

**‘Silk Road Archipelagos: Islands in the Belt and Road Initiative’: A special thematic section of *Island Studies Journal*, 15(1), May 2020**

In 2013, President Xi Jinping of the People’s Republic of China announced the ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ (BRI; formerly known as ‘One Belt, One Road’). The BRI is an overarching strategy for linking East with West through a combination of transport, political, and economic connections. Originally envisioned as being composed of the overland ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’ and the oceanic ‘21<sup>st</sup>-Century Maritime Silk Road’, the BRI has since expanded to encompass a vast array of projects and regions, including the creation of a ‘Polar Silk Road’ or ‘Ice Silk Road’. The BRI has been variously conceived of as a uniquely ambitious infrastructure project, as a framework for exercising China’s soft power, and as a means of strengthening Chinese business interests across the developing world. As the BRI has gained increasing prominence in Chinese policymaking and economic planning, state and business actors from other countries have increasingly co-opted and adapted the BRI vision in an attempt to steer their way into Chinese investment streams and benefit from infrastructural, transport, and strategic synergies. By the same token though, other state actors have used the breadth and power of the BRI concept as a political lever for signalling distance from China and opposition to what is cast as Chinese imperialism.

Despite language barriers and differences in national focus, the above issues have been subject to considerable attention from researchers. Less attention has, however, been paid to the geographical specificities of the BRI, particularly to the prominence of islands in the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Maritime Silk Road and the Polar Silk Road. Drawing thematic inspiration from the Silk Road that developed as a trade route connecting the civilisations of ancient and imperial China through to those of Central Asia, the Middle East, and Southern Europe, the BRI has accorded strong roles to both oceanic island states and territories (e.g. Comoros, Greenland, Iceland, the Maldives, Mauritius, Singapore, Sri Lanka) and major island cities and near-shore ports (e.g. Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Batam, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Macau, Pingtan, Zhoushan, Tromsø) – with even some Pacific island states seeing possibilities for themselves in the BRI framework. The BRI has furthermore served as a means of focusing policy attention on many small islands that were previously unpopulated or deemed marginal and peripheral. In addition to its potential social, economic, and political results (whether positive or negative) for islands, the BRI is in the process of creating and reshaping a wide range of island-island and island-mainland relationalities. Formerly unconnected islands have entered into archipelagic relationships in a network stretching from the island cities of South China around to small island societies of Russia, the Nordic world, and the Canadian Arctic – and around through the Mediterranean, Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and Indian Ocean.

This special thematic section of *Island Studies Journal* (ISJ) seeks to place islands at the centre of focus when considering the BRI. Articles to appear in the special section are not restricted to any specific definition of the BRI. Articles must, however, consider one or more islands explicitly in the context of the BRI. (That is, papers about the BRI but without an island focus would not be appropriate.) Topics for papers include but are not limited to:

- What are the effects or potential effects of integration into the BRI for island communities, economies, infrastructures, and/or environments?
- How is the BRI creating or altering island-island and/or island-mainland relationships?
- What role does the BRI play in encouraging scientific research on and around islands?

- How can island policymakers, businesses, and/or communities make the most of the BRI? Or why might it be best if they keep their distance from the BRI framework?
- What roles did islands play in the ancient Maritime Silk Road?
- How can island policymakers and planners best harness the BRI framework in their development planning?
- What cultural and demographic effects might the BRI have on islands? Might the BRI result in culture loss, enhanced cultural exchange, population displacement, greater retention of young people, etc.?
- How are mainland businesses and policymakers using small islands in their BRI strategies?
- What geostrategic and/or military issues are (or are not) at play in the BRI?

This special thematic section will be published in May 2020 in ISJ 15(1), but individual papers will be published online ahead of print as and when they complete the peer review and editorial process. The special thematic section is being developed in association with the conference ‘Silk Road Archipelagos: Islands in the Belt and Road Initiative’, being organised by Island Dynamics in Macau on 11-12 April 2019 (<https://www.islanddynamics.org/silkroad2019.html>). This is, however, an open call for papers: Researchers who are not attending the conference are welcome to submit papers to the journal special thematic section, and presenting a paper at the conference does not guarantee publication in the journal.

ISJ is a web-based, freely downloadable, open access, peer reviewed, electronic journal that publishes papers advancing and critiquing the study of issues affecting or involving islands. It is listed and abstracted in Scopus and Web of Science (Social Science Citations Index). For further information, or if you are interested in submitting a paper, contact ISJ executive editor Adam Grydehøj ([agrydehoj@upei.ca](mailto:agrydehoj@upei.ca)). Manuscripts should preferably be between 5,000-8,000 words and must be written in excellent English (prepared in accordance with the ISJ submission guidelines: [http://islandstudies.ca/guidelines\\_instructions.html](http://islandstudies.ca/guidelines_instructions.html)).

Submissions should reach Adam Grydehøj by 31 May 2019 at the latest to be considered for this special thematic section (please use the title ‘Special Section on Silk Road Archipelagos’ as the e-mail subject).