

# Silk Road Diplomacy: China Redefines Its Role on the Asian Mainland

Lang Kao

Hang Seng Management College (HSMC), Hong Kong

This article proposes how China is using Silk Road diplomacy to redefine its roles on the Asian mainland. This undertaking will inevitably change geopolitical conditions along the Silk Road corridor, and will affect the interests of major powers within that region. For the past five years, Beijing has been vigorously promoting its Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), the most ambitious foreign policy to be adopted by China since Deng Xiaoping's program of "reform and opening up." This is an enormous initiative that will require vast amounts of capital and multilateral cooperation, so many risks will be encountered in the course of its implementation. The objectives of the article are to: (a) explore the ideas, goals, and strategies of Silk Road diplomacy from the constructivist perspective; and (b) analyze the attendant difficulties, as well as how Silk Road diplomacy is likely to affect the Silk Road countries and China's Western provinces.

*Keywords:* Belt & Road Initiative, Silk Road diplomacy, China, constructivism, geopolitics

## Background

In 2013, China's President Xi Jinping announced the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI). Since then, Beijing has begun to treat this initiative as a new foreign affairs policy known as Silk Road diplomacy.

How exactly does China plan to carry out this ambitious undertaking? How broad is it in scope? How are we going to evaluate its effectiveness? There was a lot of uncertainty regarding this initiative during its first two years, but much work has been done since then. The general outline of Silk Road diplomacy has gradually come into focus, and the relationship between its goals and the methods for achieving them has gotten clearer. The term "Silk Road diplomacy" refers to two different roads. One is a maritime Silk Road and the other is an overland Silk Road. These are the two roads that China has used over the last one or two-thousand years to trade and communicate with the rest of the world. Many of the countries along these roads are still poor and underdeveloped. And many of them share a border with China.

From a geopolitical perspective, the overland Silk Road leads to Europe. It passes through Central Asia and Western Asia, both of which have long been neglected. These regions are torn by serious ethnic conflict and the infrastructure is fragile.

To promote the BRI, Beijing launched the US\$40 billion Silk Road Fund in 2014, and in the following year, established the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Through multilateral cooperation, Beijing is promoting the development of infrastructure in the 60-plus countries located along the two Silk Roads.

---

Lang Kao, Ph.D., professor, department head of Social Science and director of the Asian Studies Programme, Hang Seng Management College (HSMC), Hong Kong.

### **A Constructivist Perspective: Idea-Driven Diplomacy**

Many papers on the BRI have been published. Some writers focus on motives and ask why Beijing is pursuing Silk Road diplomacy. Some focus on power politics and examine Beijing's strategic arrangements. Others focus on economic benefits and look at the huge potential business opportunities.

This paper takes the perspective of constructivism. It looks at how China's leaders construct a worldview and how they act on that basis to develop a set of strategies for achieving their goals.

Ideas are created by people. When political elites define a nation's interests, goals, and strategies, and a consensus arises in support of these things, these ideas will evolve into a set of norms and rules that can be put into practice and eventually become a set of systems. Ideas also become a road map for the pursuit of strategic goals (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993).

In other words, a nation's interests and goals are not an objective existence waiting to be discovered by people. To the contrary, these interests or preferences are shaped by people (Kowert & Legro, 1996). As said by Alexander Wendt, "actors do not have a 'portfolio' of interests that they carry around independent of social context; instead, they define their interests on the process of defining situations" (Wendt, 1992, p. 398).

That is to say, people are shared ideas that arise in the course of interaction among political elites. In the view of Goldstein and Keohane, there are three types of ideas. Those at the highest level are world views. These constitute people's basic views on world order. At a second level, there are principled beliefs. These are beliefs that arise within a given worldview, and determine one's strategic direction and one's choice of road map. At a third level, there are causal beliefs. These are the strategies that must be adopted to achieve a person's policy goals (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993).

When a set of ideas becomes a frame for political elites, they will use it to interpret the relationship between the world and themselves, and it will steer their policy choices. When an idea becomes a basis for action, the idea virtually determines the direction and content of policy. And when a set of ideas becomes mainstream thought among political elites, it limits the possibility for policy changes, because policies cannot run contrary to the frames of political elites.

As some scholars have pointed out, many ideas over the course of history have had a huge impact on the selection and implementation of policies. Examples of such ideas include "human rights," "self-determination," "anti-colonial liberation movements," and "free trade." When an idea becomes mainstream thought among political elites, the idea is more than just the basis for implementation of policy; it also acquires a moral halo and becomes a source of policy legitimacy.

Perhaps we can regard a popular idea as a sort of paradigm that points the way forward and provides a standard by which to choose a path. And just like a paradigm, if more and more puzzles arise that an existing theory cannot resolve, that theory will eventually lose favor and be replaced by a new theory (Kuhn, 1970). The same applies to social science. The idea of "free trade," for example, is now being seriously questioned. Even the US has withdrawn from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). President Trump is emphasizing the idea of "America first" and moving toward the path of protectionism.

It is very important to examine China from the perspective of ideas, for the following reasons:

1. The Communist Party of China attaches great importance to ideology, so any policy initiative is always carried out in line with a guiding ideology. While it is true that there have been intense struggles in the past within the Communist Party over the direction of policy, the faction in power, no matter which one, has always

regarded ideology as an important guide for policy.

2. The Communist Party is a highly institutionalized and disciplined political party with a powerful ability to implement policy. When a particular ideology becomes the dominant mode of thought, it will be complied with everywhere, from the center down to the local level.

3. The Communist Party attaches great importance to the planning of national economic development. Every government over the years has set targets and adopted a Five-Year Plan. China is now implementing its 13th Five-Year Plan. And when the government launched its BRI in 2015, it issued an official document to set out a clear-cut vision and action plan.

That is why the Communist Party adopts a guiding ideology for all of its policies, regardless whether they involve domestic or foreign affairs, and it has the ability to implement those policies. As a result, there is a high degree of predictability in China's policies and actions in both domestic and foreign affairs. If we want to understand Beijing's Silk Road diplomacy, we first have to understand its ideas. Only then can we anticipate the future direction of any particular policy.

### **Learning From the West: The Worldview Behind Reform and Opening up**

After Deng Xiaoping returned to power in 1978, he launched the policy of reform and openness. This policy completely rejected the worldview behind Mao Zedong's ideas about "class struggle as the guiding principle" and "continuing revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat."

This paper will not examine the theoretical basis that Deng Xiaoping used to sum up the lessons of the Cultural Revolution, or how he legitimized reform by extracting from Mao Zedong Thought the elements of pragmatism, such as the idea that "practice is the sole criterion for testing truth." What this paper focuses on is how the worldview behind reform and opening up has affected the direction of China's foreign policy.

For China's leadership, reform and opening up is a process of learning from the West. The key points are "science and technology," "education and management," "attracting Western capital," and "expanding trade and investment ties with the West." But Deng Xiaoping strictly prohibited any borrowing of Western freedoms or democratic systems. What Deng wanted to build was socialism with Chinese characteristics, not a Western-style democratic republic.

The status of reform and opening up as the Communist Party's guiding ideology was affirmed in 1978 at the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee. The next year, China began to build special economic zones. This marked the beginning of 40 years of opening up to the outside world.

Under the ideological guidance of reform and opening up, Deng Xiaoping put forward a foreign policy framework. He believed that China, in order to develop its economy, would need peaceful and stable relations with its neighbors, so in the 1980s, Beijing began actively working to resolve difficult territorial disputes with almost all of its neighbors (Deng, 1982). It also acted to ease tense relations with Taiwan and adopted the "one country, two systems" approach to handle the handover of Hong Kong.

When reform and opening up became the consensus viewpoint of China's leadership, China began to gradually open up to the outside world and take part in international affairs. China's WTO accession in 2001 was an important turning point. From this time forward, the Chinese economy and the world economy began to integrate more deeply and stimulate each other's development. Economic development in China accelerated and the global impact of the Chinese economy expanded.

Under the logic that has guided reform and opening up, the goal of Beijing's foreign affairs strategy has been to achieve peace and stability in order to develop the Chinese economy. Beijing has sought to avoid international disputes, and has repeatedly declared that China will oppose hegemony, will not get involved in other countries' affairs, and will uphold The Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence (Deng, 1990b). After the Tiananmen Incident of 1989, the international community imposed sanctions on China. Not long afterward, communist regimes in Eastern Europe collapsed, then the Soviet Union broke up in 1991. Deng Xiaoping emphasized that in the conduct of foreign relations, China "shall never seek hegemony or sever as the leader of the Third World," but his policy of reform and opening up did not change (Deng, 1990a, p. 363).

During the first 30 years of reform and opening up, China's leadership carried out economic reforms designed to build up national power. They consciously kept a low profile in the conduct of foreign relations so as not to raise concerns in neighboring countries and to avoid inciting the major powers to block its plans.

Although Beijing has maintained a very hard line on certain issues, such as sovereignty, human rights, and trade sanctions, generally speaking, Beijing's foreign policy has sought participation rather than confrontation and the ultimate objective has been to achieve China's peaceful rise. This aspect of foreign policy remained basically unchanged under Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao.

### **A New Self-Image: Recovering the Worldview of the Historical China**

By the time, Xi Jinping took over as Communist Party General Secretary and President in 2012, China's power had already grown considerably and it had become the world's second largest economy. The global financial crisis of 2008 exposed the shortcomings of capitalism and caused major economic damage in the US and the European Union. The West's leading role in the global economy was affected. China, in contrast, was not as badly affected by the financial tsunami and it emerged as major engine of global economic growth.

It is not the purpose of this paper to cite all kinds of data to show how quickly China's national power has developed. Our focus is on how the ideas of China's leadership have changed.

For thousands of years, China has been a land-based power that has relied almost completely on overland routes to communicate with other countries. In the 19th century, however, this situation changed dramatically. Foreign aggressors arrived via the sea. Imperialist powers carried out repeated maritime incursions and forced China to sign unequal treaties.

More than 200 years ago, China turned its attention away from the land and toward the sea. From the reforms of the late Qing Dynasty through Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening up, every Chinese leader has sought to learn from the West. In other words, the image of the world embraced by China's leadership has featured a world order established by the West. The Western powers have occupied a central position in this image, while Western Asia, South Asia, and Central Asia have been pushed off to the margins, almost completely ignored, even though those regions are located along China's border, and were once its main route to the outside world.

But China's steadily growing strength has made it a major global power and eroded the leadership position of the US. As a result, China's leadership has come to view the world from a clearly different angle. After Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, he vowed to make an effort to achieve the Chinese dream. He said "to realize the Chinese dream, China must take the Chinese way" (Xinhua, 2013). In his view, he wants to achieve strength and prosperity, rejuvenate the nation, and ensure that Chinese people lead happy lives.

It is worth noting that Xi Jinping draws a direct connection between China's past humiliations and the nation's rejuvenation. As he has said:

Beginning with the Opium War of 1840, the Chinese nation suffered through a century of foreign aggression and civil war. The people of China experienced years of disaster and suffering.... In our hearts, we harbor a desire to achieve the Chinese dream. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2013)

The Chinese dream is connected not just to the country's modern history. When Xi Jinping announced the BRI, he specifically mentioned the ancient Silk Road and described it as a new focal point of China's foreign relations.

From these word choices, we can see a shift in the worldview of China's leadership, away from the West-centered worldview of the past to one that puts China at the center. With this new and simultaneously "retro" worldview, the direction of China's development is no longer oriented strictly toward the West; instead, China is now turning its attention toward the countries on its border. China no longer plays a minor role. It is now a major Asian continental power, so in speaking of the Chinese dream, Xi Jinping seeks to return China to its historical position. He asserts that the projection of national power toward China's neighboring countries is in line with China's geopolitical requirements and he redefines the order of priority among China's various national interests.

Since Xi Jinping announced the BRI in 2013, Chinese authorities from the central on down to the local level have all adopted policies and measures based on this idea. In just a few short years, the BRI has become a development concept and a program of action that the whole world is paying close attention to.

### **A Hybrid of Two Worldviews Steers China's Foreign Relations**

It is needed to clarify one point. Xi Jinping has never felt that his Chinese dream or the BRI initiative should replace Deng Xiaoping's policy of reform and opening up.

Beijing's leadership is working to create a link between the worldview behind reform and opening up, on the one hand, with the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. In 1992, with China still facing sanctions imposed by the West following the June 4th Incident, Deng Xiaoping said: "We still need to keep a low profile for a few more years to build up significant political strength. After that, China's voice will carry more weight on the international stage" (Leng & Wang, 2004, p. 1346). In Xi Jinping's view, the "significant political strength" that Deng Xiaoping talked about had become a reality after 20 years, so it was only natural that he took a different view of China's relations with the rest of the world.

President Xi's foreign policy basically follows the path of Deng Xiaoping's economic reform. The only difference is in how he views China's relationship with the rest of the world. China is no longer economically backward but is now a major player in the world economy. China has the capability and the need to take a new look at its foreign relations and redefine its interests. China's leadership wants to recover the nation's past glory, but not by reconquering China's traditional territories or building a Great Wall.

Over the past 40 years, the idea of economic reform has yielded huge dividends. It long ago became the consensus viewpoint of China's leadership, and China has been pursuing peace and development for many years. We could describe President Xi's foreign relations as an upgraded version of the Deng Xiaoping line, in which President Xi brings peace and development to its neighboring countries and territories. He hopes to use both overland and maritime routes to revitalize China's traditional pathways for outward development, and to establish stronger interdependence.

In other words, Xi Jinping's idea regarding foreign relations unfolds in the dimensions of both time and space. In the dimension of time, he is trying to combine tradition and modernity. On the one hand, he is calling

for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and the restoration of China's traditional position on the Asian continent. At the same time, he is carrying forward with the path of reform and opening up in order to seize upon opportunities for peace and development.

As for the spatial dimension, President Xi is trying to abandon the West-centered foreign policy of the past in favor of a more balanced foreign policy that puts equal emphasis on the West and China's neighbors.

The worldview advocated by Xi Jinping is important because it is the first time in over a century that China has had the ability to steer the course of development in the nearby region. From the Opium Wars through the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese leadership always had to respond to external challenges under extremely difficult domestic and international circumstances. China was never in a position before to play a leading role in determining the framework for multilateral relations.

Today, the framework that China wants for regional multilateral relations will not establish spheres of influence or colonies, nor will it bring back the tributary system of ancient China. Instead, it will seek to establish a series of economic and trade blocs all along the Silk Road. In the thinking of China's leadership, this is a joint development project that will not be limited to any particular area or time period. It will simply seek to stimulate development throughout an entire region by taking these economic and trade blocs and joining them together.

If this idea can be carried out, the countries along the Silk Road would benefit and China itself would be the biggest beneficiary of all. If China's neighboring countries become prosperous, it will change the regional power structure and China will have achieved the dream of its peaceful rise.

The idea of China's leadership regarding foreign relations can be considered both traditional and contemporary at the same time. On the traditional side, it has a nationalistic component and returns to the core interests of historical China. On the contemporary side, taking China's experience with reform and opening up as its point of departure, it uses peace and development to spur economic development in the countries along the Silk Road.

### **Strategic Ideas Behind Silk Road Diplomacy**

In March 2015, the Chinese government issued its vision and an action plan on the Belt & Road Initiative (The State Council, the People's Republic of China, 2015b). It has continually added to the content since then and the outline of the strategy has become clearer.

Officially, China has stated that the BRI is meant to be an important bridge between the East Asian economic belt and the continental European economic belt. It includes all the countries in a very large region and offers tremendous potential for economic development. The overland Silk Road is composed of three routes. One goes via Central Asia and Russia to Europe (the Baltic Sea). Another goes via Central Asia and Western Asia to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea. And the third goes via Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Indian Ocean. The maritime Silk Road, meanwhile, includes two different routes. One goes via the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean to Europe, while the other goes via the South China Sea to South Pacific (The State Council, the People's Republic of China, 2015a).

It is worth noting that China, in its conduct of Silk Road diplomacy, has continually emphasized the principles of wide consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits (Xinhua, 2016). These principles call for China to consult as equals with the Silk Road nations, make joint contributions, and share in the benefits.

In addition, China is also taking care to maintain a distinction between Silk Road diplomacy and Western power politics. The Chinese authorities emphasize that this initiative will abide by the five principles of peaceful co-existence that China has championed for many years. It will respect the sovereignty of other nations and will not interfere in their internal affairs. Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi has said: “The Belt and Road Initiative is younger because it is born in the era of globalization. It is a product of inclusive cooperation, not a tool of geopolitics, and must not be viewed with the outdated Cold War mentality” (Wang, 2015).

From the way China’s leadership defines the role of the BRI, we can see that it is an infrastructure project in which many countries are taking part. It is an open project in which other countries are welcome to participate.

And how will this project be carried out? China intends to use infrastructure projects to spur economic development in the Silk Road countries. Building strong transportation networks is the only way China can spur the growth of trade and investment ties with the Silk Road countries. Such infrastructure includes railroads, highways, oil and gas pipelines, airports, harbors, power plants, and fiber optic communications networks. The plan is to engage in bilateral and multilateral talks with the Silk Road countries, which will have opportunities during these talks to choose the projects in which they want to take part. And other countries are also welcome to join in on the projects.

China launched the US\$40 billion Silk Road Fund in late 2014 to provide financing to the Silk Road countries, and in 2015, China established the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) with capital of US\$100 billion and 57 member states.

The most notable initiative currently being pursued under Silk Road diplomacy is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a collection of infrastructure projects worth a combined total of over US\$60 billion (Crabtree, 2018). In addition, China is also promoting the construction of railroads and bullet trains in Indochina, Africa, Europe, and Russia. Some projects have not succeeded due to difficulties with financing and politics, but the very clear trend in Silk Road diplomacy is to pursue major infrastructure projects in the Silk Road countries, establish a string of economic blocs, and gradually increase their dependence upon economic and trade ties with China. This approach is conducive to economic development in the Silk Road countries and also spurs development in remote regions of China.

Of course, the ambitious BRI also involves a lot of risks. All along the Silk Road, natural environments are inhospitable, economies are underdeveloped, and politics are highly unstable. Building infrastructure in these regions is an extremely difficult undertaking. The countries that China lends to may very well default on their debts, which is the main reason why international financial institutions have been unwilling to make loans. These same risks apply to Chinese lending activities. It is completely beyond China’s ability to know how political conditions may change in the Silk Road countries. China’s strategy is to proceed carefully, evaluating each project on its merits and moving forward one step at a time. China has not made any general commitment and is not treating the new Silk Road project like a sort of Marshall Plan.

The BRI is not purely altruistic in nature. China has its own interests in mind. With the completion of each BRI project, China’s international economic and trade network grows that much more diversified. Newly built infrastructure will enable China to receive a wide variety of shipments from the Indian Ocean or via the Eurasian rail network, and Chinese products can also be transported to destinations in Afro-Eurasia via new channels that completely avoid areas patrolled by the US Navy’s Seventh Fleet. What is more, when economic conditions improve in the Silk Road countries, these countries will all seek to sell in Chinese markets, and this

will inevitably lead to deeper economic and trade ties. It is hard to estimate the benefits that China would reap once its economy becomes the core of the Asian economy.

### **Different Ideas Lead to Different Conclusions**

From the above analysis, we can see that the ideas and strategies associated with China's Silk Road diplomacy put high priority on developing infrastructure in neighboring countries and regions, in order to gradually build a number of economic belts and spur overall economic development. This logic is different from the logic of Western power politics.

With Western countries, aid to the Third World often involves more guns than butter. Moreover, the West strives to export democratic systems and other such Western values, and uses a wide variety of tactics to control the domestic affairs of recipient countries.

China, in contrast, has explicitly stated that it has no intention to use Silk Road diplomacy to transplant Chinese systems to other countries. As said by Xi, "we will not ask other countries to copy Chinese practice" (Xinhua, 2017). China only hopes that different countries can seek common ground while respecting differences, consult as equals, respect each other's sovereignty, and refrain from interfering in each other's internal affairs. Since adopting the policy of economic reform, China's leadership has actively sought to integrate into the global trading system, and embraced globalization, but it has never intended to establish military or political alliances because China does not want to lead the Third World, nor does it want to be "the world's policeman" like the United States.

The ideas that frame the view of Western countries regarding international politics have always differed from the ideas held by China. Even Germany, which is a participant in the BRI, interprets China's Silk Road diplomacy from the perspective of power politics. In early 2018, German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel stated that China's BRI amounts to a struggle between democracy and dictatorship. He believes that China, in expanding its influence to Afro-Eurasia, is trying to create something different from the system of freedom and democracy—something that threatens the interests of democratic countries (Strong, 2018).

Different ideas can thus lead to drastically different conclusions. The US-led Western world generally sees development under the BRI as Chinese meddling. China's leadership, in contrast, sees it as a matter of co-existence, shared prosperity, and win-win international cooperation.

Different ideas can lead to different actions. If Western countries see China's Silk Road diplomacy as a strategic arrangement motivated by geopolitical considerations, they will inevitably take response measures to designed to hold China in check. But if Western countries believe that China's Silk Road diplomacy is a type of multinational economic development initiative, they might be willing to participate and give their support.

Western countries are currently unsure what to think of the BRI. Some countries, such as the US and Japan are unwilling to take part in the AIIB. Other countries, such as the United Kingdom are taking part but are not willing to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with China to pledge support for the initiative. (Parker, 2018)

International politics is a process of interaction among different countries. Where frames differ, there is a higher probability that misjudgments could trigger conflict. As described by Robert Jervis (1985), "a state's beliefs about itself are so powerful that it is hard to imagine others having a different view, and a state's self-image carries a heavy load of affect" (p. 29). Thus, Western countries need to better understand how China views its international relations and how to interpret the goals and strategies of the BRI.



The Communist Party of China attaches great importance to ideological guidance, to consistency in policies, and to thorough implementation. As a result, China's diplomatic actions are consistent and predictable. China has chosen its current path because it seeks a peaceful rise and wants to avoid involvement in international conflicts. China has defined its role on the Asian mainland as the engine that will drive economic development in countries along the Silk Road.

Countries in the West may not like the way China is governed, but for the sake of their own interests, they need to better understand the logic that guides China's conduct of foreign affairs. China wants to use economic cooperation to create links with other countries in the region and throughout the world. This approach to foreign affairs is very much in the best interests of Western countries and the entire world. If the major powers can establish a certain degree of mutual trust, there will be opportunities to create international relations of a new sort. This would facilitate the achievement of regional peace and development.

However, Western countries have their own ways of thinking and their own frameworks for observing the world. They generally interpret Silk Road diplomacy and the rise of China as threats to their interests. Herein lies the problem: If China and the West are too far apart in their ideas and in their interpretations of diplomatic behavior, conflict could occur.

The noted political scholar Graham Allison (2017) analyzed the wars between Athens and Sparta in ancient Greece and concluded that structural stress between a rising power and a ruling power easily leads to military conflict, which he called "Thucydides's Trap." In the face of China's growing political, economic, and military power, the attitude of the US toward China is changing. It now sees China as a strategic competitor, and therefore regards the BRI as China's way of projecting its power beyond its own borders and an attempt to rope neighboring regions into its sphere of influence. The US does not believe China currently has any intention to intervene in the affairs of neighboring countries, but it does worry if China has this capability in the future, Beijing might act upon it at any time.

President Xi is aware that the West is worried about China's rise. When he visited the US in 2015, he stressed that there is no Thucydides's Trap at issue because China will not seek hegemony regardless of its power (Xi, 2015). During a meeting with President Donald Trump in April 2017, President Xi said that China "will not take the old path of big powers which seek hegemony once they grow strong." On the contrary, it is willing to work with the US to safeguard world peace, stability, and prosperity (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, 2017). In late September 2018, with trade tensions between China and the US running high, China's Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi clearly stated at the US Council on Foreign Relations:

China will not repeat the old practice of a strong country seeking hegemony. I do not think China will become the United States, and China will not challenge the United States. Still less will China take the place of the United States. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018)

He emphasized that China is going to take the path of peaceful development, not the old Western path of imperialism.

That is why it is so important to have dialogue mechanism between leaders and other officials at all levels in different countries. The main way to resolve misunderstandings is to use multilateral mechanisms to give affected nations a chance to participate. Good-intentioned ideas are no guarantee of international security. The only way to maintain regional and world peace is for major powers to establish effective communication channels and conflict management mechanisms.

The ongoing process of globalization has brought a succession of international regimes into existence over the past several decades. These multilateral regimes, whether their focus is economic matters or security, are very helpful in advancing the common interests of their member nations, and in defusing any disputes among them. For example, if there had been no multinational regimes like the G20, EU, or IMF at the time of the 2008 global financial tsunami, the global financial system would have collapsed. Similarly, in order to develop the BRI, China has established the AIIB, which has several dozen member nations. The US and Japan ought to join this Bank, as well, because doing so would reduce needless misunderstandings.

Humans repeat past mistakes, to be sure, but we also have the ability for self-criticism and self-improvement. As the number of multilateral economic and security regimes grows larger and larger, the possibility of military conflict breaking out between different countries diminishes considerably. Since China is determined not to fall into the trap of a strong country seeking hegemony, it should promote the establishment of, and participation in, more multilateral economic and security regimes in the region along the Silk Road, and invite stakeholders to join. These regimes should not reject specified nations. And the members should respect each other's interests. That is the only way China's Silk Road diplomacy can ease the concerns of other countries and achieve the goal of benefitting all parties.

### Conclusion

As discussed earlier, there are different evaluations of China's Silk Road diplomacy. Although these evaluations reflect the interests of various nations, at a deeper level the reason for the differences is that many countries lack an understanding of Beijing's way of thinking. They are unable to frame issues the same way Chinese leaders do in making a judgment as to whether the BRI is really as good as Beijing describes it, or whether China is attempting to establish regional hegemony or a tribute system.

Since the beginning of reform and opening to the outside world, it has been very difficult, from within existing realist approach, to fully understand at a glance the foreign policy path that China has taken. But in fact, it is only by looking at the worldview and value systems of Chinese leaders that one can judge its strategic agenda. Earlier we analyzed how China defines its role on the Asian mainland, in hopes of slightly reducing the misperceptions in Western societies about China's diplomatic intentions.

The BRI has already become an important foreign economic policy for China, and it will have a long-term impact on geopolitics and the regional economy. For this policy to succeed, it must meet a number of conditions, one of which is that it is essential to have participation by developed countries, because they have the capital, technology, and political influence. If this policy fails, it will not just be a setback for China, but also for the many countries along the Silk Road who will miss out on the opportunity for economic development, which will in turn affect regional stability.

Therefore, in the interests of regional stability and prosperity, it is essential to get even more countries to participate in the BRI and its related projects. However, getting countries to overcome prejudices and cooperate hand-in-hand is not only a challenge for Beijing, it is also a test for the political wisdom of Western countries.

### References

- Allison, G. (2017). *Destined for war: Can America and China escaped for Thucydides's Trap?* London: Scribe Publications.
- Council on Foreign Relations. (2018, September 28). Retrieved September 30, 2018, from <https://www.cfr.org/event/conversation-wang-yi>

- Crabtree, J. (2018, February 20). *China is puming cash into Pakistan, but that might not convince other investors*. Retrieved March 6, 2018, from <https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/19/china-and-pakistans-belt-and-road-plan-might-not-convince-other-investors.html>
- Deng, X. (1982, August 21). China's foreign policy. *The Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Vol. 2). Retrieved March 11, 2018, from <https://dengxiaopingworks.wordpress.com/2013/02/25/chinas-foreign-policy/>
- Deng, X. (1990a, December 24). Seize the opportunity to develop the economy. *The Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Vol. 3). Retrieved March 11, 2018, from <https://dengxiaopingworks.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/seize-the-opportunity-to-develop-the-economy/>
- Deng, X. (1990b, March 3). *The international situation and economic problems*. Retrieved March 11, 2018, from <https://dengxiaopingworks.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/the-international-situation-and-economic-problems/>
- Goldstein, J., & Keohane, R. O. (Eds.). (1993). Ideas and foreign policy: An analytical framework. In *Ideas & foreign policy: Beliefs, institutions, and political change* (pp. 3-8). Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Jervis, R. (1985). Perceiving and coping with threat. In R. Jervis, R. N. Lebow, and J. G. Stein (Eds.), *Psychology & deterrence* (pp. 13-33). Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Kowert, P., & Legro, J. (1996). Norms, identity, and their limits: A theoretical reprise. In P. J. Katzenstein (Ed.), *The culture of national security: Norms and identity in world politics* (p. 462). New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press.
- Kuhn, T. (1970). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Leng, R., & Wang, Z. (2004). *Deng Xiaoping nian pu: 1975-1997* (Vol. 2). Beijing: Zhong Gong Zhong Yang Wen Xian Yan Jiu Shih.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. (2013, March 19). *President Xi Jinping gives joint interview to media from Bricks Countries*. Retrieved March 6, 2018, from [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/t1023070.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1023070.shtml)
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China. (2017, April 8). Retrieved from [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/xjpdfjxgswfbmgfldjxzmymshw/t1453022.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpdfjxgswfbmgfldjxzmymshw/t1453022.shtml)
- Parker, G. (2018, January 31). May resists pressure to endorse China's "new silk road" project. *Financial Times*. Retrieved March 6, 2018, from <https://www.ft.com/content/3e79ae14-0681-11e8-9650-9c0ad2d7c5b5>
- Strong, M. (2018, February 18). German foreign minister slams China's "One Belt, One Road". *Taiwan News*. Retrieved March 6, 2018, from Taiwan News: <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3366492>
- The State Council, the People's Republic of China. (2015a, March 30). *Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative*. Retrieved March 11, 2018, from [http://english.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content\\_281475080249035.htm](http://english.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm)
- The State Council, the People's Republic of China. (2015b, March 30). *Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative*. Retrieved March 6, 2018, from [http://english.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content\\_281475080249035.htm](http://english.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm)
- Wang, Y. (2015, March 8). *Foreign Minister Wang Yi meets the press*. Retrieved March 11, 2018, from [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1243662.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1243662.shtml)
- Wendt, A. (1992, Spring). Anarchy is what states make of it: The social construction of power politics. *International Organization*, 46(2), 391-425.
- Xi, J. (2015, September 24). *Full text of Xi Jinping's speech on China-U.S. relations in Seattle*. Retrieved from [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-09/24/c\\_134653326.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-09/24/c_134653326.htm)
- Xinhua. (2013, March 17). *Xi vows to press ahead with "Chinese dream"*. Retrieved March 7, 2018, from [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013npc/2013-03/17/content\\_16314303.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013npc/2013-03/17/content_16314303.htm)
- Xinhua. (2016, March 8). *China's Belt and Road Initiative not expansionism: FM*. Retrieved March 11, 2018, from [http://english.gov.cn/news/top\\_news/2016/03/08/content\\_281475303585446.htm](http://english.gov.cn/news/top_news/2016/03/08/content_281475303585446.htm)
- Xinhua. (2017, December 5). *Commentary: China willing to share, but not to export Chinese model*. Retrieved March 11, 2018, from <http://en.people.cn/n3/2017/1205/c90000-9300399.html>