

Wei Liu
Editor

China's Belt and Road Initiatives

Economic Geography Reformation

With Contributed by Jianxiong Ge, Angang Hu, Yifu Lin,
Liang Qiao



Editor
Wei Liu
Guangming Daily
Dongcheng, Beijing
China

Translated by Jun He and Jia Lao

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Preface

Last July, coordinated by Guangming Daily's Shanghai bureau, Guangming Daily's Forum Edition (hereinafter referred to as the Forum Edition) and Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press co-hosted the Guangming Yuanji Forum. Invited to speak at the first lecture were Mr. Ji Weidong, Dean of SJTU's Law School and Mr. Cheng Zhaoqi, Director of SJTU's Tokyo Trial Research Center. Both spoke on the trial of the century under the title *The Tokyo Trial is a Civilized One*. After publication of the Forum Edition, the articles were then reprinted by many websites and were well received.

Earlier this year, while in Shanghai for business, I revisited the SJTU Press and consulted with them on the future development of Guangming Yuanji Forum and profound cooperation on publication. Soon afterwards, Ms. Liu Peiying, the standing vice editor-in-chief telephoned Ms. Liu Qian, editor-in-chief of the Forum Edition, to say that they had read the scholars' speeches on the Belt and Road on the Guangming Forum and appreciated the articles, so the SJTU Press suggested that they should compile these speeches into a book and publish it. After much deliberation, we gladly agreed.

The SJTU Press (to be referred to as the Press) is always good at approaching critical subjects of social life, science and culture. For example, *The International Military Tribunal for the Far East: A Trial Record* and the 50 volumes of *Evidence and Documents from the International Military Tribunal for the Far East*, both are national projects assigned to the Press. Last year, they designed and published *Xi Jinping: Wit and Vision*. This brilliant book then became a best-seller and was well received by the public. And this time, visionary as they are, the Press has chosen the Belt and Road series on the Forum Edition.

The Belt and Road initiative is a strategic conception put forth by President Xi Jinping. And it bears realistic significance that is vital to the great revival of the Chinese nation. This conception was well received as soon as it is proposed. Professor Liang Qiao of National Defence University of People's Liberation Army described it as: "By far the best strategy that matches China's superpower status." And Prof. Angang Hu of Tsinghua University wrote: "Economically speaking, the Belt and Road initiative is a revolution of gigantic scale that will recreate economic

geography of China and the world. From a diplomatic point of view, it will give rise to an era of win-win cooperation”. When interviewing Prof. Angang Hu, a Korean reporter pointed out that some saw the proposal as the Chinese version of the Marshall Plan, to which the professor replied: “The Belt and Road initiative can be called the China Plan or the Xi Jinping Plan but it is definitely not the Marshall Plan, for the latter only benefited developed countries whereas the Belt and the Road mainly focuses on the developing world with the developed included as well. It is open to all nations with a spirit of mutual benefit and win-win”.

Guangming Daily is a national newspaper run and managed by the CCCPC. Since its establishment in June 1949, the newspaper has been operating on the principle that we are a newspaper whose readers are mainly intellectuals, we report news of the intellectual world and print stories of experts and scholars. The Forum, established in 2006, is one of our star columns. It is a one-page column published once a week, running exclusively speeches and academic lectures of experts and scholars. The column actually benefits from *Guangming Daily*'s good reputation because every time an editor asks a prominent scholar to give a speech on a certain subject they all say yes with delight. Or when an editor comes across information about a scholar's speech and wants to print it on the newspaper they'd usually get the approval with just a phone call or an email. The more prominent a scholar is, the more serious his or her attitude is towards academics. I once saw this speech by Tang Min and Yifu Lin on the Belt and Road and they had some really fresh ideas. Tang Min indicates that there are huge differences in economy, politics, law and society among countries along the Belt and Road regions and that means great risks. There is also the possibility of strategic conflicts between superpowers caused by challenging current international order. The handling of said issues is of vital importance. Yifu Lin, on the other hand, thinks the Belt and Road initiative offers a new model of development and cooperation based on construction of infrastructure and industrial transfer therefore has considerable significance to global development. Tan Min, whom I've had the privilege studying within the Tsinghua Harvard class, is a well-known economist and a State Department Counselor. So, I called Tang Min and asked him for a contribution. He sent me the revised draft the next morning. When I asked Yifu Lin before and Angang Hu this time they sent me emails en route, discussing in a serious manner about revising a certain paragraph, sometimes even for a single word.

Zhang Yuanji was one of the founders of the publishing industry in modern China, the first Dean of the Translation Academy of Nanyang College, presently known as the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press. He was also the Founder of the Commercial Press and the second President of SJTU. On 15 December 2007, *Guangming Daily* published an article titled *Zhang Yuanji: Life and Struggles of a Publisher*, which was a long report on this intellectual giant. Of course, the newspaper has done coverage of Zhang Yuanji before and there's more to come since.

In fact, there is a historical origin for *Guangming Daily* and SJTU's co-hosting the Guangming Yuanji Forum.

The Japanese invasion of China came with not only ruthless military strikes but also an elimination of Chinese culture. In 1932, after Japanese planes bombed the Commercial Press headquarters and Oriental Library, a total of some 460,000 books, including countless rare or unique copies, were burnt to ashes. This war crime against China on Japan's part infuriated millions and broke their hearts. So, eighty years later, when the Guangming Yuanji Forum opens with a lecture on the Tokyo Trial with successors of Zhang Yuanji testifying against Japanese invaders it can be viewed as a memorial of Mr. Zhang.

As early as the founding of the People's Republic of China, leaders of New China had invited Zhang Yuanji to Beijing for the first-ever Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. On September 24, the eve of the conference, Xie Gongwang, a correspondent with *Guangming Daily* paid a special visit to Zhang Yuanji, asking about his personal story as well as his opinion on the new government. It was then that Zhang Yuanji gave Xie Gongwang three copies respectively of *Plain Words*, *New Proverbs on Family Management* and *Songs of Extraordinary Women*, while telling him that, if the interview was to be printed, the draft must be presented to him for approval. This direct contact with *Guangming Daily* was recorded in Zhang Yuanji's personal journal.

This co-publication by *Guangming Daily* and SJTU is a demonstration of perspectives of a number of Chinese intellectuals. I believe the book will generate a benign social impact.

Not only will the Belt and Road initiative introduce to the world the traditional Chinese idea of harmony, but also the economic concept of mutual benefit and win-win, which also has its roots in Chinese traditions.

How will the Belt and Road initiative carry out? How will hundreds of countries in the region respond? What influence will it have on global politics and economy? You, dear reader, will know what scholars and experts think when you open this book.

Dongcheng, Beijing, China
August 2015

Wei Liu
Vice Editor-in-Chief
Guangming Daily

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Contributors

Jianhua Fan President of Yunnan Federation of Social Science Circles.

Jianxiong Ge Member of the 12th CPPCC Standing Committee, Professor of Fudan University.

Shiyuan Hao Assistant to the President, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Angang Hu Renowned Economist, Dean of the National Research Institute of Tsinghua University.

Wang Jie Professor and doctoral supervisor at the Transportation Management College of Dalian Maritime University.

Yifu Lin Renowned Economist, Former Chief Economist and Senior Vice President of the World Bank.

Liang Qiao Professor at National Defence University, Air Vice Marshal, China Air Force.

Zhenyuan Qu President of China Association of Higher Education.

Min Tang Deputy Secretary General of China Development Research Foundation, Counselor of the State Council.

Lixin Wu Professor at Ocean University of China, Academician at the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Wenbin Xia Deputy Director of CCP Committee of Shihezi University, Director of the Collaborative Innovation Center of Central Asian Civilization and Westward Opening.

Peisheng Yao Former China's ambassador successively to Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine.

Wei Zhao Professor and doctoral supervisor at the Law School of Dalian Maritime University.

Summary

The construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Twenty-first Century Maritime Silk Road (hereinafter referred to as the Belt and Road) is a significant strategic conception put forth by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, led by General Secretary Xi Jinping, in order to further improve China's economic openness. This book was compiled from a series of lectures on the Belt and Road, originally released on the *Guangming Daily's* "Guangming Forum" (hereinafter referred to as the Forum). A total of thirteen well-known scholars and experts, including Jianxiong Ge, Angang Hu, Yifu Lin and Liang Qiao, co-wrote this book, which offers a comprehensive interpretation of the Belt and Road strategy and its influence from perspectives of politics, history, economy, military, diplomacy, culture, technology and law.

The Silk Road: Historical Geographic Background and Outlooks



Jianxiong Ge

The Origin of the Silk Road Concept

Speaking of the Silk Road, we should first understand its historical facts, and why such a road existed in the first place, which was closely related to the historical conditions at that time. Marxism historical materialism has a basic idea, that all kinds of cultures or thoughts, including religion, politics or scientific activities, are all based on the daily lives of the contemporary people, that is, the material conditions. Especially at the time of low productivity and technologies, all activities were subject to serious geographical constraints. Therefore, we must understand the geographical environment at that time, not only the natural one, but also the cultural one.

It is generally understood that the Silk Road started from Luoyang and Chang'an of ancient China, went all the way through the Hexi Corridor to its terminal of Dunhuang before trifurcating: the north route to the Tianshan Mountains and Urumqi; the middle route from Turpan to the west, through the southern edge of Xinjiang, Hotan to Central Asia, then through Central Asia to Persia (Iran) and finally to Europe; and the south route along the Pamir plateau today into Pakistan and India. Some scholars in China transplanted the Silk Road concept onto other routes, such as the "Southwest Silk Road", "Southern Silk Road", "Northern Silk Road", "Grassland Silk Road", etc., without being widely accepted. Now the question is, why are these routes put on the name Silk Road? How did such a name come about? Many people thought this concept comes from ancient China, and many got it confused. The Silk Road we talk about now is not just any road

J. Ge (✉)

Fudan University, Shanghai, China

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or traffic route, but a specific concept. Who coined this term? Ferdinand von Richthofen, a German geographer. He studied the geography Central Asia and the western part of China in the 1860s, for about three years, and studied historical records in China. After going back to Germany, he published his research, where he proposed that in the 2nd century AD, there was a business route from Luoyang and Chang'an to Samarkand in Central Asia, and the main business was silk, sent from China to Central Asia, West Asia, and finally Europe. Since silk was the main business and of the greatest impact, so he named the route Silk Road. Therefore, you won't see Silk Road mentioned anywhere in *The Twenty-Four Histories*, *Siku Quanshu* or any book about China before 1870.

The Silk Road Was Paved by People of Multiple Nations

Who is this way to open it? In March 2015, the National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China described it well in its vision, "More than two millennia ago, the diligent and courageous people of Eurasia explored and opened up several routes of trade and cultural exchanges that linked the major civilizations of Asia, Europe and Africa, collectively called the Silk Road by later generations. It contributed greatly to the prosperity and development of the countries along the Silk Road. Symbolizing communication and cooperation between the East and the West, the Silk Road Spirit is a historic and cultural heritage shared by all countries around the world." Numerous evidence has proven that the road exists since long ago. In the Tomb of Fu Hao of the Shang Dynasty found a number of jade artifacts, which have been identified as Hetian jade and Kunlun jade. The fact that they are found in tombs of the Shang Dynasty shows that such a road existed at that time (17th century BC to 11th century BC). Somebody shipped the jade to today's Henan Province three thousand years ago—how would that be possible without a road? There are even earlier evidences that this road has long existed. Taking a different perspective, present-day Xinjiang was influenced not only by the Central Plain, but also by the West. Ancient corpses found in Xinjiang was obvious Caucasian, and some of those were certainly from Europe. As Mr. Ji Xianlin once said, Central Asia was at the crossroad of cultural exchange of the East and the West. There must have been a road—whether it was natural or paved by the ancient—the road must have existed.

"2nd century AD", as mentioned by Richthofen, was the time that Zhang Qian of the Han Dynasty went on a mission to the Western Regions. Yet his journey was not to exchange goods, or to export Chinese silk, or to do foreign trade, but for political and military purposes. Before his journey, the Huns was a huge threat to the Han Dynasty. When the Western Han Dynasty was founded, the Huns can even

threaten Chang'an, its capital. As its strength recovered, especially at the time of Emperor Wu, the Han Dynasty finally had the ability to launch a comprehensive counterattack against the Huns. However, facing the cavalry-based Huns with great mobility and agility, the Han Dynasty struggled to defend the long border from Liaodong Peninsula to the west bank of Yellow River. So Emperor Wu wanted to completely destroy the Huns' effectives. He received information that Yuezhi, one of the two peoples originally living in Qilian Mountains, under the oppression of the Huns, was forced to move to today's Afghanistan, known as Daxia. Knowing the running feud between Daxia and the Huns, Emperor Wu wanted to set up an alliance with Daxia so that they would attack the Huns from the west and the Han Dynasty attack from the east. Emperor Wu recruited messengers to go to the Western Regions on behalf of the court, and Zhang Qian applied. Zhang Qian was captured by the Huns just stepping out of Han's control, and detained for 10 years. But he never forgot his mission. Getting a chance to escape, he did not flee back to his hometown, the Han Dynasty, but continued his mission and finally arrived at Daxia. Yet neither his political nor his military mission was accomplished. The king of Daxia was enjoying himself with bigger territory and stronger nation than he had at Qilian mountain, and wasn't willing to start a war with the Huns. *Records of the Grand Historian* described the mission of Zhang Qian "no point" which later became the Chinese idiom "不得要领". With "no point" staying there, Zhang Qian headed back, and was detained again by the Huns on his way. This time he quickly escaped and returned to the Han Dynasty. Although he did not complete Emperor Wu's mission, his briefing and experience intrigued great interest of the Emperor. At that time, the military situation had undergone drastic changes. Han Dynasty had defeated the Huns, the door to the Western Regions had been opened and the Hexi Corridor was under the control of the Han Dynasty. It was possible to travel from Chang'an through the Hexi Corridor and go directly to the Western Regions. So, Zhang Qian took a second mission. This time he had a mighty troop of hundreds of people, as he knew it would be impossible to go to those countries all by himself. He sent his deputies to various countries with numerous gifts. In his era, Emperor Wu deemed himself as the almighty ruler of the world, so he wanted to attract other people to the Central Plains. Among the gifts there was silk, which was relatively portable. Exotic to the Western Regions, silk was exclusively produced in the Han Dynasty. Yet the silk was not for trading, but as a reward. As Zhang Qian and his deputies travelled, a large number of Central Asian countries and local people were aware of the beauty and preciousness of silk, which then expanded silk trading to Central Asia and West Asia through merchants. That is why Richthofen called it the Silk Road.



A statue of Zhang Qian as the envoy to Central Asia

Since then, the Emperor of Han sent more messengers to the Western Regions, and some of them misappropriated those gifts—a free gift from Han’s treasury became their own commodity for profit, which, from an objective perspective, expanded the trade. Yet those actions would not amount for a Silk Road. The main drive was the strong demand for this rarity from Central Asia, Persia and the Roman Empire. Good silk products were exclusively from Han, and rich Romans had nowhere else to get it. Silk clothing and silk ornaments were symbols of extraordinary wealth. The Romans had a tradition for business, so the strong demand matched up with the purchasing power, giving a strong drive to this route of trade. Therefore, it was not built or intentionally driven by the Han Dynasty—it was not China that actively exported silks. People along the Silk Road also lacked commercial exchange.

External Factors to Consider When Building the Silk Road

If we want to build the Belt and Road today, some external factors must be considered. For example, do Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have the same enthusiasm, the same desire and the same interest as China do? A historical Silk Road doesn’t mean we can build such a route today or it would be possible to build a Silk Road economic belt. That would be a misreading of the history. Our situation today is completely different. China has always considered itself to be “the center of world” and there is no demand to anybody else. But that’s not the case today. Historically China was not actively making use of the Silk Road, or gaining major benefits from

maritime trading. If we are to build the Belt and Road today, we cannot make such ineffective moves. We have to consider how to invite positive response and sustained motivations.

For example, a few years ago we signed an agreement with Kazakhstan to establish a Sino-Kazakhstan Trade City. China finished our side, yet there was literally no action from Kazakhstan. Why? They had their own considerations. Kyrgyzstan faced a similar situation. From the Kashi to the border, the elevation goes up to 3400 m—it snows in autumn time. Going past the border, there is a mountainous depopulated area of more than 100 km. How can they trade with China? I went there in 2003, and we saw trailer trucks, all full of home appliances, or even furniture—those countries would buy whatever China sent, but the trucks all came back empty. That was not a trade. Even if Kazakhstan is rich in cotton, but they can sell to whoever offer the highest price, not necessarily to China. They have oil and gas, but those are transported through pipelines. There are minerals, but not for border trading. Some measures have to be taken to motivate trading. In the Boao Forum, President Xi Jinping empathized mutually beneficial win-win situation and the establishment of a community of shared interests. How to create the demand from other countries? That's not easy. Take Pakistan. President Xi went there and we signed many contracts, such as nuclear power plants, which was reported to be over USD15 billion. But if their own economy stays weak for a long time, can this investment on infrastructure sustain? The economic belt cannot be a unilateral thing, but has to be bilateral or multilateral. Simply quoting the Silk Road in the history does not help us building it.

Often Broken, the Silk Road Depends on the Strength of China

The Silk Road is not always unimpeded, or even more often blocked. It only works when the regime on Central Plains firmly controls Central Asia, otherwise it would be more of a regional or local route rather than a thoroughfare between the East and the West. According to historical records, the Western Han Dynasty set up Protectorate of the Western Regions on 60 BC, covering an area of about 2 million square kilometers in present-day Xinjiang and Central Asia, which marked for the first time that Xinjiang belongs to China. But we also noted that, although the Western Han Dynasty had the sovereignty, it did not set up regular administrations such as counties or prefectures, because it was too far away from the Central Plains and too costly to administer. If the Emperor sent an official to today's Yanqi in Xinjiang (the usual headquarters of Protectorate of the Western Regions), it would be such a long trip that he might be killed on the road. There was no convenient measure of information transmissions, and it would probably be too late when the herald arrived. Therefore, the Western Han Dynasty can only be a guardian there. There were only a few thousand soldiers and a small group of officials to cover such

a vast area, and they had to farm to feed themselves. How did they rule? By the authority of the central government and the courage of the officials.

With the special geographical conditions of Xinjiang, there was no way to implement the administrative hierarchy as in the Central Plains. At first there were 36 countries, and later 50–60 countries in the West Regions. Why so many? Because many places are completely isolated oases. Seen from the plane, Xinjiang is like a big sandbox—full of the plateau, Gobi, desert, and the green or black blobs are the oases—there is water where people can grow crops and settle. Big oases can support tens of thousands of people, while small ones can only accommodate hundreds. They would be bigger or smaller countries in the ancient times. For example, Wusun, the largest country in the Western Regions, had 300,000 people, while the smallest country had only 100 people. Those countries were far apart with depopulated areas in between. If dispute arose, the administration can only mediate, or command the forces around. When natural disasters hit, they were on their own and could not rely on the central government. Only such a loose administration was possible, which might work when things went well, yet unsustainable if the central government was weak or the officials were incompetent. At the end of the Western Han Dynasty, Wang Mang seized the throne and the Protectorate was dismissed. After the establishment of the Eastern Han Dynasty and the crackdown of internal separatist forces, another Protectorate of the Western Regions was set up, but with a different name (Chief Official of the Western Regions). In the 200 years of the Eastern Han Dynasty, the prefectural government of the Western Regions was set up and dismissed for three times, and only intermittent afterwards.

The route was working when the Western Regions was in the control of the Han Dynasty, and broken when it wasn't. The Silk Road, as defined by Richthofen, didn't last the entire time of the Western and Eastern Han Dynasty, but more specifically the time with stable regime. This is the same case after the Eastern Han Dynasty. For example, the Northern Wei Dynasty unified the north, then relocated its capital from Pingcheng to Luoyang. The Western Regions were under its control all the time, so the foreign trade was prosperous, and merchants from Daqin (the Roman Empire) can brought large amount of merchandise to China. But when there was war, not only Luoyang but the whole area along the route was in depression. The Tang Dynasty controlled Central Asia at its early establishment, and set up an administrative center—Suyab. It was an important stronghold of the Tang Dynasty in the Western Regions, as military headquarters and civil administration. With such large area under control, Tang Dynasty needed this artery for internal traffic. However, the good situation didn't last. After the An Lushan Rebellion broke out, the army moved eastwards to fight against An Lushan and Shi Siming. As the control on the Western Regions weakened, the Tibetans expanded from Tibet to Xinjiang and even seized the Hexi Corridor. Uighurs originally living in the Mongolian plateau moved westward to the Tarim River Basin, and became today's Uighurs after mixing with local people and absorbing others. Later the Tibetans withdrew from Xinjiang and Hexi Corridor, and the Arabian expansion spread Islam to Xinjiang. The Silk Road from Chang'an to Central Asia was long gone.

The Ming Dynasty set up a military fortress at Hami in their early days, but retreated to Jiayuguan at mid Ming, not even controlling today's Dunhuang and Yumen Pass.

Dominance of Maritime Transport

When it came to the 9th century, the Arabs came to Guangzhou, Quanzhou, Ningbo and Yangzhou through the sea. Formerly through the land, only silk was worth long-distance trafficking, but through the sea, although we still use the name Silk Road, silk wasn't the main merchandise. With cheaper ocean shipping, not only silk, but also porcelain as well as other goods, such as rough textiles, handicrafts, ceramics, tea or almost everything, can all be transported. The land Silk Road was in fact of no value in the Tang Dynasty. To the Song Dynasty, there was Western Xia which blocked the route, what was the benefit of going through the land as the maritime transport was sophisticated? Not to mention the Southern Song Dynasty, which only reached Qin Mountains and Huai River with the Jurchen Jin Dynasty in the north. Even in Yuan Dynasty when the route worked, present-day Xinjiang, especially the south part, was under the control of Chagatai Khanate. Admittedly transportation was more developed in the Yuan Dynasty, as both the sea route and land route worked. In addition to Marco Polo, as we all know, the Arabian Ibn Battuta also left records. We can see from their records that they came through different routes, some from the sea, some through the land. This showed that the exchange of people and merchandise was quite developed and diversified, which went beyond the traditional Silk Road. This went backwards in the Ming Dynasty, as it only controlled Jiayuguan in mid-Ming. There were Turpan and other regimes to the west, and ordinary merchants could not even go out of Jiayuguan, limiting the trade mostly within the Western Regions. It was only in Qing Dynasty, not in 1644, but as late as 1759 when Qianlong Emperor crushed the revolt to the South of Tianshan Mountains, that the regime of the Central Plains regained the control of Xinjiang, and finally established a vast unified territory of 13 million square kilometers. But by that time, most trade went through the sea, and the land route was much insignificant.

This is why President Xi called for an understanding of its duration and complexity when talking of Xinjiang issues. In fact, in the 1004 years from An Lushan Rebellion in 755 until 1759, Xinjiang was relatively independent with little control from the central government. We didn't talk much about this period and many people have misunderstandings. It was in this period that Xinjiang converted to Islam. That is why it's so complicated and different. In contrast, although Tibet only came under control as of the middle of 13th century under Yuan Dynasty, it has been kept the same way since the Manchu and Mongolian alliance came into power. Xinjiang is indeed special and complicated in this sense. As we are trying to build the Silk Road economic zone precisely starting from here, these situations should all be considered.

Overall Considerations on Security and National Interests

There was no international order in the ancient times, and equality between nations depended solely on strengths. To make a route work, the dominating country must have proper military and political control over it. It's not that we need to have military control over the route to build the Belt and Road, but the overall security and national interests need to be considered. Stability of the country is still crucial to the building of the Silk Road economic zone.

We must be fully prepared for lurking or existing unfavorable factors and make proper responses. For instance, Central Asia is full of former members of the Soviet Union. Given that they have become independent since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the influence from Russia is still strong. Although they have their own national languages and are trying to restore their national characteristics, the current official language is still Russian. The upper classes, including intellectuals and politicians, are mostly trained by Russia and the USSR, and many of their leaders have come into power before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Their traditional logistics and personnel relations with Russia still hold. Therefore, when it comes to Central Asia, the influence of Russia cannot be ignored. On the other hand, the United States has always had its global strategic vision. When it took military actions in Afghanistan, it rented a military airport in Kyrgyzstan. NATO's supply in Afghanistan mainly went through Uzbekistan.

From the religious point of view, it's all Islamic from Xinjiang to Turkey; from the language perspective, they all speak Turkic languages. A Uyghur person who goes from Xinjiang to Turkey may understand most of the TV programs, which helps a lot in their communication. Yet we must not forget the two trends since the 20th century: pan-Islamism which considers all Islamic countries as a community of interests, and pan-Turkism that thinks all countries speaking Turkic language should form a community. Some Westerners call this area Turkestan and Xinjiang "Eastern Turkestan". Don't we have the so-called East Turkestan in Xinjiang? In addition to Yaqub Beg's rebellion crushed by Zuo Zongtang, there was the so-called "Three Districts Revolution" in the 1940s instigated by Stalin. The result of such acts was that the three districts, namely Altai at the north of Xinjiang (then called Ashan area), as well as Yili and Tacheng, established an "East Turkistan" Islamic Republic, announced their independence and use Yining as the capital. Later, Chiang Kai-shek tried to make a deal with Stalin and asked him to withdraw the support, and finally the independence movement did not succeed. But even so, in 1962 when China was in dire difficulty, instigated by the Soviet Consulate, tens of thousands of people went across the border to USSR, which made the Yili incident and Tacheng incident. This is the background of some key areas of our economic zone.

In addition, we have conflicts with Central Asia in addition to cooperation. One important contradiction is water allocation. For example, Kazakhstan is short of water, just like Xinjiang. The lower reaches of the Yili River mainly going to Kazakhstan constitute its main source of water, yet Yili River is also an important source for northern Xinjiang. Now China is trying to guide the water to both

northern and southern Xinjiang for irrigation. The case is just the opposite for Kyrgyzstan, where the upstream Aksu river passes through. China would also raise objections if Kyrgyzstan wants to build hydropower stations. All these interests need to be coordinated.

In a broader context, we need to consider security for the maritime Silk Road also. Take Malacca Strait, our ideal is to build a route, including railways, highways, oil and gas pipelines, from Pakistan's Guadalan port to Kashgar of Xinjiang, then some of the cargo would no longer need to go by the Malacca Strait. Surely this is good, but if you look at the map, next to this route is Taliban. Pakistan's northern border to Afghanistan is full of refugee camps of Afghans, where Talibanists are impossible to find. Osama bin Laden was hiding in Pakistan. Tribes are strong in Pakistan, where some areas out of the government's control rely on tribal elders. Although Pakistan is China's all-weather friend now, the complex international situation could go out of Pakistan's control. Another big obstacle is the road to southern Xinjiang, which requires constant maintenance. It would be another headache for the future. Or take Myanmar: we had hoped that we could use the harbor of Myanmar and go through oil and gas pipelines and land routes to Yunnan, so that we could open up a new path in the southwest. But we have to pay attention to the political situation in Myanmar. The original investment on hydro-power stations has been on hold—can it be restored? Can we continue mining copper there? Can the safety of established oil and gas pipelines be ensured? Can we control it? The former President of Sri Lanka gave President Xi such a warm welcome that China promised to invest USD15 billion to build a port, then the new president came and stopped it. Although he promised that this was not against China, but the variable is always there. To build the Maritime Silk Road, places like the Suez Canal and Panama Canal could all become our soft spots.

One of the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" passed by the Bandung Conference is called "Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs". I think this was very positive when China proposed this, because at that time China's main threat was that others would interfere in China's internal affairs, and China was struggling to eliminate external impacts. China declared that dual nationality would not be recognized in 1950s, mainly to eliminate the concerns of Chinese in Southeast Asian countries, such as Indonesia. There were rumors that all Chinese there were "Fifth Column", so China declared that they had to either naturalize or retain Chinese nationality, and most people chose to naturalize. Today, if the internal changes in other countries are not good for China's development or even damage our interests, what should China do? Shall we leave it completely or actively influence it? This involves our judgment and on the trends of major international issues and control of the situation.

How can China ensure the safety of oversea investments of our enterprises? Now the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank would be a good move. Some laymen said some nonsense that this was to challenge the World Bank, or to build a monetary fund led by China. We want to promote our high-speed rail, but have we done it? Not yet. There are many reasons. Vietnam was ready, but had domestic oppositions. Thailand is also hesitant, with their realistic consideration. Do they

really need so many trains of such high speed, with only a small population? Also, who pays for it? Laos is certainly to build the rails, but it's neither economical nor safe for China to pay for the whole thing. In this case, it would be much safer to have the Asian investment bank invest in ports and railways, funded by a dozen of countries. If we can bring in the US, then it would be even safer with the majority of the World Bank here. This is a practical need. Another example is that, the US engages private security companies, such as Blackwater, to ensure the safety of personnel and properties. On the contrary, it won't work if China wants to send armed police to other countries. Some of these private guards have just retired or even quitted from troops, yet the company was private. They are similar to soldiers, or even more skilled. This might be a solution.

All in all, facing these problems, we must think ahead on how to ensure the security of the Belt and Road. Our foreign policy, especially some strategies needs to farsighted.

We have had many failures in foreign assistance projects which we should learn a lesson from. Take Tanzania-Zambia Railway, our largest project before the reform and opening up. It was Niger that proposed this railway. Surely, we should support them, but the question was why they wanted it. The fundamental reason was that the cooper in Zambia was exported through ports of South Africa, and this was the best and shortest route. But because of the apartheid, there was an economic sanction and South Africa was no longer viable. Consequently, we had to make a detour of more than 1000 km to Tanzania, and go to the sea through Dar es Salaam, so the main purpose was to help Zambia export their copper. If this condition changed, what's the benefit of this railway, no matter how well it was built? Sure enough, South Africa soon ended apartheid, economic sanctions were lifted, and Zambia's copper went once again through South Africa. How could they make use of this 1000-km railway? For tourism, it was through tropical jungle and there weren't many tourists. Also, it didn't make sense for tourists to take a long detour as it was convenient to go along the coast by air or car. In no conditions, there are not so many tourists, and tourists do not need to bypass so far. I was there in 2006 and learned that the railway only run four slow trains every week, which often got cancelled or delayed. We must be more cautious about such inefficient projects in the future.

China Should not Simply Adopt Western Maritime Thought

I want to eliminate a long-held misunderstanding: now we are accustomed to take the Western maritime thought, which is wrong. Western historians, philosophers and geographers all hold such a view—the ocean, representing wealth, hope and communication, is something man cannot live without. This has influenced Western philosophers, and even Karl Marx said that geographical environments build the characters of people: coastal people are open-minded and visionary, while inland people are usually narrow-minded and conservative. Is this right? The ocean in their

mind is mainly the Mediterranean, which is totally inapplicable to China. I didn't know this early on and thought they were right. Over the years, with in-depth study, I have come to the conclusion that we cannot blindly apply the experience from the special conditions of the West to China or other countries. Because there is only one Mediterranean, which is very special—it's almost an inland sea with numerous islands and gulfs, which made sailing convenient and safe even in ancient times. More importantly, a galaxy of ancient civilizations embraced the Mediterranean, Mesopotamia, Babylon, Egypt, Rome, Greece, Asia, Assyria, etc. By sailing along the Mediterranean, you can easily access heterogeneous civilizations actively exchanging. There's only one place in China similar to the Mediterranean—Bohai Bay. Unfortunately, despite similar geographical distances, the surrounding Korea and Japan don't have civilizations different from China. In the history, they had been learning from China on a lower level. Japan had copied the whole system of Tang Dynasty. It turned out that China had no incentive to expand maritime traffic. Therefore, the significance of sea for China is completely different from that of Mediterranean for Europe and North Africa.

It would only be natural that the Chinese holds a different view towards the sea. The Chinese view the world as “within the four seas”, which means the sea is the border, and there's nothing beyond. When a Chinese came to the sea, he didn't see hope, future or fortune as the Europeans did, but a dead end. It was Chang'an and Luoyang, the politically and economically developed areas, that attracted ancient Chinese. The sea only contributed fish and salt to the ancient Chinese. Sailing was actually quite developed by the end of the Western Han Dynasty, and was attached greater importance, but then it went backwards. Why? It was useless. On the other hand, China hadn't been much threatened by the sea, and it was only necessary to build a navy when there was a threat. The biggest threat was pirates until the Spaniards, the Portuguese and the Dutch came. Hence the Chinese deemed the sea neither as a threat requiring much defense, nor as a treasure generating much benefit.

Ancient Maritime Silk Road Built by the Arabs

Because of this, the ancient Maritime Silk Road was not built by or controlled by China. Who did it? The Arabs. Based on the interests of trade, they found that the land route was blocked and too expensive, but sailing was feasible as they had leading technologies for that. So, they sailed to Guangzhou, Quanzhou, Ningbo, Yangzhou, etc. In the late Tang Dynasty, there were tens of thousands of Arab businessmen and family members in Guangzhou, forming their own communities, known as “Foreign Square” (Fan Fang), which had their own responsible people, known as “Foreign Lead” (Fan Zhang). We can still see the cemetery of Arabs in Quanzhou, with blessings of God written in Arabic, as well as relics of mosques. In the Southern Song Dynasty, PU Shougeng, the executive in charge of Quanzhou's customs and foreign trade, was found to be a descendant of the Arabs. Were there any Chinese people going the other way to trade there? Not that we know of.

The only thing we now know is that in 751 AD, Gao Xianzhi, leading tens of thousands of troops from the Tang Dynasty, attacked Chach (present-day Tashkent in Uzbekistan), when they unexpectedly encountered army from the Abbasid Dynasty. The Tang army was completely defeated and mostly captured. The captives were sent to Baghdad, where the papermaking techniques of China was disseminated by some craftsmen to the Arabs and later to Europe. There was one secretary in the troop name Du Huan, who stayed in Baghdad for 9 years before returning to Tang Dynasty on an Arabian ship. He wrote his experience in about 900 words, from which we learned about the Arabs now. It was the first time that a Chinese had first-hand description on the Arab and Islam world. Recently, an epitaph was found in Xi'an, which said that a eunuch was sent in the late Tang Dynasty to the Arab world, the Tazi. But those were not normal trade. Granted trading was prosperous in the Tang Dynasty—it was all foreigners coming to China. The governments of Tang and Song dynasty were happy just to collect taxes. There are many wrecks in the South China Sea, but as far as I know, most are foreign ships coming to buy stuff, not China's active export. Even in more recent era, the Spaniards, the Portuguese and the Dutch came to trade in the Philippines, Taiwan and Penghu area, but there was no official trading from China. There were some smugglers or entitled businessmen, but totally incomparable to foreign traders. This is something we need to clarify.

Ancient Chinese Governments Never Focused on Economic Benefits in Foreign Affairs

One more thing we want to clarify—what shall we say about the “Treasure voyage” by Zheng He? Is that a paradigm for us to build the Maritime Silk Road today? Objectively speaking, Zheng He's purpose was neither to trade nor to establish a colony, but to promote the emperor's prestige. After the establishment of the Ming Dynasty, the Emperor Yongle felt that it was a shame that less foreigners were coming to China than in the Yuan Dynasty. He wanted to tell them that a strong Ming Dynasty had been established. Another point, more discreetly, was that Emperor Yongle came into power by deposing his nephew with conspiracy, and he would like to attract foreign tribute through such promotion, thereby reinforcing his political legitimacy. He wanted to be the real king, not only supported domestically, but also worshiped by all the countries. That was why he was willing to send Zheng at any expense, not only once, but for seven times. Once arriving at a country or region, the standard formalities of Zheng He were the following: first blast the gun, convene the local monarch or chief with local people, then read the edict announcing the establishment of the Ming Dynasty and the benefit it would give, and encourage local people to come and tribute. If they conceded, he would give out rewards, like gold, silver or silk. Indeed, there were people coming to China, bringing some local products, including spices, rare animals, etc. There was a giraffe from Africa, and reportedly lions and unicorn (could be an elk). From then

on, there were elephants in the palace of the Ming or even Qing Dynasty. We didn't see any trade along the route that Zheng He explored. How could such voyages sustain? It was Liang Qichao who first found out his voyages and acclaimed him on the sailing techniques. Apart from some folk stories, the Ming dynasty, notably the ministers, all opposed such voyages. Once Emperor Xuande wanted to see the records of the voyages, and the ministers panicked and claimed them lost, and secretly destroyed them all. Why? They feared that the Emperor might want to do it again, but the treasury had no money for such activities. If we compare him to Columbus, we'll see that although his fleet was no comparison to Zheng He's and he did it later, he was welcomed by the whole city as a hero when he went back to Spain. They all knew that he brought practical benefits, and found new routes where colonies could be established. Zheng He did not do that, and his techniques might as well been exaggerated. According to Prof. Yang You of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Arabs had reached all the places that Zheng He arrived at. I have noticed the same thing and that was true. Zheng He himself was an descendant of the Arabs with a family name of "Ma". People in his father's generation had been to Mecca for pilgrimage. In the early years of the Ming Dynasty, there were many Arabs remained in China, and records clearly showed that he brought foreign sailors in his voyages. From the records of Zheng He, he used the concept of "needle route" in the maps which came from the Arabs, and used the stars to navigate as invented by the Arabs. Although the ancient Chinese had compass, it was used only locally and totally useless in the sea. If China wants to build the Maritime Silk Road now, there's a lot of innovation and learnings to do.



A miniature of Zheng He's treasure ship