



EDITORIAL

Silk Road: A Journal of Eurasian Development – Prospectus and Purpose

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This editorial explains the beginnings of the journal *Silk Road* commencing around the time of the 2019 Tashkent agreement and the journal's future scope and ambitions. As nations within Central Asia look towards greater cooperation the editors articulate the journal's focus on public policy issues and how *Silk Road* intends to offer a long-held need for scholarly perspectives and analysis from within the region itself. It explains how the journal's name links to the past of the region, to evoke its 'inclusive' connotations as a space of exchange, travel and 'ambiguity' but also is 'intended to evoke a dynamic forward look towards the future'. Embodying a broad and interdisciplinary focus in its scope, it is hoped that the journal's name also paves the way to its long term mission of encouraging 'creativity among researchers working' on policy in the region and to 'prompt them both to analyse current public policy and to imagine its future'.

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Introducing *Silk Road: A Journal of Eurasian Development*

Silk Road (silkroadjournal.online) was founded to act as a forum to debate the various public policy issues in the Eurasian region it seeks to serve. It is consciously multi-disciplinary and empirical in its approach. The journal provides a scholarly platform to provide an inside-out perspective of the region that once brought 'enlightenment' to the world as shapers of science and culture (Starr 2020). Remarkable figures such as Abu Rayhan Beruni, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Alisher Nava'i, Al-Khwarizmi and Ulugh Beg achieved breakthroughs in fields ranging from mathematics to medicine. This journal seeks to be similarly broad-ranging. This is not least because the intersecting nature of so many policy issues determines such breadth of approach. Particular articles by subject specialists, whether economists, geographers, social scientists, or environmental scientists are all encouraged.

The aim of the journal is to further the conversation among all these groups on policy issues of significance regionally. Accordingly, *Silk Road's* prime goal is to provide a platform

for scholarly research into contemporary developments and challenges in the region, research that will cast light on the nature of these issues and how best to tackle them. The intention is that it will provide an arena in which those interested in the region – experienced researchers and practitioners as well as young scholars – can come together to discuss current and emerging trends and factors across a range of policy areas and review possible impactful responses. Above all, it is designed to serve as a means through which scholars and policymakers from the region itself can engage with and address its needs, interests and concerns. Although international scholars are certainly encouraged to contribute to the conversations about the region and its future direction that *Silk Road* intends to host, it is with a view to nurturing research within the region itself that the journal was established in Tashkent.

The journal was inaugurated in 2019, shortly before the Tashkent agreement signed on 29 November 2019 by five of the countries in the region aiming at the ‘development of cooperation in the areas of trade, economy, investments, transport and transit, agriculture, industrial cooperation, protection of environment, energy, water resources, tourism, science and culture’ (United Nations 2019; Starr 2019). By that time nearly thirty years had passed since the establishment of a swathe of newly independent republics in Central Asia, including all five signatories to this agreement. In the interim, the various states of the region took different paths to asserting their new identities and establishing new structures, managing internal ethnic minorities, adjusting their economies to post-Soviet frameworks and new trading relations, and tackling a diverse range of issues – from public health to environmental degradation to globalisation – within their territories. Yet a reduction in trade barriers and promotion of connectivity across a landlocked region, such as now might at last be emerging, has long been advocated.¹

Policy and Process – A Eurasian Conversation in the Making

This makes the launch of this new journal timely. The Tashkent agreement is just one aspect of a new buzz about the region and its potentialities that this journal aims to serve. At the same time, the range of issues its signatories have identified as both prospects and concerns are of relevance across the region, not just simply in the five countries involved. In the process this list helps to signal the kind of public policy subjects that we hope *Silk Road* will tackle. Indeed, we would add more to the list, such as educational development, which is the subject of a number of the articles already submitted to or published by the journal. Initiatives such as modernisation of government structures and service delivery, as recently instigated in Uzbekistan, are also very much the substance of the kind of issues *Silk Road* aims to cover. So are evidence-based policy issues and, in the light of the biggest public policy challenge to hit this or any region in the world in recent years, healthcare and all the other policy ramifications of COVID-19.

The University of Westminster Press is proud and delighted to be involved in this new journal and to support its aspiration to increase scholarly productivity and disseminate scholarship in Central Asia and beyond. Launched in 2015 as a new, digital-first, open-access publisher of peer-reviewed books, policy briefs and journals, UWP exists to provide global public access to cutting-edge academic insights. One of its aims is to offer a focus on providing transnational perspectives on public policy issues. *Silk Road*, hosted by UWP and managed by Westminster International University in Tashkent, very much speaks to this agenda and is accordingly free-of-charge to its readers. The journal is one of the first English language journals editorially

¹ See for instance: Asian Development Bank, 2006.

based in Uzbekistan. It intends to serve readers both interested in and actually located in the region, particularly the new generation of emerging scholars in Central Asia and the broader Silk Road region. The journal accordingly will apply to be indexed in SCOPUS.

All research articles will undergo rigorous peer-review, based on initial editor screening and anonymous double-blind refereeing by two (editorial board) referees. *Silk Road's* foundation builds upon the successful partnership the University of Westminster has forged in the region with Westminster International University in Tashkent since 2002. This helps to explain why some of the early articles appearing in the journal examine the growth and impact of transnational education. Nonetheless, *Silk Road*, is designed to tackle a much wider range of subject matter. The aspiration is that *Silk Road* becomes a key vehicle for raising, analysing and debating public policy issues within the region. Hopefully, this also will lead in time to the publication of related policy briefs and books that will similarly aim to contribute to positive developments in public policy.

It is important that there is a forum in which these policy issues and their implications for the region can be debated from the point of the view of the region itself. Nonetheless, as the very name *Silk Road* implies, the region cannot be seen in isolation from its geopolitical location. The name has been chosen, not just to reference this historic setting as a region seen (often by outsiders) as a place of transit, shaped by forces emanating from elsewhere. All too often, in light of China's One Belt, One Road initiative, the region is still seen in similar terms. Yet it is also important to reference a sense of direction for the region itself, with the implied question of which directions policymakers within it will take, in respect to policy matters. Such decisions are never simple tasks. Policymaking involves weighing various often complex variables, assessing consequences and making choices. *Silk Road* intends very much to speak to and inform these processes. At the moment the region tends to be a net importer when it comes to such discussions. Growing capacity within the region to address public policy is itself a public good. It is hoped that *Silk Road* will not only nurture this, but also help to develop a sense of how countries in the region can learn from each other in shaping policy solutions. *Silk Road* is thus about looking at and learning from policy innovation in the region, as well as analysing the nature of policy issues.

All of the foregoing raises the question of what geophysical reality is raised by the notion of a region to which this journal is addressed. To speak of a 'Silk Road' region is, to invoke an imagined, culturally inflected geography rooted in the historical past rather than one necessarily reflective of current realities or future aspirations. This past provides some integrative images and symbols that overlap with but are not entirely coterminous with others. These include cultural, linguistic, religious and geopolitical frameworks which map onto each other unevenly across the region we are broadly trying to describe. To delineate the region we seek to address as the 'Silk Road' region purposely places it outside these frameworks and invests it with a deliberate and, we hope, inclusive ambiguity.

This region sits somewhere within Eurasia, but with somewhat shadowy and flexible boundaries. This seems befitting for a region located solely by an ascription – *Silk Road* – that evokes travel, exchange, interchange and connections. This imprecision is entirely intentional in the case of this journal. We do not propose clearly to delimit the ambit of the region that it notionally addresses. Instead, the 'Silk Road' region is an imagined space with a core in Central Asia, but connections beyond. It is an appellation that links the region to the past, but is also intended to evoke a dynamic forward look towards the future. Public policy has many qualities and one that is often unduly overlooked is creativity. *Silk Road* seeks to encourage such creativity among researchers working in this region and to prompt them both to analyse current public policy and to imagine its future. Beyond COVID-19 there are many

challenges and opportunities. Some of these are invoked by the Tashkent agreement text. Others, ranging from the impact of nanotechnologies and AI to human trafficking, are among the policy issues that we hope will elicit thoughtful and thought-provoking contributions to this journal. *Silk Road* is not here to try to set an agenda, but to start a conversation on public policy in the region. We look forward to receiving informative articles addressing these and other matters which will do exactly that.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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