeast Asia.



Aleena Khan
18 years old, Pakistan

Colour, joy, and identity

At the heart of a bustling market, Salma lifts an *iraghi*, the traditional headdress of Hunza, a mountainous region in northern Pakistan; a delicate chain of ornaments falls gently across her forehead. Each mirror glimmers like an echo of the ancient Silk Roads, carrying centuries of craftsmanship and pride. Wrapped in traditional colours, her smile reflects the countless stories she carries along the streets of Saidpur.





Thanh Thuy Cao
20 years old, Viet Nam

The making of a lacquer statue

In Hanoi, Viet Nam, the art of lacquerware dates back to the 17th century. According to tradition, the process includes 12 stages, and craftsmen can spend months completing a single piece. Once known mainly along the Silk Roads for producing ritual objects used in worship, the village now creates a wide range of items, from vases and plates to decorative souvenirs, continuing a centuries-old legacy of meticulous mastery.



Zhaleh Nasajpour
25 years old, Iran (Islamic Republic of)

Khatam inlay work

A woman practices *khatam inlay*, a traditional craft from Isfahan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), where tiny pieces of wood, bone, and metal are meticulously assembled to form intricate geometric patterns. Passed down through generations, this art reflects the precision, patience, and devotion that have long shaped shared cultural heritage of the Silk Roads in Iran (Islamic Republic of), Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Anya Gopal
17 years old, United States of America

Cleaning grain

In rural Karnataka, India, a woman outside a school canteen spills grain onto the floor, letting the wind clear the dust. Women have preserved these traditions, despite the advent of modern machinery. Though this woman must cook for large groups of children, she continues to preserve Indian culinary tradition through practices.



Eldaana Esengeldieva
21 years old, Kyrgyzstan

Fierce and free

Standing on the bricks of an unfinished house overlooking the mountains and the river, two girls embody faith and strength. Manizha, in a red cloak, represents courage and prosperity as she gestures forward, showing that only the best lies ahead. The wind lifts the white skirt of Meerim, who gazes onward with hope and resilience, symbolizing change and the long journey that ancient travellers have experienced along the Silk Roads.





Diyor Nematullozoda
18 years old, Tajikistan

Hands where tradition is born

At the heart of Tajik and Central Asian cultural heritage, the art of embroidery is a living tradition passed down from mother to daughter. These traditional garments, rich in symbolic patterns, embody the craftsmanship and enduring artistic traditions that have been transmitted by women across generations along the Silk Roads.



Shivam Khanna
25 years old, India

Healing in petals

In Vrindavan, a sacred town in Uttar Pradesh, India, often called the “city of widows”, hundreds of women from states all around the country seek each year solace after the loss of their husbands. At the historic Gopinath Temple, widows from shelter homes come together to celebrate Holi, the festival of colours, painting a different picture of courage and reclaiming their joy. Their plain white sarees, once stood for sorrow and loss, are wrapped in colours, flowers, and devotion in their hearts.

Nil Samur
15 years old, Türkiye

Between tradition and modernity

During Turkish weddings, the Kina Gecesi, a traditional Henna night is celebrated among women across the Silk Roads in Asia and Africa. The bride is surrounded by women dancing and singing wrapped in a circle of candlelight while a relative of the groom gently applies henna to her hand. Though the custom may be fading, the scent of drying henna and the red stain on her palms carry a nostalgia that connects generations.



Adina Bayazitova
19 years old, Kazakhstan

Farewell ceremony

A Kazakh woman is getting married in a ceremonial headdress called *Saukele*. Her mother and close female relative help her put it on, as it symbolizes her entry into a new family and her farewell to parents and relatives. This tradition, the first part of marriage in Kazakh culture, mirrors Silk Roads communities where marriage rites formalized a woman's entry into her new household through rituals shared across nomadic and settled cultures of Central and Inner Asia.





Esther Kay
21 years old, France

Women in good company

In the winter sun near Almaty, Kazakhstan, two women share a quiet moment with their horse during a visit to a nearby village. Proper to the Silk Roads, their bond echoes Kazakhstan's deep horse-riding traditions, rooted in the nomadic cultures.

Qian Wang
25 years old, People's Republic of China

Rejoicing

A woman guides her companion into the traditional Miao dance. During weddings, harvest celebrations, or traditional festivals, Miao women from China's Thousand-Household Miao Village of Xijiang dress in ethnic attire and silver accessories recognized as intangible cultural heritage, gathering in the square to sing and dance. Participants often come from surrounding villages and different Miao branches, continuing a centuries-old tradition that both preserves rich ethnic customs and strengthens community bonds.





Madina Amantay
14 years old, Kazakhstan

A smell from the past

A woman bakes traditional flatbread in a clay street oven used in Central Asian cultures, a cooking technique spread along the Silk Roads. Nearby, her son enjoys the fresh bread and smell, reflecting the warmth of heritage and family. Baking bread in clay street ovens is a long-standing tradition across diverse communities along the Silk Roads, predominantly maintained and transmitted by women.

Ammar Magdi
19 years old, Egypt

Jasmine sorting

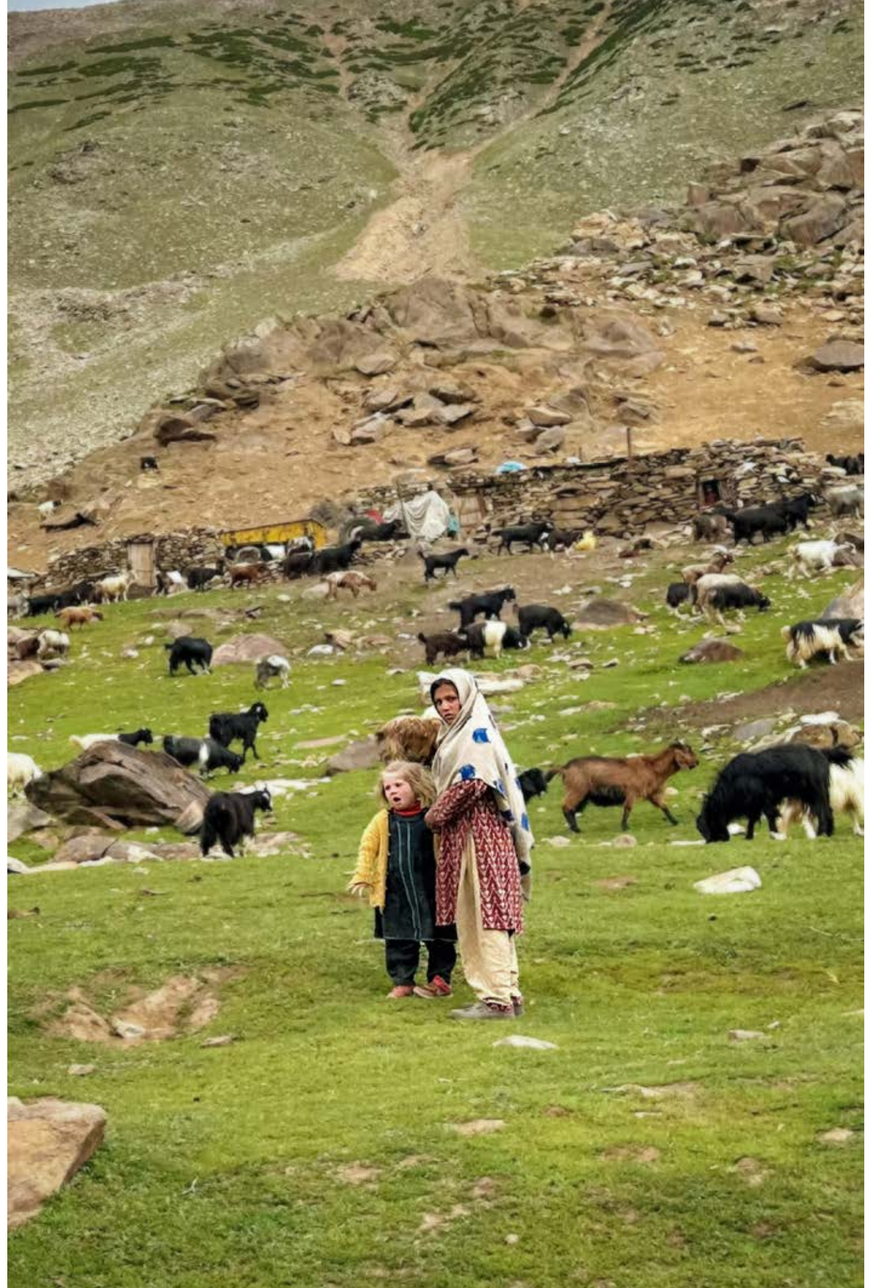
Collecting white jasmine flowers in the early morning in an open field in Egypt, she gathers the blossoms she will later sell to perfume and essential oil producers. Her work continues a long tradition of jasmine cultivation and trade in a region once linked to the aromatic exchanges along the Incense Route in Arabian Peninsula and Middle East.



Maheen Saleem
18 years old, Pakistan

Trading, leading and nurturing

Amidst the rugged slopes of the Karakoram mountains, Pakistan, a child and her mother stand strong surrounded by herds of livestock. Women continue to uphold a quiet legacy of resilience and trade. Representing two generations, traditional ways of working are not formally taught but are gradually learned, observed, and passed down. Their presence is a living testament to the continuity in both livelihoods and cultural practices transmitted by the spirit of Silk Roads.





Haining Ma
17 years old, People's Republic of China

Timeless notes

A musician plays the *guqin,* an instrument inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, bridging contemporary rhythms with a millennia-old musical tradition.

Thant Htoo Aung
19 years old, Myanmar

Pride of the floating harvest

A farmer proudly dries rice sheaves on Inle Lake, Myanmar, where life and tradition float together. This form of agriculture is part of the enduring legacy of the Silk Roads, reflecting the exchange of knowledge, techniques and ways of life across connected regions.





Murad Aliyev
15 years old, Azerbaijan

Carpet making

In Azerbaijan's Guba region, women preserve an old art of carpet making, keeping alive skills and traditional craftsmanship that shape local life. Through practices historically exchanged along the Silk Roads, their work is connected to a wider heritage of trade and artistry from Indian subcontinent and Central Asia to Iran (Islamic Republic of), the Caucasus and Anatolia.



Karem Ayman Tawdros Arteen
17 years old, Egypt

In her shoes

During the Good Friday procession in Qena, Upper Egypt, girls wear clothing similar to that of the Virgin Mary, symbolizing that they share her grief during the crucifixion of Christ. This ritual not only highlights the role of women in preserving and transmitting traditional customs and practices across countless generations, but also bears witness to the dialogue and exchanges between different religions.

Bilal Al-Hammoud
25 years old, Syrian Arab Republic

Guardians of Aleppo's heritage

In a traditional laurel soap shop in Aleppo's Old City, Syria, one of the historic crossroads of the Silk Roads, a woman buys handmade soap, sustaining a craft that has shaped the city's identity for centuries, and its local economy.



Debora Kharista Christiani
20 years old, Indonesia

Body, heart and mind

Gandrung is a traditional dance from East Java, Indonesia, practiced for centuries. Originating from the Osing tribe, this performance expresses gratitude for the harvest, with the word *gandrung* referring to the agrarian Banyuwangi people's fascination with Dewi Sri, the Goddess of Rice, who brings prosperity. The Ngumbul is characterized by its graceful and gentle gestures, reflecting the refined qualities held in high esteem for women.



Best photographers of the contest

A

Abazarian, Amir Hossein | 120
24 years old – Iran (Islamic Rep. of)

Ahmed, Asif | 78
23 years old – Bangladesh

Ahmed, Bipul | 70
23 years old – Bangladesh

Ahmed, Tanvir | 84
23 years old – Bangladesh

Al-Hammoud, Bilal | 166
25 years old – Syrian Arab Rep.

Aladhubi, Marwan Salim | 58
25 years old – Oman

Aliyev, Murad | 163
15 years old – Azerbaijan

Alsiyabi, Noof Salim | 76
22 years old – Oman

Amantay, Madina | 153
14 years old – Kazakhstan

Arteen, Karem Ayman Tawdros | 165
17 years old – Egypt

Aung, Thant Htoo | 160
19 years old – Myanmar

B

Basu, Pubarun | 86
24 years old – India

Bavehie, Farbod | 27
25 years old – Iran (Islamic Rep. of)

Bayazitova, Adina | 146
19 years old – Kazakhstan

Bijoy, Krishna Paul | 81
22 years old – Bangladesh

Biswas Utshow, Ananto | 54
24 years old – Bangladesh

C

Cao, Thanh Thuy | 133
20 years old – Viet Nam

Chopanov, Gulmammet | 63
17 years old – Turkmenistan

Christiani, Debora Kharista | 168
20 years old – Indonesia

D

Dai, Yixiao | 98
20 years old, People's Rep. of China

Das, Pramit | 82
22 years old, India

E

Esengeldieva, Eldaana | 138
21 years old, Kyrgyzstan

Eshnazarov, Jakhongir | 66
24 years old, Uzbekistan

F

Fahriyadi, Ahmad | 31
20 years old – Indonesia

Fetnat, Aqiq Mohabbat | 57
24 years old – Afghanistan

G

Ghosh, Avilash | 64
25 years old – Bangladesh

Ghosh, Ankit | 114
17 years old – India

Goh, Zhi Ying | 51
21 years old – Malaysia

Gopal, Anya | 136
17 years old – United States of America

H

Hamidi, Morsal | 35
21 years old – Afghanistan/France

Haque Nayem, Ahsanul | 29
25 years old – Bangladesh

Hikmatova, Adel | 127
17 years old – Uzbekistan

Hu, Baoyi | 101
16 years old – People's Rep. of China

K

Kay, Esther | 149
21 years old – France

Khan, Aleena | 130
18 years old – Pakistan

Khanna, Shivam | 143
25 years old, India

Krishnanunny, Yash | 47
25 years old – India

Krishnaraj, Luckyshan | 90
20 years old – Sri Lanka

L

Larmour, Indigo | 60
17 years old – Ireland

Liu, Yijun Monica | 108
24 years old – Australia

M

Ma, Haining | 159
17 years old – People's Rep. of China

Magdi, Ammar | 154
19 years old, Egypt

Mamawag, Kestrel | 68
15 years old – Philippines

Mayeli, Mobin | 52
25 years old – Iran (Islamic Rep. of)

Min Soe, Hein | 97
24 years old – Myanmar

Mirpochoeva, Sarvinoz | 45
23 years old – Tajikistan

Mirzaie, Ahmad Qasim | 106
20 years old – Afghanistan

Mondal Rajon, Md Sallim | 73
23 years old – Bangladesh

Mulamba, Roméo | 123
19 years old – Democratic Rep. of the Congo

N

Nasajpour, Zhaleh | 135
25 years old – Iran (Islamic Rep. of)

Naser, Yousef | 117
22 years old – Egypt

Nasiet, Safy | 128
24 years old – Cambodia

Nematullozoda, Diyor | 141
18 years old – Tajikistan

Nguyen, Minh Anh | 25
17 years old – Viet Nam

O

Oo, Min Ko | 112
23 years old – Malaysia

P

Pham, Quan | 74
23 years old – Viet Nam

Pulodi, Manizha | 22
17 years old – Tajikistan

R

Rezaie, Shukria | 42
22 years old – Afghanistan

Roy, Shubhodeep | 118
24 years old – India

S

Saberian Deljavan, Hadis | 41
18 years old, Iran (Islamic Rep. of)

Saleem, Maheen | 156
18 years old – Pakistan

Samur, Nil | 144
15 years old, Türkiye

Shen, Huilin | 93
16 years old, People's Rep. of China

Siri, Ashinpyinnya | 111
24 years old, Myanmar

Suzana, Shelzia Camal Antonio | 124
18 years old, Mozambique

T

Terés I Teixiné, Pau | 94
24 years old – Spain

Thurein, Nay | 37
24 years old – Myanmar

Tsirekidze, Zurab | 102
24 years old – Georgia

V

Vardanyan, Sona | 32
17 years old – Armenia

W

Wang, Qian | 150
25 years old – People's Rep. of China

Wang, Ziqing | 48
17 years old – People's Rep. of China

Z

Zargarian Ahari, Hadis | 89
19 years old – Iran (Islamic Rep. of)

Zhang, Yitian | 21
15 years old – People's Rep. of China

Zhang, Zhenbo | 105
17 years old – People's Rep. of China

7th Edition

This album presents the seventh edition of UNESCO's *Youth Eyes on the Silk Roads* international photo contest. Organized by the UNESCO Silk Roads Programme, with the support of the *Beijing International Peace Culture Foundation,* this annual initiative brings together young photographers from across the globe to document the cultural heritage and diversity that continue to thrive along these historic routes.

The term "Silk Roads" refers to the vast network of historical trade routes linking East, South, and Southeast Asia with Central Asia, the Russian Steppes, the Indian Subcontinent, the Iranian and Anatolian Plateaus, and the Arabian Peninsula. These routes also extended into North and Northeast Africa and Europe, eventually reaching Western Europe and the Iberian Peninsula. Over centuries, they served as pathways for trade and vital corridors for cultural exchange, the circulation of knowledge, and the meeting of diverse traditions and practices. This intercultural dialogue has significantly shaped contemporary societies, enriched identities, and fostered mutual understanding among cultures.

In this seventh edition, held under the theme *Women, Guardians of Silk Roads Heritage,* young photographers have turned their lenses toward the women who carry and transmit the cultural heritage of the Silk Roads. Their images speak to the wisdom, inspiration, and legacy that these women embody across communities and generations.

The ***Youth Lens on the Silk Roads*** album presents 74 photographs across two age categories, 14 to 17 and 18 to 25 years old, offering an intimate and powerful portrait of the women who keep culture alive. Together, these images remind us that, alongside monuments and archives, cultural heritage also lives through the hands, voices, and daily lives of the women who continue to safeguard and transmit it across generations.

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