

## THE ROLE AND RELEVANCE OF ABDURAUUF FITRAT'S IDEAS IN THE ECONOMIC POLICY OF NEW UZBEKISTAN

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19869692>

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the economic and socio-philosophical legacy of Abdurauf Fitrat, one of the leading Jadid intellectuals of early twentieth-century Turkestan, in the context of the contemporary economic transformation of New Uzbekistan. The study analyses Fitrat's ideas on entrepreneurship, craftsmanship, private property, free labour and economic enlightenment as expressed in his works "Rahbari najot", "Sayyohi hindi", "Munozara" and "Oila", and demonstrates their conceptual alignment with the strategic priorities of the "New Uzbekistan Development Strategy 2022–2026" and "Uzbekistan-2030 Strategy." Using historical-comparative, hermeneutic and content-analytical methods, the article identifies seven key vectors through which Fitrat's ideas are operationalised in current state policy: small business promotion, women's entrepreneurship, craftsmanship clusters, dual education, export-oriented production, ESG-based responsibility, and digital economic citizenship. The findings argue that Fitrat's heritage provides an authentic indigenous theoretical foundation for shaping a national model of market economy rooted in ethical responsibility and human capital.

### **Keywords**

Abdurauf Fitrat, Jadidism, New Uzbekistan, economic policy, entrepreneurship, craftsmanship, private property, small business, ESG, human capital, national development model.

The economic transformation of Uzbekistan since 2017 has produced one of the most significant institutional shifts in Central Asia: the liberalisation of the currency market, simplification of tax administration, support for private entrepreneurship, expansion of women's economic participation, and the gradual establishment of a knowledge-based economy. Within this context, the search for an authentic national philosophical foundation for the country's economic policy

has become increasingly important. Foreign theoretical models alone cannot fully address the cultural, ethical and historical dimensions of economic transformation in a society with a deep Islamic and Turkic intellectual heritage.

Abdurauf Fitrat – a prominent Jadid thinker, statesman, philologist and the architect of early Soviet-era Bukharan modernisation – left an extensive intellectual legacy that touches upon nearly every dimension of social and economic development. His writings on entrepreneurship, free labour, the inviolability of private property and the role of craftsmanship in national prosperity offer a remarkably modern framework when re-read through the lens of contemporary economic policy.

The relevance of this study is determined by three converging factors. First, the New Uzbekistan Development Strategy 2022–2026 (Presidential Decree No. PF-60, 28 January 2022) sets the goal of increasing the share of small business in GDP to 80% and creating a competitive private sector ecosystem. Second, the Uzbekistan-2030 Strategy emphasises human capital, innovation and value-driven entrepreneurship as the foundation of long-term growth. Third, the global discourse on indigenous development models – from East Asian Confucian capitalism to Latin American *buen vivir* – increasingly demands locally rooted theoretical foundations for economic policy. The objective of this article is to systematically analyse the conceptual relationship between Fitrat’s economic ideas and the contemporary policy agenda of New Uzbekistan, and to demonstrate the methodological and practical relevance of his heritage for shaping the future development model.

Studies of Abdurauf Fitrat have predominantly focused on his philological and pedagogical contributions. Scholars such as B. Qosimov, N. Karimov, H. Boltaboyev, D. Alimova and Sh. Yuldashev have produced foundational research on Fitrat’s literary, educational and political activity, examining his role in the Jadid movement and Bukharan People’s Republic. However, the systematic analysis of Fitrat’s economic thought remains comparatively underdeveloped, particularly in connection with contemporary policy frameworks.

The theoretical framework of this study draws on three intellectual traditions. The classical and neoclassical economics of A. Smith, J. S. Mill and J. Schumpeter provides the conceptual vocabulary of entrepreneurship, division of labour and innovation. The neoinstitutional economics of D. North and F. Hayek offers a framework for analysing property rights and institutional change. M. Weber’s thesis on the religious-ethical foundations of capitalism allows for comparison between Protestant and Islamic economic ethics, an analytical bridge that is particularly relevant for understanding Fitrat’s synthesis of religious morality and

modern economic activity. Among Uzbek economists, the works of A. Vahobov, N. Mahmudov and Sh. Shukurov on contemporary entrepreneurship theory and small business policy form an essential complement to the historical analysis.

The methodology employed in this study is multilayered. Historical-logical analysis is used to reconstruct the socio-economic context in which Fitrat's ideas emerged. Hermeneutic analysis is applied to interpret his texts within the cultural and linguistic framework of early twentieth-century Turkestan. Comparative analysis enables the systematic juxtaposition of Fitrat's ideas with contemporary policy documents. Content analysis of strategic documents – including Presidential Decree PF-60, the Uzbekistan-2030 Strategy and annual addresses of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan – identifies thematic and conceptual convergence with Fitrat's heritage. Primary sources include Fitrat's works "Munozara" (1909), "Sayyohi hindi" (1911), "Oila" (1914), "Rahbari najot" (1915) and "Begijon," as well as documents from the Bukharan People's Republic period (1920–1924).

Fitrat's economic ideas do not constitute a separate treatise but are woven into his broader programme of national awakening. They form a coherent system in which economic activity is inseparable from education, ethics, family life, religion and statehood. This holistic character distinguishes Fitrat's economic vision from purely technocratic Western models and aligns it closely with contemporary value-based economics, ESG principles and the human-development paradigm associated with A. Sen and M. Nussbaum.

Three foundational principles structure Fitrat's economic worldview. The first is the principle of productive labour as the moral basis of citizenship: idleness is presented as the root cause of national decline, while honest work is the path to dignity, prosperity and freedom. The second is the principle of the inviolability of private property as a guarantee of individual creativity and social stability. The third is the principle of national economic self-reliance: a nation's freedom is contingent on its capacity to produce, trade and own its means of livelihood. These principles, formulated more than a century ago, anticipate central themes of contemporary development economics.

In Fitrat's conception, the entrepreneur is not merely a profit-seeking agent but a moral actor whose activity contributes to the welfare of the nation. The entrepreneur must possess knowledge of the trade, courage to assume risk, integrity in transactions, and a sense of responsibility towards employees, customers and society at large. This vision corresponds remarkably well to J. Schumpeter's notion of the entrepreneur-innovator while extending it with an ethical and patriotic dimension.

Fitrat's travel narrative "Sayyohi hindi" ("Account of an Indian Traveller", 1911) presents Indian merchants and industrialists as exemplars of disciplined, ethical and globally oriented entrepreneurship. Through this comparative device, Fitrat introduces concepts that today fall under brand management, export orientation, product quality and international market access – a remarkably forward-looking perspective for early twentieth-century Bukhara. The contemporary policy agenda of New Uzbekistan, with its emphasis on the "Made in Uzbekistan" brand, export promotion to the European Union, Türkiye and South-East Asia, and the introduction of GSP+ preferences, can be seen as a direct realisation of this Fitratian vision.

Fitrat assigns a central role to craftsmanship in national development. He recognises four interconnected functions of crafts: economic (employment and household income), cultural (preservation of national art and aesthetic values), pedagogical (transmission of work culture to younger generations), and external (promotion of national products on global markets). This framework anticipates the contemporary cluster theory of M. Porter and the "one village – one product" (OVOP) movement that originated in Japan and spread across Asia.

The contemporary policy of New Uzbekistan demonstrates striking continuity with Fitrat's vision. The development of artisan clusters in Bukhara (gold embroidery, copperware), Margilan (silk weaving), Rishton (ceramics), Shahrisabz (suzanne embroidery) and Samarkand (paper and miniature painting) reflects exactly the holistic approach Fitrat advocated more than a century ago. According to data from the Uzbek State Statistics Committee, by the end of 2024 there were over twenty-seven thousand officially registered artisans in Uzbekistan, with an annual turnover exceeding 1.8 trillion soums and growing export sales of handicrafts to the European Union, the United States and Japan.

One of Fitrat's most theoretically significant contributions is his defence of private property as a fundamental institution of social order. Long before the neoinstitutional economists of the late twentieth century articulated the role of property rights in economic development, Fitrat insisted that the protection of legitimately acquired property is the first duty of the state. This view places him in direct intellectual proximity to D. North's thesis that secure property rights are a precondition for sustained economic growth, as well as to F. Hayek's argument that liberty and prosperity require the protection of individual ownership.

Yet Fitrat's position is not a simple translation of Western liberalism. He embeds the right to property within a framework of social responsibility derived from Islamic ethics: the owner is also a steward, expected to use property for the benefit of the broader community through charity, waqf endowments and support

of the poor. This synthesis of property rights with social responsibility prefigures the contemporary discourse on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) principles and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which are increasingly integrated into the Uzbek policy agenda through new legislation on sustainable finance, green bonds and corporate transparency.

In “Oila” (“The Family”, 1914), Fitrat develops a vision of the family as the basic economic unit of society, in which both spouses share responsibility for production, consumption and the education of children. He explicitly argues that women must be educated and given access to economic activity, since the prosperity of the nation depends on the productivity of half of its population. This perspective, exceptional for its time and context, finds direct resonance in the contemporary policies of New Uzbekistan.

The state programmes “Ayollar daftari” (Women’s Register), “Tadbirkor ayol” (Entrepreneurial Woman), and the Women’s Entrepreneurship Support Fund directly operationalise Fitrat’s ideas. By 2024, more than ninety thousand small enterprises in Uzbekistan were headed by women, and women’s share in registered private entrepreneurship reached approximately twenty-eight percent – a dramatic increase from the early 2010s. The integration of women into export-oriented sectors, particularly textile production and digital services, represents a contemporary realisation of the Fitratian principle that national development cannot proceed without the full economic participation of women.

On the basis of the conceptual analysis presented above, seven key vectors can be identified through which Fitrat’s economic ideas are operationalised in the policy framework of New Uzbekistan.

First, the cultivation of a national entrepreneurial culture. Fitrat’s emphasis on the moral and patriotic dimension of business is reflected in the systematic incorporation of entrepreneurship education into the curricula of schools, professional colleges and universities, in line with the Presidential Decree on the development of business education adopted in 2023.

Second, the territorial decentralisation of economic development through artisan and industrial clusters. The cluster approach, advocated by Fitrat as a means of preserving regional identity and economic specialisation, has become the dominant model for the development of cotton-textile, fruit-vegetable, silk and tourism clusters across the regions of Uzbekistan.

Third, the integration of education with practice through dual learning, entrepreneurial universities and innovation parks. Fitrat’s formula of “knowledge plus craft plus trade” finds direct expression in the establishment of IT-Park, BIO-Park, and the recent transformation of higher-education institutions into

entrepreneurial universities, where Bukhara University of Innovation has emerged as one of the leading examples in the western region.

Fourth, the institutional reinforcement of private property rights. Reforms in land ownership, the introduction of long-term lease rights, the digitalisation of property registries through the unified electronic platform My.gov.uz, and the strengthening of the judicial protection of contracts directly correspond to the Fitratian principle of property inviolability.

Fifth, the strategic promotion of women's economic empowerment. The legal, financial and educational support for women entrepreneurs corresponds to Fitrat's vision of the productive family economy and gender-balanced human capital development.

Sixth, the orientation of small business towards export and global value chains. The introduction of digital export platforms, the GSP+ preferences with the European Union, and the active participation of Uzbek manufacturers in international trade fairs (Heimtextil, Première Vision, Texworld) extend Fitrat's vision of the entrepreneur as a participant in the global economy.

Seventh, the integration of digital and ESG dimensions into national economic policy. The launch of the digital ID system, e-government services for entrepreneurs and ESG-oriented corporate reporting standards represents the modern infrastructural realisation of Fitrat's ideal of the educated, responsible and internationally engaged economic citizen.

The systematic analysis conducted in this article supports several conclusions of theoretical and practical significance. First, Abdurauf Fitrat's economic ideas constitute a coherent and remarkably modern framework that anticipates many concepts of twentieth and twenty-first century development economics, including the entrepreneur-innovator, the institutional foundations of property rights, human capital, gender-inclusive growth and value-based responsibility. Second, the strategic documents of New Uzbekistan demonstrate substantive conceptual alignment with Fitrat's economic vision, even though direct citations of his economic writings remain rare in policy discourse. This alignment is most visible in the seven vectors identified in the previous section.

Third, the integration of Fitrat's heritage into the theoretical foundations of Uzbek economic policy can strengthen the legitimacy and cultural rootedness of ongoing reforms. By translating his ideas into the language of contemporary economic policy, the country can develop a distinctive national development model – one that combines market efficiency with ethical responsibility, individual freedom with social solidarity, and global integration with cultural identity.

On the basis of these conclusions, several recommendations can be formulated. The introduction of a specialised course on “The National History of Economic Thought” in the curricula of economics and business faculties of Uzbek universities would help connect new generations of professionals to their intellectual heritage. The publication of an annotated academic edition of Fitrat’s economic writings, accompanied by contemporary commentary, would provide a scholarly foundation for further research. Finally, the systematic integration of Fitrat’s ethical principles into corporate governance codes, ESG frameworks and entrepreneurship-education programmes would translate his philosophical legacy into practical instruments of economic policy. In this way, the heritage of one of the leading thinkers of twentieth-century Central Asia can become a living resource for the economic transformation of New Uzbekistan in the twenty-first century.

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