

# Humanitarian Cooperation Within the Framework of the “One Belt, One Road” PRC Initiative

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*Abstract*—The relevance of the problem being studied is due to the need for a scientific analysis of the role of humanitarian cooperation in the “One Belt, One Road” project with regard to the increasing attention of its participants to cultural and humanitarian initiatives. The “One Belt, One Road” project is an original and unique one combining the format of multilateral and bilateral cooperation. The humanitarian cooperation within the framework of the project was considered by the authors mainly on the example of bilateral relations between the PRC and the Russian Federation, taking into account the new institutions, forms, and documents that emerged due to the large-scale “One Belt, One Road” project. The paper analyzes such areas as information and media, youth exchanges, intercultural dialogue, tourism, etc.

Work with the narrative and documentary material of the study was carried out on the basis of various general scientific methods, according to the interdisciplinary nature of the topic. As the main research methods, we used semantic analysis and content analysis when referring to the main documents regulating the functioning of the “One Belt, One Road” project, and a systematic approach allowed us to formulate a comprehensive vision of the project in the system of modern international relations and show its role for understanding the global nature of international relations and the emergence of new leaders. Turning to the research material allowed the authors to note the special role of humanitarian interaction in international cooperation. It is obvious that humanitarian relations have an

image-forming effect, contribute to creating a welcoming atmosphere, involve the widest audience of participants in cooperation, and contribute to the institutionalization and further development of the “Belt, Road” project. In the humanitarian dimension of a large-scale project, an urgent task – to preserve the cultural identity of the project participants, which is consistent with the fundamental initiatives of the UN and UNESCO – is being realized.

The study concluded the following: despite the fact that the “One Belt, One Road” initiative was born as an international political and economic project, attention is currently being focused on cultural and humanitarian issues, which have become a new vector in the development of the “Belt-Road”. The authors also believe that the spheres of humanitarian cooperation in the “One Belt, One Road” project will develop further, enriched with new directions and forms.

*Keywords:* China, “One Belt, One Road” initiative, humanitarian cooperation, cultural exchange, mass-media, tourism

## I. INTRODUCTION

On September 7, 2013, Xi Jinping, President of the PRC, delivered a speech “Development of People’s Friendship for a Beautiful Future” at the Nazarbayev University. The PRC President called on the parties to join forces and, based on an innovative model of interaction, create the “Silk Road

Economic Corridor” in order to increase the welfare of the peoples of the region [1]. In September and October 2013, President Xi Jinping during his visits to Central and Southeast Asia put forward an initiative to jointly create the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road. In launching that initiative, China seeks to create an integrated market that would rid it of the dictates of the traditional leaders of the world market and provide fairer conditions for economic cooperation.

Over the past six years since the idea of creating the New Silk Road was put forward, the Chinese initiative has gone far beyond economic and investment cooperation. On the contrary, it can be said that the Chinese leadership is making considerable efforts to develop a universal format for comprehensive cooperation in the fields of science, culture, education, and the media. In many respects, these efforts are explained by the fact that China’s plans for cooperation in the field of politics, infrastructure, trade, and investment over time have become a part of the world community as a traditional expansion policy of a great economic power with all its costs. At the same time, it is cultural and humanitarian cooperation designed to overcome this mistrust, contribute to the destruction of stereotypes, maintain a constructive intercultural and inter-civilizational dialogue, and, ultimately, harmonize international development [2, p. 1733]. The issues of humanitarian interaction and cultural dialogue were given significant attention in the “road map” of the “Belt and Road” [3], proposed in 2015, but the conceptual design of the initiative continues to this day.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

To date, a large number of works devoted to the “One Belt, One Road” project have been published in China, but there are few studies containing an analysis of humanitarian cooperation. In the paper *The Role of Culture in the Belt and Road Strategy*, Chinese scientist Tang Renwu emphasized the importance of the project to protect China’s cultural resources and strengthen its soft power [4]. Researcher Xin Liju in her paper *Promoting Humanitarian Communication in the “One Belt, One Road”*: Difficulties and Answers noted that one of the main problems in implementing the cultural component of the project is the influence of American culture [5]. In the paper *Humanitarian Exchange in the “One Belt, One Road” Project: Significance, Practical Path, and Construction Mechanism* [6], researchers Sun Tsunliang and Li Ning focus on educational exchanges, but do not provide a complete picture of the development of humanitarian cooperation in the “One Belt, One Road” project. However, they do not give a complete picture of the development of humanitarian cooperation in the “Belt, Road” project. Compared to Chinese, Western scholars are even less exploring the problems of humanitarian cooperation in the “One Belt, One Road” project, focusing on China’s economic growth and its impact on the global economy. Among the few European scientists, we will single out a paper *Belt and Road by Ferdinand Peter*, the expert of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (England), which notes the role of the project in strengthening relations in Eurasia [7]. Interest in the political and economic aspects of the “One Belt, One Road” project also prevails in

Russian science. Among the few studies on the cultural aspect of the “Belt and Road” project, we note a paper by A.V. Lomanov, an expert at the Center for Asia-Pacific Studies, which focuses on how the “One Belt, One Road” project is used to enhance cultural influence in the world [8].

## III. RESEARCH METHODS

The methodological basis for the study was a series of political science theories. The theory of globalization and the theory of geopolitics made it possible to consider the humanitarian component of the “Belt, Road” project from the point of view of its significance for strengthening China’s leading position, including at the regional level. The civilizational theory has enabled assessment of the “Belt, Path” project significance as an inter-civilization bridge. As the main research methods, we used semantic analysis and content analysis when referring to the main documents regulating the functioning of the “One Belt, One Road” project, and a systematic approach allowed us to form a comprehensive vision of the “One Belt, One Road” project in modern international relations.

## IV. RESULTS

The concept of “Belt and Road” itself is consistently moving forward as an alternative model of co-development, where along with the economic component, social, cultural, and humanitarian aspects of interaction should be developed. As a key basis for cooperation, the PRC proceeds from the principle of interconnection of world civilizations. So, speaking at the jubilee 70th session of the UN General Assembly, Xi Jinping noted, “In the modern world, all countries are interdependent, they have a common future. We must reaffirm our commitment to the principles of the UN Charter, create a new type of international relations, the core of which will be cooperation and mutual benefit, build a community of one destiny – we still have a lot of work to do” [9]. At the same time, in recent years, the Greater China has been promoting the idea that the joint construction of “One Belt, One Road” can play a key role in the practical implementation of the main provisions of the proposed 2030 Sustainable Development Concept [10].

China has high hopes for media cooperation, which is necessary in order to achieve broad support for the Silk Road project in many countries, and significant attention in the speeches of the Heads is given to this issue. Thus, Liu Yunshan, member of the Politburo Standing Committee and the Secretariat of the Communist Party of China, urged the media of different countries to pay special attention to the “One Belt, One Road” project with the goal of creating a positive public opinion, which is so necessary for “building a green, harmonious, smart, and peaceful Silk Road” [11]. It is worth noting that recently the PRC has held a lot of press conferences within the country, as well as involving international venues (the Boao Forum for Asia, the Silk Road Forum for participating countries, etc.) for more effective development of information support for the construction of the “Belt and Road”. Presumably, including for this purpose, at the end of 2016, the CGTN network (China Global Television Network) was formed, which involved at least 70 reporter

groups around the world. It is quite difficult to estimate the total amount of expenses directed by the Chinese government to the media sector, however, according to some estimates, about 10 billion dollars are allocated annually, 7 billion of which are spent on the activities of Chinese media abroad [12, p. 265-266].

A media forum dedicated on a regular basis is devoted to issues of cooperation in the media sphere. For example, such an event was held in Beijing on July 26, 2016. Its main goal was to deepen the understanding of the Chinese initiative of the New Silk Road. Li Keqiang, Premier of the State Council, stated at this forum that the “One Belt, One Road” project contributes to the economic prosperity of the countries participating in it, as well as the exchange between different civilizations and the peaceful coexistence of the peoples of the world [13]. The forum examined new opportunities for cooperation in industry, finance, as well as tourism and the media. Particular attention was then paid to the issue of media cooperation in the framework of reporting on the implementation of the New Silk Road project. This event also found resonance among the Russian side: at the opening ceremony, A. Volin, Deputy Minister of Communications and Mass Media, noted, “The media can actively contribute to the development of cooperation in the field of economy, investment, education, culture, and tourism. Today, this cooperation is based on knowledge and trust. And without the participation of the media – this is impossible” [14].

The strategic initiative over the past period has given rise to a new direction also in integrated scientific cooperation. In May 2017, data on the extent and nature of global scientific cooperation on the issue of “One Belt, One Road” were released. In accordance with them, research institutions and higher educational institutions of the People’s Republic of China, in turn, established research platforms for the study of “One Belt, One Road”. To date, there are about 300 such research centers. Moreover, there are already more than 50 foreign “think tanks” that are engaged in the research of “One Belt, One Road”. Analytical centers of Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and Western countries gather groups and conduct studies on this subject. A series of research results has already been presented to the world community. So, the “think tanks” referred to by us have already published more than 400 thematic books, and foreign analytical institutions have issued over a hundred research reports on the topic “One Belt, One Road” [15].

In Russia, the study of the Chinese initiative in its various aspects is carried out by the Institute of Far Eastern Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Centre for Integration Studies of the Eurasian Development Bank, the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), etc. Furthermore, at the initiative of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences (RANS), the National academy of sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan (NAS RK), with the support of the Ministry of Science and Technology of the PRC, and others, it is planned to create the International Academy of Sciences of the Silk Road (IAS SR). It is expected that it will unite scientific organizations from 29 countries of the world, and for the successful coordination of interdisciplinary research within the framework of “One Belt, One Road”, a network of analytical

centers will be gradually formed, one of which will appear in Russia [16].

Strengthening scientific cooperation, undoubtedly, requires the parallel development of educational communication. It could be said that significant successes are also being achieved in this area. With regard to enhancing educational exchanges, a special Silk Road Government Grant was established in this direction, within the framework of which it is planned to annually allocate about 10 thousand grants for undergraduate and graduate programs for students of countries lying along “One Belt, One Road” [15]. Meanwhile, since 2014, the PRC has been paying special attention to border educational exchanges, which is why immigrants from the Central Asian republics now make up the majority of foreign students at universities in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and Gansu Province [17]. In order to maintain and develop scientific and educational ties, Chinese universities began to gradually increase the number of foreign languages available for study by Chinese students: for example, Beijing Foreign Studies University in 2017 has opened training programs for specialists in 7 new language areas, increasing the number of languages taught from 77 to 84. By 2020, it is planned to open programs in 16 more languages [18].

The cultural cooperation that develops under the auspices of the initiative we are considering does not stand aside. For this, a solid regulatory and legal framework for intergovernmental contacts in the field of culture has been created. By the end of 2016, the PRC Ministry of Culture had already signed cultural exchange agreements with the governments of more than 60 countries involved in the construction of “One Belt, One Road”. It is planned that by 2020, the number of people involved in cultural contacts between China and countries and regions along the “One Belt, One Road” will increase to 30 thousand. Moreover, China plans to invite about 800 experts, sinologists, and interpreters of “think tanks” to the country for further training, as well as to train at least 150 young international specialists in the field of cultural restoration and museum personnel management [15]. By 2021, China also intends to open at least 13 new Centers of Chinese Culture in the countries participating in the implementation of the Silk Road [19]. The Silk Road Film Festival, held annually since 2014, also becomes an important cultural event, the last of which was attended by representatives of 116 countries and regions of the world [20].

Regarding Russia’s participation in the “Belt and Road” project, it is worth recalling that on May 8, 2015, a joint statement was signed by Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, and Xi Jinping, President of the People’s Republic of China, on cooperation between Russia and China in the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Road Economic Belt Trans-Eurasian Trade and Infrastructure Project. Thus, the parties hope to resolve possible contradictions between the Eurasian Economic Union and China’s economic expansion in Central Asia. Obviously, the opportunities to attract foreign investment in its own economy look for Russia more attractive than the need to share influence in the region with China. At the same time, Russia is interested in some control over Chinese expansion in its traditional region of influence.

In bilateral cooperation, much attention is paid to the coordination of efforts to build a single information space. In 2015, Russia and China have signed an Agreement on Cooperation in the International Information Security [21], which was an important step in the cooperation of China and Russia in the current international relations. The countries agreed on close cooperation to counter international cybercrime, on the exchange of information between relevant law enforcement agencies, and on the establishment of communication channels for a quick response to cyber threats. This document seems to be an important strategic step in relations between the Russian Federation and China, strengthens the line of their cooperation in the process of establishing an information security policy, which Russia proposed to resolve internationally for the West.

In 2016, V.V. Putin and Xi Jinping have also signed a Joint Statement on Cooperation in the Information Space Development [22]. It confirmed the expansion of cooperation in the information area, the intention to oppose the use of the information space for interference in the internal affairs of the States, the strengthening of economic cooperation in the information area, the protection of the rights and interests of citizens in the information space, etc.

The joint activity of the Russian and Chinese media is now the most developed area of information cooperation. In many ways, this became possible due to the practice of cross-press tours in the regions of Russia and China, respectively. The first such press tour for Russian journalists under the title “Journey through Beautiful China” was organized as a part of the “Year of Chinese Tourism in Russia” far back as 2013.

Later, in June 2015, the first Russian-Chinese Media Forum was held in St. Petersburg. During the event, representatives of various mass media of China and the Russian Federation discussed issues related to channels and means of transmitting information, the role of new media in the development of relations between countries; special attention was paid to the issue of the functioning and cooperation of the media in covering the work of the Silk Road Economic Belt project and the Eurasian Economic Union [23]. The importance of events of this nature, presumably, is difficult to overestimate, since more and more often in the world practice not only a multilateral, but also a bilateral format is involved, which can be considered a real trend in recent years [24, p. 305]. This, on the one hand, allows members of the public to make unique contacts corresponding to the most diverse interests (in particular, media culture), and on the other hand, helps to form the most complete picture of the specifics of a particular country.

The Russian-Chinese interaction in the field of media, television, and radio communications continued in 2017, when, as part of Xi Jinping’s official visit to Moscow, the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Provisions of the Treaty on Good-Neighborhood, Friendship, and Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China for 2017–2020 and among other agreements, arrangements had been reached on joint Russian-Chinese film production and the start of broadcasting of the special

Russian-language television channel – Katyusha, aimed at a Chinese audience in China [25].

Cultural contacts are also developing successfully. It is worth recognizing that SRCF, the Society of Russian-Chinese Friendship, plays an important role in their development, with the active participation of which over the past three-year period (2016-2019), more than 150 events were held devoted to memorable dates, events of Russian-Chinese relations, and figures in science and culture who have contributed to the formation and development of these relations. Undoubtedly, such events are important from the point of view of preserving the memory of a joint historical past. At the same time, considerable attention is paid to mass events aimed at promoting a dialogue between the two cultures. In particular, within the framework of the agreements reached for holding the “Years of Interregional Cooperation” in 2018-2019, introductory presentations on a number of Chinese cities (Shanghai, Beijing) and provinces (Guizhou, Gansu, Guangdong, etc.) were held in Moscow. A significant event for the intercultural exchange was the Festival of Chinese Culture, held under the auspices of the SRCF in 10 Russian cities [26, p. 62-63].

The current level of bilateral relations opens up wide opportunities for Russia and China for the development of tourist exchanges. According to some reports, the tourist flow of Chinese citizens to Russia is constantly growing. So, only in 2017, direct revenues from Chinese tourism to the Russian regional budgets amounted to about 120 billion rubles [27, p.141].

When researching various aspects of humanitarian cooperation within the framework of the initiative in question, it should be understood that this is not an integration project, and, therefore, practically does not impose strict obligations on participants. The lack of a clear structure in the Chinese project, no doubt, opens up significant opportunities, including the hypothetical attraction of new participants, but it raises certain problems. The fact is that profile committees and alliances formed under the auspices of the initiative (such as the University Alliance, the Silk Road Journalists Forum, etc.) are voluntary associations without strict accession criteria. As for the direct regulation of all aspects of humanitarian cooperation (including education, tourism, etc.), it is still under the jurisdiction of national specialized ministries, bilateral commissions and committees. Although this situation leaves a wide enough space for the development of public diplomacy, it also creates difficulties for practical deepening of cooperation and, ultimately, reduces the effectiveness of this process.

## V. DISCUSSION

The “One Belt, One Road” strategic project promotes globalization not through opposing national and global, but through the harmonious development (as we know, China began to promote this concept from the beginning of the 21st century). This development implies a synthesis of national and global, which theoretically allows not to destroy, but to create a new global reality based on respect for national characteristics, the use of national traditions and mentality in

the formation of a new economic reality. Turning to the speeches of representatives of the Chinese leadership allows the authors to conclude that the position of the PRC is based on the idea that the cooperation framework should be mutual respect for the cultures of peoples and the preservation of their cultural diversity. Such principles of cooperation became part of the official Chinese agenda back to the mid-zero years of the 21st century, when, speaking in 2005 at the UN Summit, Hu Jintao, President of the People's Republic of China, designated them as a guideline that should be sought in international relations [28].

At the same time, the Chinese government is faced with a number of difficulties in the implementation of its strategy, which are not only related to competition in the international arena, but also to the specifics of foreign economic activity. Chinese business, guided by their own interests, often takes actions that do not fit into the strategy of CPC, and thereby do not contribute to the growth of trust among the population of partner countries of China. Sometimes, it is included in corruption schemes in these countries, acts without taking into account the interests of the local population, focusing only on the elites, which is no different from traditional capitalist expansion. This has a negative impact on the perception of the image of China in other countries. Such aspects of the implementation of the Chinese initiative require close study, on the way to connecting the EAEU and the New Silk Road, it is now necessary to gradually intensify efforts to combat corruption. Separately, it is worth mentioning that the principle of China's economic diplomacy is that loans and investments for infrastructure and industrial facilities from the Chinese side should be provided on the terms of subsequent involvement of Chinese contractors and the use of Chinese labor [29, p.30]. At the same time, control over enterprises and facilities is often transferred to Chinese state-owned companies to repay debts on loan obligations, as was the case, for example, in the case of the deep-water port in Hambantota (Sri Lanka) [30, p. 49].

All this leads to the fact that in a number of regions, there is an increase in anti-Chinese sentiments, which, in turn, levels the image successes achieved through humanitarian and cultural cooperation. According to analysts at the Pew Research Center, the perception of Chinese politics in the world as a whole has become more polarized in recent years [31]. Certainly, these trends are not least associated with events taking place in world politics (including the Sino-American "trade war"), but this fact once again underlines the need to develop intercultural dialogue and interchange, which are a key means of overcoming negative and, sometimes, stereotypical representations [32, p. 49].

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

Economic cooperation with China is attractive to countries that are now faced with the problem of modernizing their societies and ensuring independent development from the financial dictatorship of the world market. Clearly, the initiative proposed by Beijing fits into the UN Sustainable Development Program and has serious competitiveness on the world stage.

There are a number of problems of a domestic political nature that require attention. The fact is that, along with an impressive increase in the well-being of the population, the CPC objectively faces the growing influence of a consumer society and growing social differentiation, which reinforces the contradictions of Chinese society. The discussion about the growth of social differences in Chinese society in one form or another accompanies the entire period of reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping. His clear conviction of China's socialist future is being severely tested during the development of China. This creates certain difficulties in terms of long-term cooperation with China, since the political consequences of the discussion in Chinese society are difficult to predict, despite public assurances from the leaders of the People's Republic of China.

According to the authors, despite the fact that the "One Belt, One Road" project began as an initiative based on economic and political interests, its humanitarian component naturally developed independently. Firstly, because the social development of the territories declared by the PRC within the economic belt requires appeal to broad sections of the population and it has an unconditionally humanistic content. Secondly, no international integration economic phenomenon relies on mutual understanding and consent of the peoples, which cannot be achieved without humanitarian cooperation in our time. The project proved that modern global cooperation is impossible without cultural and humanitarian relations that accompany almost all political and economic international initiatives.

The authors of the paper were among the first to make an attempt to identify and show the role of cultural and humanitarian cooperation in the implementation of the "One Belt, One Road" project based on documentary and narrative material. The paper shows that cultural and humanitarian relations as a part of this project have evolved, received their institutional design, and become an independent and very important area of multilateral and bilateral cooperation in the framework of the "Belt, Road" initiative, which was conceived as a politico-economical and logistic one. The considered cultural and humanitarian initiatives can be interesting in practical terms, in the preparation and organization of international political and economic initiatives, as well as in the theoretical and methodological aspect in terms of an objective assessment of the role of cultural and humanitarian relations in modern international cooperation.

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