

The Marginocentric Cultural Features of Cities along the Great Silk Road in the territory of Kazakhstan

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Ainura Kurmanaliyeva, Nurlykhan Aljanova, and Mira Manassova,
"The Marginocentric Cultural Features of Cities
along the Great Silk Road in the territory of Kazakhstan"
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Abstract: In their paper "The Marginocentric Cultural Features of Cities along the Great Silk Road in the territory of Kazakhstan," Ainura Kurmanaliyeva, Nurlykhan Aljanova and Mira Manassova discuss the cultural features of the Great Silk Road as a marginocentric dialogic location. Among the ancient cities in the territory of Kazakhstan, the paper focuses on the city of Otrar. The city dated from the Persian Empire, when it was known as Fārāb, meaning irrigated lands. Otrar was the birth-place of philosopher and scientist Al Farabi, also known as the 'second teacher' after Aristotle, an important influence on Avicenna and Maimonides. Al Farabi's works can be said to tend a bridge between Eastern and Western philosophical and political systems, connecting also a wide range of disciplines. The last part of the paper discusses the project "Revival of the Great Silk Road" which provides an opportunity for Kazakhstan to implement the advantages of its geographical position, aiming at the modernization of existing cultural sites along the Silk Road, rediscovered as intercultural locations, as well as supporting the creation of jobs and the improvement of living standards in local areas.

Ainura KURMANALIYEVA, Nurlykhan ALJANOVA and Mira MANASSOVA**The Marginocentric Cultural Features of Cities along the Great Silk Road in the territory of Kazakhstan**

This paper contributes to the goals of the One Asia Community by pointing out the historical features of The Great Silk Road as a transcontinental bridge between Europe and Asia for many centuries. The Great Silk Road connected peoples, communities and cultures from the Mediterranean Sea to the Pacific Ocean, linking territories as well as artistic and spiritual cultures for the first time in the history of mankind. It facilitated the exchange of material assets and trade, as well as the development of crafts, the establishment of new settlements, and the interaction of entire cultural systems. Today, the area continues to play an important role in various industries and communication.

The Great Silk Road strongly influenced the territories through which it passed. In the case of this paper, the development of the Republic of Kazakhstan has particular features that can be traced back to those ancient commercial routes and ways of life. The cities along the route retain their status as monuments of ancient civilizations, bearing an important historical and cultural weight, significant for the genetic memory of the Kazakh people. The area that today occupies the Republic of Kazakhstan was both the scene of constant struggles for the possession of territories, and a point of contact between very diverse communities. In particular, this paper will explore the city of Fārāb, also known as Otrar, birthplace of Abu Nasr Muhammad Al-Farabi, one the earliest Islamic intellectuals who contributed to the inter-cultural dialogue of East and West with the transmission of Greek doctrines of Plato and Aristotle to the Muslim world.

It would be unfair to reduce the importance of the Great Silk Road in the history of world civilization solely to the silk trade, when its impact was much wider and varied. Trade caravans and diplomatic embassies travelled along the Road, carrying not just Eastern and Western goods, but also cultural and spiritual values. Temples and houses of worship are among the first monuments that contemporary travellers can still find in sites such as Kashgar, Taraz, or Samarkand when they visit today (Nasyrov, *Po togovym putyam* 55).

The Silk Road not only makes available a variety of ancient sites and cities for today's visitors. Throughout several historical periods, it facilitated contacts between different peoples, and allowed these cultures to penetrate each other. The Silk Road also served as an inexhaustible channel for various kinds of innovations, enabling a great number of achievements in terms of material cultural and spiritual heritage. Indeed, the Silk Road is the historical proof of more than 2000-years of contacts between the East and the West. It also testifies to the possibility of creating of world house of culture as well as a commitment to tolerance and cultural diversity.

The first exchanges along the Great Silk Road date from the second half of the 2nd century BCE, as evidenced in Chinese and Greco-Roman sources. However, cultural, spiritual, political and economic ties had already started in the Neolithic period and in the early agricultural civilizations of the Bronze Age. The Silk Road emerged as a system of caravan routes of various lengths. Caravans were able to travel an average of 23-26 km every day (Baipakov 135; *Srednevekove goroda na Velikom shelkovom puti* 135). The intercontinental route was ten thousand kilometres long, the continental

several thousand, and the local routes only a few kilometres long. There were also smaller paths, mountain trails, hunting grounds and farming pastures. These routes maintained at times a busy transit, serving as an essential strategic road, strengthened by powerful fortifications in a number of nodal points.

Contacts along the Great Silk Road gave rise to unique towns and city-states, comprising important architectural pieces and monuments, and functioning as stop-over locations for the travelling caravan groups. The internal structure of these cities clearly reflects the traditional socio-economic system of the settlements and historic centres, promoted along the network of routes. Their layout offers clues to the functions and purpose of the ancient buildings located within the urban centres, whose features were shared across distinct civilizations, from Europe to China, and from the Maghreb to the Indian subcontinent (Nasyrov 55). These sites also provide evidence of the multivalent structures of human communication and knowledge transfer across time and space.

In the Republic of Kazakhstan, great efforts are invested in the restoration and protection of these sites. These efforts are also the result of cooperation among other countries in the region, with the support of the world community, as acknowledged by the president of the republic N. Nazarbayev in his message to the nation "Kazakhstan-2030" (see <<http://prokuror.gov.kz/eng/state/acts-president/strategy-kazakhstan-2030>>). The restoration of the Great Silk Road and its ancient landmarks serves Kazakhstan to rehabilitate its identity prior to the years of Soviet rule. It also helps to familiarize the contemporary local population, as well as other communities in Asia and the world, with the original life style of Kazakh nomadic civilizations and the origins of architectural sites and cities. Thus, the restoration of these sites carries information about the cultures of the original Turkic tribes that inhabited the territory, ensuring the continuity of Kazakh heritage and its important contribution to the world's heritage as well.

Cities, like people, have their past and present. Not knowing their past, it is difficult to understand their current state and future development. For this reason, it is important to bring to public awareness the cultural characteristics of great number of ancient and medieval cities on the territory of Kazakhstan, as this can contribute to give an idea of Kazakh culture today, a friendly society whose territory has served as point of encounter of many ancient peoples.

Many ancient and medieval cities of Kazakhstan disappeared from the earth as a result of wars or natural disasters. Those that remained, preserved the foundations of their economic activity, special political and legal status and topographic signs, some of which can be traced back to this day and interpreted under cross-cultural lens. Indeed, the territory of Kazakhstan in Central Asia was crossed by many of the various caravan routes and paths that formed part of the network of the Great Silk Road. Interaction among cultures took the form of large-scale trading operations, diplomatic agreements and military alliances, but also of cultural exchanges which included two important ground-breaking events: the spread of alphabetic writing and almost alongside it, the expansion the world monotheist religions which emerged from the biblical texts, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Although the impact of settled civilizations and urban landscapes was decisive, the role of non-sedentary cultures and nomadic societies cannot be underestimated. In general, nomads, among them

especially the Turkic tribes, Indo-Iranian (or proto-Indo-Europeans), and the Arabs, developed many products, techniques and ideas still used in everyday life by the global community. Scholars such as Lev Gumilev have indicated the importance of the achievements of Turks and Mongols and their cultural legacy. For example, "male clothes, especially trousers and pants, were invented by ancient nomads. The zip first appeared between 200 and 400 years ago in Central Asia. The first two-wheeled wooden cart evolved from the original older larger cart and, later, became the tent which allowed nomads to travel through forests and mountains" (Gumilev 39). Similarly, Karl Baipakov has pointed out the relation between ancient nomad communities and the early forms of urbanism that emerged along the Great Silk Road in the 6th century. Indeed, the development of the Kazakhstani sections of the Silk Road took, at this time, two main directions: Syrdarya and Tian Shan.

The first route, Syrdarya, began in China and moved through Eastern Turkestan (Kashgar), the Zhetisu (Seven Rivers), and along the banks of the Syrdarya (called first the Jaxartes, and later the Seyhun) into the Aral Sea region, from where it led to the Middle East and Byzantium. The Syrdarya River served here as the main link between East and West, and major trading centres were Zhetisu and various cities in today's southern Kazakhstan. The Tian Shan route determined the movement from East Turkestan through the Zhetisu (Seven Rivers) along the foothills of the Jungar, Ile Alatau, Kyrgyz, and the Talas Ridge to Tashkent, and then through Samarkand, Bukhara, Merv, Asia Minor and Byzantium. In these areas, there were cities such as Taraz, Kulan, Aspara, Almatu, Talhir, Kayalyk, Usbaniket, Otrar, Turkestan, Sauran, Syganak, Yangikent, Saraishyk, Suyab Balasagun, Gazgird, Navaket and Shavgar. In different historical periods, depending on the political situation, the route shifted its direction from the Syrdarya to Tian Shan, and sometimes in the reverse (Baipakov, *Srednevekovaya gorodskaya kul'tura Yuzhnogo Kazakhstana i Semirechiya VI – nachalo XIIv*, 5).

Karl Baipakov highlights three major areas of urban culture in the territory: South Kazakhstan, South-Western Zhetisu (Talas and Chu valleys) and the North-Eastern Zhetisu (Ile valley). Each of these areas had a peculiar and rich urban culture. Important results of the research work performed on these sites has involved the localization, identification and chronology of almost all the ancient settlements in South Kazakhstan and Zhetisu. Baipakov points out that this may have been facilitated by the fact that many cities have maintained their names until the early modern period. These cities are clearly linked to the trade routes along The Great Silk Road Baipakov, *Srednevekovaya gorodskaya kul'tura Yuzhnogo Kazakhstana i Semirechiya VI – nachalo XIIv*, 38. For instance, the Kaunchin, Otrar-Karatau and Zhetisu cultures on the Syrdarya River bank in south Kazakhstan date from the last century BCE, with many more urban centres emerging in the Middle Ages. Excavations and written evidence suggest that there were highly developed settled agricultural traditions in the Southern Kazakhstan. In addition, the dissemination of the Sogdia culture may have occurred as a result of their settlement on the Silk Road along the Syrdarya, as evidenced by the names of Sogdian cities such as Farab and Shavgar. Sogdian standards did not overshadow the previous local traditions, being included alongside as component of what now could be interpreted as South Kazakhstan urban culture.

Many cities along The Great Silk Road became prominent cultural centres. One of such was the city of Fārāb, also known as Otrar. Fārāb was the Persian name of a city irrigated by the river under this name, birthplace of the great philosopher and scientist Abu Nasr ibn Mohammed, also known as Al Farabi. Later known as Otrar, the city was a major trading centre on the Silk Road, a spiritual cradle that hosted the largest library in world history. This ancient settlement was one of the biggest and most developed cities in the territory of Kazakhstan between the eleventh and seventeenth centuries. The city was an oasis located in present Otrar district of South-Kazakhstan region, ten km to the West of Imur railway station and the present village of Talapty, and fifty-seven km to the south of the city of Turkestan, not far from influx of the river of Arys into Syr Daria river. Other cities such as Kuiruktoba, Kok-Mardan, Altyntobe and Mardan-Kuik also adjoined this oasis territory (Baipakov, *Drevnie goroda Kazakstana*, 184).

The first city settlement in the place of Otrar dates back to the second century BCE. The kangju people are considered to be the founders of the city. In ancient Turkic runes (sixth-eighth centuries), the city is mentioned as Kangu-Taraban. In 737-748 Kangu-Taraban was conquered by the Arabs and remained under Arab control, becoming a centre of culture and science in Central Asia. Famous scientists lived there, and among them, Abu Nasr Al-Farabi mathematician, and philosopher, known as the "Second teacher" after Aristotle was born in Otrar.

In the period of the Kara-Khanid governance, in ninth-thirteenth centuries, the city reached the highest level of development (Kochev 44). Like other medieval cities, it consisted of a citadel, located in the centre of the hill in the shape of a triangle, and a shakristan which occupied a pentagonal hill of twenty hectares and eighteen meters, surrounded by a wall. Excavations have concluded that the city developed a municipal culture.

In the Middle Ages, Otrar was a commercial and religious capital that attracted a lot of attention with its enviable position at the crossroads of ancient caravan routes along the Silk Road in Central Asia. The city is mentioned in the travel accounts of almost all Arab and Persian authors who visited the region. As many as a quarter of a million people lived in the city during this period. In the ninth-twelfth centuries some buildings were built, including a large madrasah (school), a market, a gurt khan (where wine was drunk), a mosque, shops, bath houses and nine ceramic and jewel workshops. Charred wood boards with carved images of stories related to the life of citizens, all dating back to the 9th century, were also found on the palace floor (Baipakov, *Drevnie goroda Kazakstana*, 223). Rich collections of glassware – pieces of water-bottles, cups, wineglasses, flacons were found, and also jewelry including beads made of andradite and carnelian, glass, rings, and bronze bracelets. A treasure containing jewelry, bracelets, rings and silver coins was found in 1974 (Baipakov, *Drevnie goroda Kazakstana*, 281).

In 1219 the city was beset by the Mongol army under the leadership of Jochi, eldest son of Genghis Khan. City-dwellers under the auspices of Kair-Khan defended the city during seven months until the gates were opened and the city was destroyed. By the middle of the thirteenth century Otrar became a big trade centre again, reconstructed during Timur reign, until his death in 1405.

The first explorations of Otrar were conducted by members of Turkestan section of amateur archeologists Alexander Klare and Andrey Cherkassov in 1904. They excavated a range of trench in the hope of finding the remains of palaces and monuments. They were disappointed because they only found pieces of ceramics and glass. Further explorations were continued at the end of 1940s under the auspices of professor Alexander Bernshtam. The Otrar archeological expedition was organized in 1969. In 1971 it was renamed as Southern Kazakhstan archeological expedition of KazSSR. The main object of their exploration was Otrar-tobe.

Since 1991, Karl Baipakov has continued to lead the excavations in Otrar. The new project under the auspices of UNESCO, Kazakhstan and Japan Target Fund "Conservation and preservation of the ancient city of Otrar" started in 2001. The key goals of the project are the recollection of a knowledge base of documents and the adoption of conservation measures. Implementation of the project has also allowed the restoration of the Friday Mosque from the sixteenth century, a city block from the 16th century, a building dating from the eleventh-twelfth centuries, walls, and gates such as "Darvaza-i sufi," as well as a bath-house from the fourteenth century (<http://www.unesco.kz/otrar/otrar_house>).

The cultural importance of Otrar is also manifested in the legacy of Abu Nasr Muhammad Al-Farabi, one the earliest Islamic intellectuals who was instrumental in translating and transmitting the Greek doctrines of Plato and Aristotle to the Muslim world. Al-Farabi also had a considerable influence on later Islamic philosophers such as Avicenna. Al-Farabi earned the nickname "Mallim-e-Sani," translated as "second master" or "second teacher." Al-Farabi contributed considerably to science, philosophy, logic, sociology, medicine, mathematics and music, but his major contribution occurred in the sphere of philosophy, logic and sociology, for which he stands out as an encyclopaedist. With regards to the cosmopolitan role of Otrar and of Al-Farabi's legacy, the author left a beautiful testimony of intercultural communication and cultural interaction when he wrote the following lines:

"We have an opportunity to liaise with all peoples whose physical properties, food and lifestyle are normal... In our day the Arab state covers all civilized countries, except those countries that can be considered purely Greek or Roman, as well as those countries located in the neighbourhood of the latter. These nations are our neighbours, and we can study their customs and habits. Many Greeks and Rumi (the Byzantines) emigrate and settle in the Arab state and tell us about their countries" (Al-Farabi, *Traktaty o muzyke i poezii*, 159).

In the same vein, we can interpret the socially significant differences as a means of attaining the truth of the residents of the city, in Al-Farabi's "*Treatise on the views of the residents of the virtuous city*." The aphoristic nature of Al-Farabi's work, his capacity of synthesis and rationality, permeated with the light of spirituality are distinctive features of his works. His thoughts have left a significant trace in the history of world philosophy, demonstrating that historical experience is a synthesis of ideas from the different cultures and civilizations. Thus, Al-Farabi's philosophy represents the historical prototype of the modern intercultural dialogue, a model historically performed in the ancient contact between Eastern and Western cultures. "We have the opportunity," he wrote, "to keep in touch with all nations whose physical properties, food and lifestyle are quite normal... Today, the

Arab state covers all civilized countries, except those that can be considered purely Greek or Roman, as well as those countries that are in the neighborhood with the latter. However, these nations are our neighbors, and we can learn their customs and habits. Many Greeks and Rumi [Byzantines] emigrate and settle in the Arab state and tell us a lot about their countries" (Al-Farabi, *Traktaty o muzyke i poezii*, 123). The evidence that Al-Farabi's contribution has implemented a specific type of philosophical communication and dialogue is present in his appellatives as "the Second Teacher" or "Aristotle's commentator." Al-Farabi considers dialogue not only as the art of understanding truth, but as a method to locate it, a position very close to that of ancient Greek philosophy. However, unlike the godless universe of the Greeks, to Al-Farabi the nature of dialogue is inspired by God's love and mercy; an inspiration that directs humanity to the heights of perfection (Nysanbaev, *Globalizatsiya i problem mezhkul'turnogo dialoga*, 174).

Al-Farabi's discussion about the problem of an "ideal generous society" ("*al-madina al-fadila*") is very important. First, he formulates that an ideal society is always governed by an equitable leader; then he mentions that a generous society adapts to a common human space. To Al-Farabi, language, religion, culture and civilization of the generous city never come into conflict. A common denominator of generous citizens is the longing for improvement in achieving common goals, supporting each and following norms to reach happiness. He strongly believed that people could be corrected via the rightful ruling of the leader, thus showing a philosophy deeply embedded in humanistic principles that give priority to spiritual values and shows respect for the positions and views of other people, guided by only a single goal – sharing the highest truth.

"Generous city" by al-Farabi is an ideal of socio-political system, a model of accurate functioning, where each resident of the city acts as a separate element of a well-established mechanism (Kirabayev, *Politicheskaya mysl' musul'manskogo srednevekov'ya*, 153). Al-Farabi here draws an analogy with the human body: "A virtuous city is like a perfect healthy body, all of whose organs help each other to preserve the life of the living being and make it more complete. How do the organs of the body differ from each other, surpassing each other in nature and in their abilities (so, they consist of one main organ-the heart; bodies approaching this main body in their degrees, each of which is naturally endowed with a certain ability, through which it carries out its activities in accordance with the natural purpose of this main body, and other bodies, endowed with certain abilities, through which they act in accordance with the objectives of those bodies, of which communication with the main body is not mediated, and these bodies are in the second degree, as well as, some other bodies, which carry out their activities in accordance with the objectives of those bodies that are at the second stage, and so on up to such bodies that serve, but absolutely do not manage anything), in the same way, and the members of the city association differ in nature, surpassing each other in their position. In the city there is a certain person – the Head and other people approaching this Head on the degrees each of which according to the position and abilities carries out that action which is demanded by the purpose pursued by the Head. They are on the first stage. Below them are other people who act in accordance with the goals of the first – these occupy the second stage. Then in the same way follow people who act in accordance with the goals of the latter. So different members of the city

association are arranged in this, up to those who act according to the goals of the latter and who serves, but is not served. They occupy the lowest level and are people of the lowest position..." (Al-Farabi, *Traktat o vzglyadah zhitelei dobrodetel'nogo goroda*, 169).

The treatises of al-Farabi show the necessity of intellectual development and moral perfection for the attainment of the general "happiness," "general welfare and prosperity." As the thinker says: "...the whole Earth will become virtuous if people help each other to achieve happiness» (Al-Farabi, *Traktat o vzglyadah zhitelei dobrodetel'nogo goroda*, 305).

His philosophical worldview expresses this culture of harmony and tolerance based on humanistic principles, understanding, dialogue, and mutual respect (Nysanbaev, *Philosophiya vzaimoponimaniya*, 351). The ideas laid out by Abu Nasr Al-Farabi became an integral part of the development of Kazakh civil society and central Asian civilization.

Today, the revival of the Silk Road is not just an economic project for the Republic of Kazakhstan. The civilizations and cultures that emerged in these territories are of importance in order to unveil the common heritage of the Eurasian continent and the connections between the Atlantic and the Pacific Rims. Four of the seven thousand kilometres of the ancient Great Silk Road passed across the territory of Kazakhstan. Neighbouring countries such as Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Iran and Turkey also participate in the project "Revival of the Great Silk Road." The United Nations first suggested and promoted the implementation of the Great Silk Road revival in its 1993 General Assembly, contemplating it as important channel of the international cooperation in diplomacy, culture, science, trade, tourism. In 1988, the project "Integral study of the Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue" was adopted by UNESCO, scheduling an extensive and detailed study of the history of this ancient route in relation to the formation and development of cultural relations between East and West, and the improvement of connections between the nations of the Eurasian continent (see <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/image/s/0015/001591/159189E.pdf>>). Cultural communication, transport and tourism have become the most important components in the project.

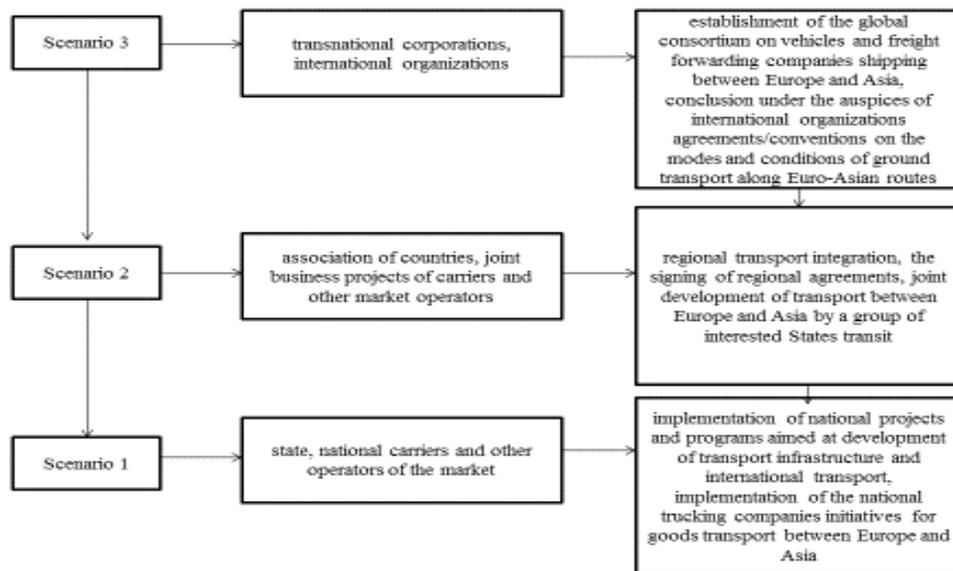
Hundreds of cultural, art and science figures of the participant countries in the project "Revival of the Great Silk Road" were gathered at the international forum "Eurasian culture in the new world" in Astana. In one of his interviews, Evgeny Nikitinsky, chairman of the Industry and Tourism Committee, explained that one of the outcomes of the project would be to unite these territories within a uniform tourist highway so that visitors are not faced with obstacles such as single entry visas required to travel to five of the countries that conform the ancient Silk Road, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Unfortunately, this is still in the process of discussion.

More positive outcomes of the project have been the creation of an International Tourist centre known as "New Ile" on the coast of the Kapshagai reservoir, the ethnographic complex YUKO, a historical and cultural museum as well as archaeological monuments in the Otrar district in south Kazakhstan, pilgrim villages in Turkestan, a free economic zone at the International Tourist centre of "Burabai," the city of the new Millennium or "Aktau city," as well as another tourist centre, that of "Kenderli" on the Caspian sea coast (see <http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30206089>).

Experts believe that the development of an economic belt along the Silk Road will give additional impetus to the growth of local economies. The idea and concept of this project was first presented by the President of China, Xi Jinping, during his official visit to Kazakhstan in 2013. The Chinese leader emphasized that the main focus would be the intensive re-construction of the road network, the elimination of trade barriers and the establishment of measures for economic cooperation between the countries of the region. However, this paper argues that we cannot underestimate the cross-cultural impact of the project.

The construction of the international corridor "Western Europe – Western China" has already made great contribution to the project of "The Silk Road revival." As a country located between Europe and Asia, Kazakhstan, could become a major transport hub on the Eurasian continent. The route, with some 8.5 thousand kilometres, covers almost three thousands of kilometres of the territory of Kazakhstan. A new highway has been designed to improve transport links between Europe and Western China. Indeed, the future transport arteries of this revived Silk Road will connect regions with a combined population of three billion people, conforming the largest market in the world. This will provide great opportunities for the Kazakhstani economy.

This program for an economic belt development along the Great Silk Road is based on the concept of collaboration and the strengthening of international relations among the countries of the region in terms of politics, economy, trade and monetary circulation, communications and transport, as well as culture. Thus, the Silk Road Belt will significantly expand international cooperation in the Eurasian region in the three scenarios devised in the chart below.



Simultaneously, this program coincides with the work in the area of strengthening of Kazakhstani cultural identity within the so-called "One Hundred steps" program, which involves the implementation of a stronger tourist industry in Kazakhstan by the year 2020, and the creation of various regional cultural and touristic clusters such as "Astana – heart of Eurasia," "Almaty – free cultural zone of

Kazakhstan," "The unity of nature and nomadic culture," "the pearl of Altai," "Revival of the Great Silk Road," or "The Caspian gates." The aim of the project is to allow Kazakh citizens as well as foreign tourists to learn more about cultural and religious diversity of the country, a diversity that became possible because the Great Silk Road was penetrated by many different cultures and religions, including the three great monotheistic religions as well as Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and others.

Currently, Kazakhstan has all the conditions for attracting foreign and domestic investment in the development of its tourist industry, either through public-private partnership or by the support and promotion of private initiatives. A comprehensive discussion of these issues took place at the 5th International meeting of the World Tourism Organization UNWTO held in October 2010 in Samarkand (Uzbekistan). Focusing on The Great Silk Road, the meeting brought together representatives from twenty-five countries. Here, the "Action plan on implementation of the Great Silk Road international project for 2010-2011" was adopted as the basis for further development of tourism along the ancient historic route. Recommendations were enforced on joint participation and the cooperation of all Silk Road countries to strengthen the brand "Silk Road" and its pool of resources, as well as the elimination of political barriers, and the simplification of visa and border formalities between the member countries of the project, all of which are being developed. According to the adopted Action plan in the framework of the international tourism exhibition World Travel Market WTM 2010 in London, a "Media Market Silk Road" panel was held, which was attended by Kazakhstan and the countries of Central Asia, Europe, the Middle East, as well as leading foreign tour operators. These are just a few examples to show that the Great Silk Road is possibly the best-known brands in the region, and that the planning and controlled development of touristic resources along the route are important for the preservation and restoration of the world cultural heritage of the countries on the ancient historic highway.

Significant obstacles to closer economic cooperation in the Central Asian region were pointed out and still remain today: first of all visa problems. Unfortunately, there is no consensus on the issue of mutual recognition of tourist visas for nationals of third countries to this day. Thus, for the successful promotion of the Silk Road project it has been considered important:

- To implement the recommendations of the Astana Declaration on the Silk Road adopted at the XVIII General Assembly of the World Trade Organization;
- To consider the proposal of introducing a single tourist visa "Silk Road" by national tourist administrations working closely with city officials. Kazakhstan has acted, and will continue to act as a mediator for the implementation of this proposal of visiting tours along the Silk Road preferably with a single tourist visa for up to three months, a visa recognized by the visited member countries;
- To establish uniform standards of service on all types of transport and accommodation for the participant countries on the "Silk Road" project;
- To consider the creation of a unified tourist product for the countries of the Great silk road;

- To develop the potential attractiveness of the Silk Road, which includes: the restoration of cultural sites and historical monuments on the ancient caravan route; the development of arts and crafts with the aim of preserving the rich cultural heritage of the Silk Road countries; the implementation and promotion of joint strategies, programs and marketing for the successful promotion of the project; the creation of a touristic image in the Central Asian region involved in the development of cultural tourism of the Great Silk Road.

The successful implementation of this transcontinental project of the United Nations, World Tourism Organization UNWTO and UNESCO on the sustainable development of tourism on the ancient, historic route of the Great Silk Road will also encourage intercultural dialogue. In this way, the cities along the Silk Road can become real networks for human exchanges of various kinds, just as it used to be in ancient times.

In summary, this article has considered the importance of settlements and cities along the Great Silk Road as an ancient route connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Rims. It has also looked at the transnational project that, with the involvement of international institutions and various countries, seeks to revive the Silk Road for the promotion of tourism. However, despite the obvious economic importance of this project, its development will also cover other important objective such as the recovery and preservation of ancient cultural heritage, and the raising of awareness towards all kinds of exchanges, not just trade, that took place along the route, all of which contributed to intercultural communication in the past, and will continue to do so in the future.

Indeed, the project draws attention to the distinctive history and culture of the Kazakh people and their recognized hospitality, associated not just with their nomad background but with the establishment of settlements along the Great Silk Road. Kazakhstan has always a promoter of peace and rapprochement among peoples, helping foster respect, tolerance and understanding based on humanitarian values, and Kazakh people see themselves as contributing to the recovery of these ancient routes, as promoters of cooperation, including economic investment, but also as political artificers of closer links between China, Russia, and Europe.

Knowledge about the Great Silk Road can also contribute to the educational goals of the One Asia Foundation. The project presented here, and the brief cultural panorama drawn around the figure of Abu Nasr Muhammad Al-Farabi and his birthplace at Fārāb/Otrar, can be implemented further in order to help reveal the ancient roots of the Kazakh people art and spirituality, and contribute to give further visibility to the territory and its mediating mission among various cultures in Central Asia. In particular, the "Revival of the Great Silk Road" project seeks to enhance intercultural and interreligious dialogue among the countries and communities involved in the project, all of which have territories along the Great Silk Road, but also with the world at large.

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