



A Common World: The Belt and Road Initiative and the Construction of a New International Order

Wanying Jin

The University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

amaljin1010@gmail.com

Abstract. Under the great changes that have not been seen in a century, the world is in turmoil, and the two hot spots in Europe and the Middle East have attracted worldwide attention. Today's era is in a historical transition period with profound changes in the balance of power, comprehensive adjustments in the strategic pattern, and accelerated transfer of the center of power. International relations and the world order are facing great development, great changes, and great adjustments. Against the backdrop of the widening gap between the North and the South in the world and the increasing difficulty for developing countries to catch up, the BRI provides developing countries with a possible path and realistic choice to achieve modernization. The infrastructure and national cooperation promoted by the "Belt and Road" initiative have not only promoted the modernization process of relevant countries at the material level, but also the BRI, which is based on the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, has transcended historical confrontations and conflicts and promoted the construction of a new international order of fairness, justice, and lasting peace.

Keywords: BRI, China, ASEAN, construction.

1 Introduction

Since 2008, China's rise has become a fait accompli and dovetails with the trend of the times. China has been one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, with real gross domestic product (GDP) growing at an average annual rate of 9.5% in 2018. The World Bank describes the pace as "the fastest sustained expansion of a major economy in history." In today's world, China has become the world's largest economy (measured by purchasing power parity), manufacturer, commodity trader and foreign exchange reserve holder. As China's composite national strength continues to increase, its international influence is increasing day by day, and it plays an increasingly important role in regional and international affairs, attracting widespread attention from the international community. At the same time, China has made qualitative leaps in economic, technological and composite national strength, which inevitably requires reforming the international economic system, developing a fairer and more equitable international economic order, establishing a more balanced, inclusive,

and win-win multilateral trading system, and opposing trade protectionism in all forms [1]. Therefore, China has gradually evolved from a participant to an order maker in the international order. In the face of the grim and complex international situation, President Xi Jinping respectively put forward the strategic concept of building “the Silk Road Economic Belt” and “the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road”, referred to as “the Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) when visiting four Central Asian states and Indonesia. BRI connects multiple economic circles such as Asia-Pacific, Europe, and Africa, which includes a large number of emerging economies and is the economic belt with the greatest development potential in the world, with a total population of approximately 4.4 billion and a total economic output of about US\$21 trillion, accounting for approximately 63% and about 29% of the world respectively [2].

In recent years, the rise of China and BRI have increasingly become a hot topic around the world. The debate over BRI has been lively and at times heated both in China and abroad, which reflects ambiguity and specificity of the concept in many ways. The global debate over BRI has raised a number of issues, including multi-order world project proposed by Trina Lee Elena recently, in which BRI is seen as an international order set by China. Different scholars have made contributions to analyzing the issue from different perspectives. An in-depth analysis of the structure, the relationship, and the resilience of BRI can help explain how BRI is viewed as an emerging international order with Chinese characteristics, and how emerging powers coordinate their relations with hegemonic powers, so as to eschew zero-sum games. This article will start from the structural relationship between BRI and China, and then focus on the core task of building a new international order for the BRI, establish a multi-dimensional and multi-level analysis framework, and use relevant academic basis and empirical evidence to find a suitable path of BRI as an Emerging International Order with Chinese Characteristics.

2 Literature Review

BRI does raise many challenging questions for researchers, academics, policymakers, and think tanks. The extensive discussions caused by BRI in academia mainly focuses on whether BRI is a “grand strategy” for China's rise, “China's Marshall Plan”, a tool for exporting China's excess production capacity, and an international public product provided by China.

In the eyes of realists, China's rise is undoubtedly a challenge to the current liberal world order. By analyzing the geopolitical implications of China's grip over the Land and Sea Belt, Pröpper posits that the military buildup in the South China Sea and diverse ports all around the world is directly challenging the current American led international system [3]. Realist analysts draw lessons from history and argue that as a rising economic power, China will inevitably become a rising military power. As reported by Financial Times on January 12, 2017, the fact that China is expanding its marine corps for deployment in Gwadar in Pakistan and Djibouti in the Horn of Africa is seen as a repetition of the history of imperial expansion. In addition, realists believe that China's launch of BRI is a manifestation of hegemony, which accelerated

strategic competition between regions and posed serious challenges to the international landscape and regional peace. Jacob publicly points out that China's purpose is to use infrastructures driven by BRI to establish overseas bases, threaten India's sphere of influence, and enhance China's influence by challenging the Indian Ocean [4]. Similarly, Indian scholar Blanchard and Flint analyze the possible impacts of BRI on India from a geopolitical perspective and argues that the "Maritime Silk Road" is a replica of China's maritime strategic expansion [5].

Liberalism tends to admit that BRI's external expansion is bound to be shaped and restricted by the laws of institutional value. Whilst screening in the concert of South Asia, China's attempt for non-violent dogma demonstrates a harmony in liberal motivation and in consequence the initiative evident' China's endorsement of peaceful development generating an all-inclusive, win-win setting backing up developing states. From a liberal perspective, BRI creates opportunities for mutual development, encourages multilateral growth, and addresses the insurmountable failures of current global and regional institutions. Illustrating an example, Chinese Bank funding in significant ports in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in order to open bottlenecks, depicts a model of a liberalist idea [6]. Liberals also believe that BRI is an opportunity for the countries along the Belt and Road routes, where these countries can promote economic growth and achieve win-win results by strengthening cooperation with China. The \$46 billion invested by China to complete the modernization projects on Gwadar port indicates a turning point for a vulnerable and a lawless region into a lively center of economic growth [7].

Constructivists propose the constructability of the collective identity of BRI actors. Constructivism focuses on that the strategic alignment of BRI in ASEAN can effectively enhance the awareness of collective identity among national actors in the region, thus promoting the construction of the concept of a China-ASEAN community with a shared future. Furthermore, constructivism also believes that the development and deepening of economic and trade cooperation among countries along the "Belt and Road" routes has created a new model of international cooperation and development. By constructing collective identity and common interests in economic and trade cooperation, institutionalized cooperation is formed, and the practice of economic and trade cooperation is deepened, which in turn constructs and forms the international structure. However, a constructivist critical of Chinese texts suggests that BRI, as Beijing's "grand strategy", is to reconstruct regional order and ultimately to reestablish a China-led global order with innovative ideas, norms and rules in global governance.

In addition, the BRI is seen as a manifestation of China's grand ambition to lead economic growth in Asia and as a grand strategy to build a "China-led Asia." "Inter-connected strategic goals such as the BRICS Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Silk Road Fund have been summarized as key deployments of the "Chinese version of the Marshall Plan" [8]. In addition to comparing the BRI to the Marshall Plan from an economic dimension, there are also views that judge the from the viewpoint of geopolitics. Some public commentators and researchers who adhere to geopolitical and geoeconomic thinking draw historical analogies between China's current BRI and the "Marshall Plan" implemented by the United States after World

War II. This comparison appears respectively in newspaper headlines such as “China’s Marshall Plan” reported by Bloomberg on 8 August 2016 and “One Belt, One Road: China’s Marshall Plan for the 21st Century?” reported by Caixin Media on 17 March 2017. Chinese scholars who hold the opposite view are more willing to believe that there are essential differences between BRI and the Marshall Plan in terms of form, content and implementation methods due to completely different historical backgrounds and distinct positioning and demands for their respective initiatives (or plans).

After the global financial crisis, the insufficient supply of international public goods and the trend of “privatization” have become obstacles to global economic growth. In a report by Xinhua News Agency on 15 May 2017, what BRI expects to provide, including the infrastructure construction, trade and investment liberalization and facilitation, environment and biological diversity, natural resource protection, international intellectual property cooperation, financial stability, cultural heritage protection, etc. are all regarded as typical international public goods (IPGs). BRI is China’s effort to create IPGs to address existing infrastructure deficits primarily in Eurasia through cooperation. The practice of providing IPG on China-Europe trains once again proves that the leading state’s active investment of resources can significantly lower the threshold for participation by other parties, thereby more effectively promoting collective action, and ultimately achieving positive interactions that benefit all parties [9]. When the BRI’s supply of instrumental, institutional, and conceptual international public goods is in equilibrium with the demand of global value chains (GVCs) entities for public goods, BRI will create necessary conditions for the extension of GVCs. Additionally, BRI is further viewed as a system that provides IPG, including sustainable development, particularly with regard to climate change adaptation. Nevertheless, some critics accuse many of the states participating in BRI, especially the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, are failing to adopt adequate climate change adaptation measures, often claiming lack of resources, such as human, financial and technological supports [10].

Given that BRI has attracted widespread attention in the academic community in recent years, a large number of scholars and experts have produced fruitful results by building various methodological frameworks to study BRI. However, there is currently no literature that constructs a comprehensive framework to conceptualize the BRI as an international order project set by Beijing. After reviewing the current theories about BRI, most of these conceptual frameworks demonstrate several weaknesses. First of all, traditional mainstream theories focus more on the impact of BRI on the current international order but fail to consider BRI as an independent issue--- an emerging international order. Secondly, some analyzes are still one-sided. Several theories still observe the international order and nation-states as two independent objective realities, leading to the neglect of the mature relationships between both. Regarding the policies and external actions of BRI, on the one hand, China is bound by international norms and patterns; on the other hand, China is also reshaping these international norms and patterns. Thirdly, most studies left behind China’s internal factors and fail to connect China’s historical and cultural background with BRI. As far as China is concerned, this country, with rich historic and cultural heritage, tradi-

tional ideology, and philosophy, still plays an irreplaceable role in shaping the perception and practice of the international order with Chinese characteristics. The formulation and implementation of BRI fully demonstrate China's profound historical emotions and humanistic sentiments, which are closely related to China's cultural and historical background and cannot be separated.

The core question of this study is: How to identify and conceptualize the Belt and Road Initiative as an emerging international order with Chinese characteristics. Consequently, the aim of this research is to make contribution to the innovative concept and theory of "International Order with Chinese Characteristics" and gain in-depth understanding of the structure, relationality, and resilience of BRI through various theoretical frameworks.

3 Analysis

In order to delve into China's attempts to realize its dream through BRI, the author uses relational theory as the backbone to analyze the problem. In addition, intertwined hegemony theory is to be used to look for available evidence, which can provide profound results for this study. Relational theory can be used as a theoretical foundation to explain the relationship between BRI (structure) and China (agent). In his article "the relational theory of world politics", Professor Qin Yaqing proposed the conceptual framework of "relational theory". He emphasizes "relationality", one of the characteristics of background knowledge formed in Chinese Confucian social practice and history, as the metaphysics of the relational theory and further makes a critical reflection on individual rationality, which is the hard-core of mainstream western international relations theory [11].

Relational theory believes that actors belong to actors in relationality, that relationality is the most important part of the social world, and that relational logic explains behaviors with social significance. This idea is to regard the world of international relations as the world composed of relationality, assume international actors as actors in relationality, and define the process as a moving relationality in an ontological sense. Relational theory is a theoretical supplement to western constructionism based on process constructivism. This theory adheres to China's dialectics of the mean, denies the logic of binary opposition, and advocates embedded inclusiveness as a path to achieve progress, co-evolution and a sustainable order. The conceptual framework of "relational theory" provides an innovative approach to understanding the relationship between BRI and China.

The conceptual framework of "interwoven hegemony" provides an innovative approach to understanding rising powers and retained powers. In the article "Interdependent Hegemony, the Rise of China in the Emerging New World Order", Professor Li Xing proposed the conceptual framework of "intertwined hegemony" (or interdependent hegemony). He decomposed global dominance into seven dimensions: (1) norms and value systems; (2) modes of production, competition, accumulation; (3) global governance; (4) control of financial and credit structures; political and economic influence (6) material capabilities (7) cultural and ideological leadership (Li,

2018). Li clearly pointed out that the current international order dominated by western countries has become structurally unstable and that the dominance system under the current international order need to rely on the institutional supply of emerging countries to maintain its demand for legitimacy. At the same time, the relationship between emerging powers, such as China and the current world order is interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

Therefore, the existing major powers cannot maintain the hegemony of the liberal international order alone, nor can China globalize the BRI as an international order. For a long period of time in the future, BRI and the existing western-dominated international order are more likely to go together in the form of "interdependent dominance". "Interdependent dominance" creates a new interpretation paradigm for the existence of BRI. It not only makes up for the limitations and deficiencies of western theoretical paradigms, but also embeds reasonable elements of Chinese civilization into the process of building a world order [12].

As an international public product provided by China to the international community, the Belt and Road Initiative is also a modern path choice provided by China to the world, allowing the concept of "common prosperity" to extend from the inside out. In 2023, the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation was successfully held in Beijing, with the support of more than 140 countries and more than 40 international organizations around the world. This not only shows that people from all countries expect the summit to "jointly build the Belt and Road and create a better future". The page reflects that the more turbulent the world situation is, the more it demonstrates the importance of the BRI in pursuing a fair and reasonable new international order.

The implementation of the BRI can provide a new source of power for the development of the global economy. As an international public product provided by China to the international community, the Belt and Road Initiative is also a modern path choice provided by China to the world, allowing the concept of "common prosperity" to extend from the inside out. According to the World Bank, if all the transportation infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative are implemented, by 2030, it is expected to generate \$1.6 trillion in benefits for the world each year, accounting for 1.3% of the global GDP, of which 90% will be shared by partner countries, and low-income and lower-middle-income countries will benefit more [13]. It is expected to help 7.6 million people in the world escape extreme poverty and 32 million people escape moderate poverty. At the same time, BRI has also injected new vitality into global governance [14]. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that the joint construction of the BRI adheres to the principle of consultation, joint construction and sharing, transcends differences in civilizations, cultures, social systems and development stages, opens a new path for exchanges among countries, builds a new framework for international cooperation, and brings together the greatest common denominator of common development of mankind. Although the joint construction of the BRI originated from China, the results belong to the world and benefit all mankind. It provides a new solution for improving the global governance system and has received enthusiastic responses from more and more countries [15]. It has the ability to believe that BRI will

help promote the development of the international order in a more fair and reasonable direction.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the world is undergoing a major change that has not been seen in a century. BRI has become a guiding principle for building a new international economic order that is equal, open and inclusive, and is fully in line with the direction of building a community with a shared future. BRI takes building a community with a shared future for mankind as its general direction, and takes the implementation of the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative as its "handle and platform", advocating equality, mutual trust and mutual respect, and will become the biggest driving force for promoting fair and just development of the international order. On the one hand, with the continuous participation and cooperation of countries along the route, BRI will surely receive support from more and more countries and peoples. On the other hand, the implementation of the principles of the Belt and Road Initiative will promote the participating countries to jointly achieve the goal of economic prosperity and social progress. By promoting the joint construction of the Belt and Road Initiative, a new international order of global harmony can be jointly established. All countries can benefit from the joint construction of the Belt and Road. This is not only a win-win situation, but a win-win cooperation situation. This is exactly the new concept and new order that the world needs today.

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