

Beyond the Silk Roads

Small-scale traders play a crucial role in forging Asian connectivity, forming networks and informal institutions separate from those driven by nation states, such as China's Belt and Road Initiative. This ambitious study provides a unique insight into the lives of the mobile traders from Afghanistan who traverse Eurasia. Reflecting on over a decade of intensive ethnographic fieldwork, Magnus Marsden introduces readers to a dynamic yet historically durable universe of commercial and cultural connections. Through an exploration of the traders' networks, cultural and religious identities, as well as the nodes in which they operate, Marsden emphasises their ability to navigate Eurasia's geopolitical tensions and to forge transregional routes that channel significant flows of people, resources and ideas. *Beyond the Silk Roads* will interest those seeking to understand contemporary iterations of the Silk Road within the context of geopolitics in the region. This title is also available as Open Access.

Magnus Marsden is Professor of Social Anthropology and Director of the Sussex Asia Centre in the School of Global Studies at the University of Sussex. He is the author of the prize-winning *Living Islam: Muslim Religious Experience in Pakistan's North-West Frontier* (2005), *Fragments of the Afghan Frontier* (with B. D. Hopkins, 2012) and *Trading Worlds* (2016).

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Beyond the Silk Roads

Trade, Mobility and Geopolitics across Eurasia

Magnus Marsden

University of Sussex



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For nur-e chashmam Robin jan!

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Acknowledgements

The research grant out of which this book arose spanned the years between 2015 and 2020: Donald Trump's election year marking one end of the period, and the UK's exit from the European Union the other. It will come as no surprise that a key theme of this study is the ways in which the mobile traders upon whom it focuses engage with geopolitical processes. These traders – most of whom identify themselves as being from Afghanistan – offer unique insights into the nature of such processes because of their experiences of the ongoing attempts of empires and nation states to project power and influence on the part of the world they call home.

In an earlier book, *Trading Worlds: Afghan Merchants across Modern Frontiers*, I explored the life histories of mobile Afghan traders living and working in Central Asia. *Trading Worlds* documented the nature of mobile Afghans' livelihood strategies and everyday lives, especially in Tajikistan, and theorised these in relation to the anthropology of ethics and morality and to debates about the form taken by national identity formations in fragile states. By turning its attention to Afghan traders active in China, as well as documenting their connections to traders in the former Soviet Union (especially Russia and Ukraine) and West Asia (notably Turkey and Saudi Arabia), this book expands the geographical scope of *Trading Worlds*. More significantly, *Beyond the Silk Roads* shifts its thematic focus away from the traders' individual life histories and social relationships and towards the structure and dynamics of the networks and nodes that are critical for their collective activities.

This book would not have been possible without the support of grant number 669 132 'TRODITIES: Yiwu Trust, Global Traders and Commodities in a Chinese International City' awarded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. I also acknowledge the support of the British Academy for making research visits to China in 2016 possible.

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Some sections of the chapters have been previously published elsewhere, though they are reanalysed and framed here in relation to this book's overarching themes. The final section of the ethnographic material presented in Chapter 5 was initially published in the *Journal of History and Anthropology* as 'Islamic cosmopolitanism out of Muslim Asia: Hindu-Muslim business co-operation between Odessa and Yiwu' (29(1): 121–39). Chapter 4 includes a revised and reframed version of ethnographic material initially published by myself and Diana Ibañez-Tirado.¹ Ethnographic material discussed in one section of Chapter 6 was initially published by the *Journal of Global Networks* in the form of an article in *Global Networks*.²

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¹ Marsden and Ibañez Tirado 2018. ² Marsden 2020a.

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As the following pages will make amply clear, the fieldwork on which this book is based was not always plain sailing: its more difficult aspects, however, were frequently punctuated by the warmth and generosity of traders from Afghanistan, many of whom I am now honoured to think of as friends. I regret for reasons of confidentiality that I am unable to name any of them here.

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progressed and eventually concluded. I wish him all the best in the years to come and am honoured to dedicate this book to him and to him alone.

I have used pseudonyms for all people in this book, as well as for easily identifiable locations and businesses. Any mistakes remaining in the book are my own, and I take responsibility for them.

Glossary

Unless otherwise stated, the glossary comprises key words and phrases used in the standard form of Persian/Farsi spoken in Afghanistan that has been referred to officially in the country as ‘Dari’ since 1958.³

<i>amanat kardan</i>	to entrust
<i>andiwāl-e sahi</i>	real friend
<i>anjoman</i>	association
<i>ashak</i>	pasta dumpling filled with <i>gandana</i>
<i>ashna</i>	acquaintance
<i>ashpaz</i>	chef
<i>ay khanum</i>	sheets of dough interspersed with mincemeat
<i>badmash</i>	criminals; thugs
<i>ba-farhang</i>	cultured
<i>ba-sawad</i>	educated
<i>bay’ al wafa</i>	selling on faithfulness (Arabic)
<i>bewatan</i>	stateless
<i>beinsaf</i>	unjust
<i>bekar</i>	without work
<i>billa aywaz</i>	without replacement
<i>boja</i>	relationship between men married to sisters
<i>brinj</i>	rice
<i>buhran</i>	crisis
<i>chainaki</i>	lamb and chickpea stew slowly cooked in metal teapots
<i>chaykhana</i>	teahouse
<i>chai-ye sabz</i>	green tea
<i>dast-e khali</i>	empty handed
<i>deg</i>	cooking pot

³ See Beeman 2010.

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<i>deg kardan</i>	to cook
<i>dil tang</i>	depressed
<i>dindar</i>	religious
<i>duq</i>	bored
<i>dost-e waqiyee</i>	true friend
<i>dukandar</i>	shopkeeper
<i>dosti; rafaqat</i>	friendship
<i>ehtimad</i>	trust
<i>ehtibar</i>	trustable
<i>ishleki</i>	a dish popular amongst Turkmen in Afghanistan comprising minced meat and onions in a pastry crust
<i>fesad-e idara</i>	institutional corruption
<i>gandana</i>	Afghan leek/Chinese chives
<i>gap</i>	discussion
<i>gashtak</i>	discussion (Uzbek/Turkestanian)
<i>ghalmaghal</i>	raucous
<i>ghulam</i>	slaves
<i>giraw</i>	surety, mostly made in the form of a jointly agreed upon temporary ownership of a property
<i>gruh</i>	group
<i>gudam/anbar</i>	warehouse
<i>gumruk</i>	customs
<i>hafiz-e qur'an</i>	a person who has committed the entire Qur'an to memory
<i>haji khana</i>	lodgings used by pilgrims on the hajj
<i>hawala</i>	money transfer
<i>hawaladar</i>	unofficial currency dealers
<i>ikhtitaf kardan</i>	to kidnap
<i>kaala pacha</i>	a stew comprising cow feet and head
<i>kafala</i>	system used in Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Gulf legally linking a migrants' work visa to a particular job and a particular citizen-sponsor/corporate entity (Arabic)
<i>kafeel</i>	sponsor (Arabic)
<i>kaka</i>	father's brother
<i>kalanha</i>	elders
<i>karai shinwari</i>	lamb, tomato and chilli cooked in a <i>karai</i>
<i>kar-e janjal</i>	problematic/difficult work
<i>karmandha-ye dawlat</i>	state officials

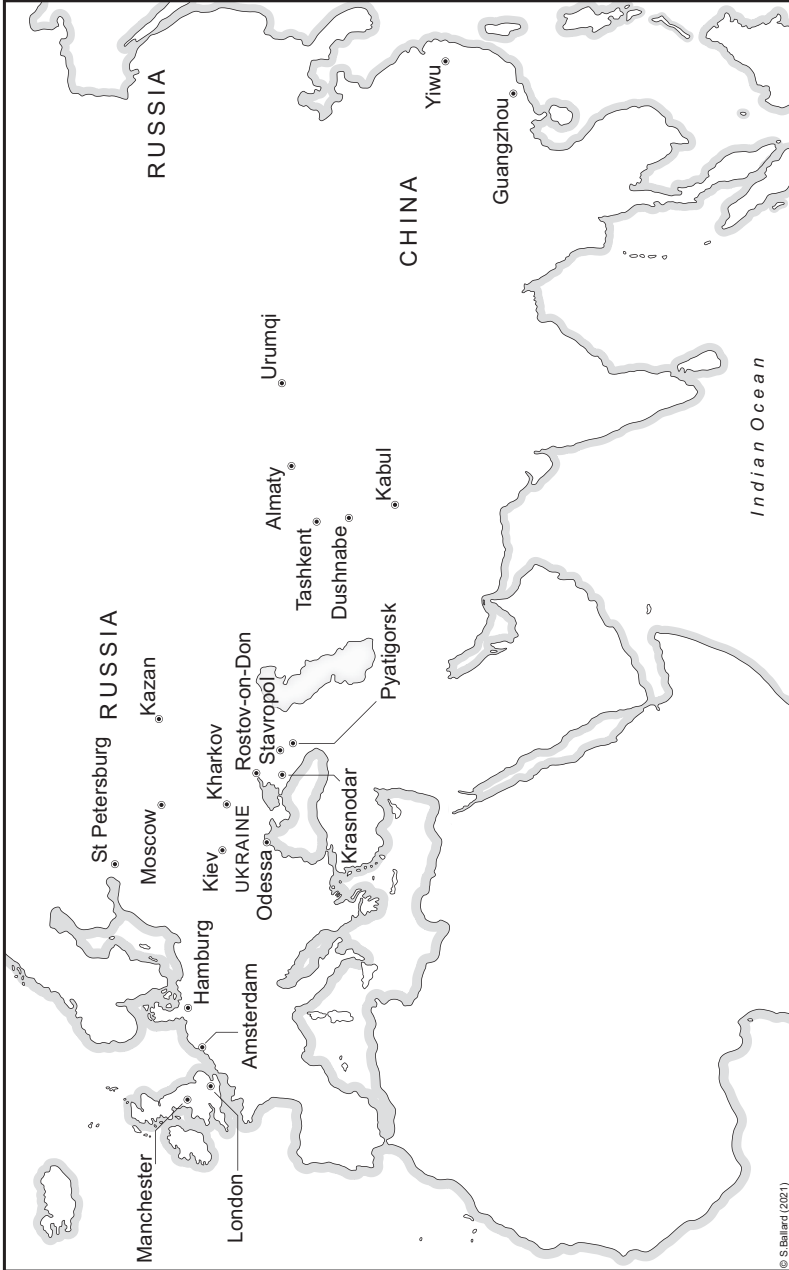
<i>keraye</i>	rental
<i>khairat</i>	sacrificial feast of remembrance
<i>khakh</i>	soil
<i>khamirbab</i>	dough used in the preparation of pasta dishes
<i>kharab</i>	bad
<i>khatum-e qur'an</i>	recitation of the entire Qur'an by memory
<i>khud khwah</i>	egoist/selfish
<i>khush tab</i>	humorous
<i>khov</i>	asleep
<i>kuch kardan</i>	to migrate
<i>lutf</i>	a favour
<i>malia</i>	tax
<i>mama</i>	mother's brother
<i>mantu</i>	pasta dumplings stuffed with meat
<i>markaz</i>	centre
<i>mazhabi</i>	religious
<i>mehman nawazi/dosti</i>	hospitality
<i>mehnat</i>	hard work
<i>mobariza-ye motadawoom</i>	sustained struggle
<i>modarn</i>	modern
<i>motamadin</i>	sophisticated
<i>muhajir</i>	refugee
<i>mui safed</i>	elders
<i>musafir khana</i>	lodgings for travellers
<i>nasabnama</i>	genealogies
<i>nanwai</i>	bakery
<i>nur-e chashmam</i>	light of my eye
<i>paisa-e nurkh</i>	cash
<i>pul-e peshaki</i>	an advance fee
<i>pul-e siah</i>	black/illegal money
<i>puldar</i>	rich/wealthy
<i>qabala</i>	land registration documents
<i>qachaqbar</i>	smugglers
<i>qaradadiha</i>	contractors
<i>qarz</i>	loan/debt/good provided on credit
<i>qarzdar</i>	debtor
<i>qorma</i>	stew
<i>raan</i>	mortgage (Arabic)
<i>rahbaran</i>	leaders
<i>riba</i>	interest (Arabic)
<i>rishwat</i>	bribes

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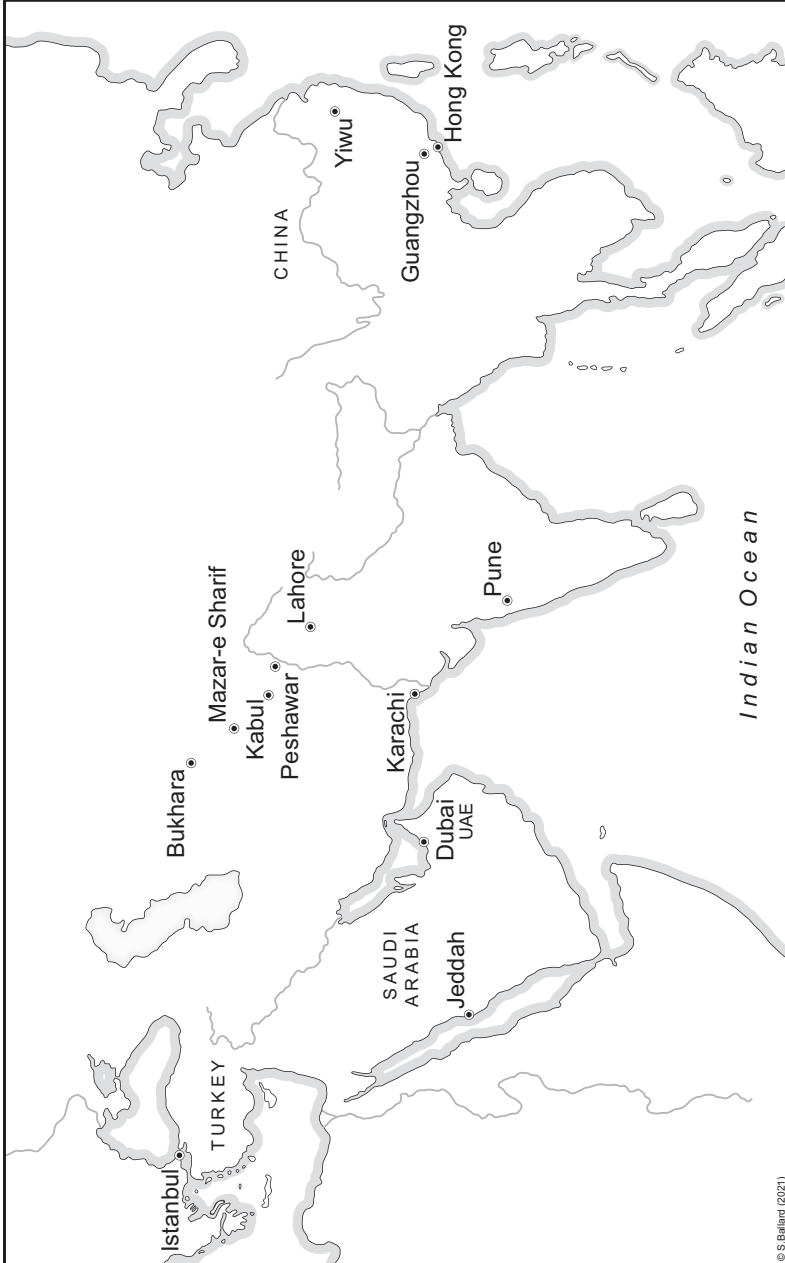
<i>rowarbit</i>	relationships (Arabic)
<i>rughan-e kunjit</i>	sesame oil
<i>ruz-e shahadat</i>	day of martyrdom
<i>sadiq</i>	honest and true
<i>sambusa</i>	baked mincemeat pies
<i>saraf</i>	money exchange agent
<i>sar qulfi</i>	long-term lease arrangement
<i>sazman</i>	organisation
<i>sheer yakh</i>	hand-made Afghan ice cream
<i>shorba</i>	soup
<i>sharakat</i>	partnership
<i>shirkat-e transporti</i>	transport companies
<i>shirkat-e tijorati</i>	company offering services related to trade
<i>shirin buya</i>	liquorice
<i>sofra/daastarkhan</i>	cloth around which diners sit on the floor when eating
<i>sud</i>	interest
<i>sunmati</i>	traditional
<i>talukat</i>	relationships
<i>ta'arof</i>	ritualised display/performance of politeness
<i>tajir</i>	trader/merchant
<i>tanbal</i>	lazy
<i>tandur</i>	clay oven
<i>taqiya khana</i>	Sufi lodge
<i>taqwa</i>	piety
<i>tarbiya</i>	upbringing
<i>tazkira</i>	national identity card
<i>tekke</i>	Sufi lodge (Turkish)
<i>turk-tabar</i>	Turkic
<i>urf-o adat-e afghanha</i>	Afghan culture and traditions
<i>ushr</i>	land tax based on shari'a law
<i>ustad</i>	a master
<i>waqf</i>	charitable foundation (Arabic)
<i>wasita</i>	connections
<i>zakat</i>	alms that Muslims are religiously obliged to give
<i>zer-e nazar</i>	under the gaze



Map 1 The main centres of significance for Afghanistan's Central Asian emigres



Map 2 The main commercial centres of the 'Eurasian corridor'



Map 3 The main commercial centres of the 'West Asian corridor'