

companies to export to the EU market, or that EU-oriented companies will face fewer obstacles when producing in parks [4]. Over all, the connectivity between the China-Belarus Industrial Park and the EU has been strengthened. The successful cooperation between China and Belarus has positive reference significance for cooperation between China and other countries along the “Belt and Road” initiative.

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## **CHINA’S THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE: BACKGROUND AND SOURCES**

*The Belt and Road Initiative proposed by China is based on the ancient Silk Road and modern industrial and commercial globalization civilization*

*to strive to find and explore solutions of today's human development problems and dilemmas.*

**Key words:** *China, Silk Road, the Belt and Road Initiative, industrial revolution, globalization, railway, "Sea power countries", "Land power countries".*

*Инициатива «Один пояс и один путь», предложенная Китаем, основана на идее древнего Шелкового пути и на современной цивилизации промышленной и коммерческой глобализации. Она направлена на поиск и исследование решений сегодняшних проблем и дилемм человеческого развития.*

**Ключевые слова:** *Китай, Шелковый путь, инициатива «Пояс и путь», промышленная революция, глобализация, железная дорога, «морские державы», «державы суши».*

### **The ancient Silk Road: historical excursus**

In the long river of human history, there was a cultural and trade road that had lasted for more than 2 thousand years. It had connected various civilizations in the ancient East and West. Compared with ancient European and Middle Eastern linen, Chinese silk had the advantages of being smoother to the body and more breathable, giving cool feeling in summer, having very light weight, more varieties and styles. So far, 100 to 155 years ago, two famous German experts F. von Richthofen<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In 1877 German geologist F. von Richthofen wrote a book "China", where he mentioned that the relevant region trading roads among China to Central Asia and ancient India through silk trade from 114 B. C. to 127 A. D. He described silk was the most ideal land trade commodity due to its light weight, high value and wide usage. Richthofen firstly used definition "Silk Road" for these trading roads. From then on, this proper noun was quickly accepted by academic and the public circles [2, p. 140].

and A. Herrmann<sup>8</sup> successively defined the term “Silk Road” in their books and made detailed explanations. The Silk Road had gradually expanded into an ancient version of the globalization of cultural, religious and trade exchanges, especially from the time of the great Italian business traveler Marco Polo (1254–1324 A. D.)<sup>9</sup>. Later, in 1913, French orientalist E. Chavannes proposed that the ancient Silk Road could be broadly divided into Land Silk Road and Maritime Silk Road<sup>10</sup> [2; 3].

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<sup>8</sup> German historian A. Herrmann in his book “The Ancient Silk Road between China and Syria” (beginning of the 20th century) extended the Silk Road to Asia Minor and the Mediterranean Rim, and finally determined the basic connotation of the Silk Road as the ancient Chinese road to South Asia, the Middle East, Europe and North Africa through Central Asia. Then the name “Silk Road” became commonly used in the overland trade channels. Gold, horses, spices, tea, fur, exotic animals, porcelain, medicinal materials etc, had gradually become the main trade commodities of this trade route [2, p. 141].

<sup>9</sup> M. Polo presented the prosperous and luxurious views along the Silk Road in his book “Travels of Marco Polo” which left many mysteries and illusions for later generations [3].

<sup>10</sup> The Maritime Silk Road as one of the oldest known sea routes started from the Shang Dynasty (1600 B. C. – 1046 B. C.), but it mainly developed from the Three Kingdoms period to the Sui Dynasty (221 A. D. – 618 A. D.) and flourished in the Tang, Song, Yuan and Ming Dynasties (618 A. D. – 1644 A. D.). The Maritime Silk Road was a large sea passage for ancient China’s transportation, trade and cultural exchanges with foreign countries.

The Land Silk Road originated from the overland trade and cultural channel that was opened by Emperor Wu of the Western Han Dynasty (202 B. C. – 8 A. D.). He sent his minister Zhang Qian to explore the kingdoms on west and north of China at that time. The starting point was the Chang’an capital city (now Xi’an). Then minister Zhang Qian crossed Central Asia and West Asia, connecting Mediterranean kingdoms. Except for military and diplomatic purposes, one of another indirect purposes were export the silk produced in ancient China [2, p. 143; 3].

However, with the arrival of the Age of Discovery and the Industrial Age from the two main engines of Western Europe and North America, the Silk Road once disappeared in the desert of history in recent 3–4 centuries. But, today in the 21st century, there have been many problems and puzzles around the world, as well as many worries and fears about the future of mankind. Therefore, many Chinese and foreign scholars have begun to study the historical significance and value of this ancient Silk Road that has gone through thousands of years. Particularly, mankind has experienced three industrial revolutions, and many industrial, scientific and technological capabilities have been enough to conquer and remake many unimaginable severe natural conditions in recent centuries. In addition, agricultural and nomadic civilization, pirate herding and hunting civilization and industrial and commercial civilization of mankind for nearly a thousand years have merged and gradually evolved into today's globalization. Humans may need to find a better way out to face today's global changes and future opportunities and challenges. So, the following content will first describe the global problems today, and also what technological progress objectively makes the new Silk Road initiative (the Belt and Road Initiative) have the possibility of theoretical implementation, as well as the opportunities and challenges that the Belt and Road Initiative also has to face to [4].

### **Long standing and recent problems in the world**

Over the years, China's various news media have reported on the long-term problems facing the world. To sum up, there are mainly about 9 points of global problems: 1) global population issues; 2) multiple religious and ethnic conflicts around the world in human history; 3) geopolitical contradictions among countries; 4) the global crisis and sense of panic caused by too advanced science and too advanced military; 5) global warming and environmental destruction; 6) the global financial crisis and economic crisis; 7) the gap between the rich and the poor and the conflicts of various classes interests; 8) the Internet and other media chaos in the era of rapid information explosion; 9) complex global cooperative governance [1; 4].

In terms of 9 aspects about the long-term contradictions of the global human race above, the following content elaborates on people's concerns about the international situation in recent years.

Since the global financial crisis in 2008 G20 has gradually replaced G7 with the result which has still not completely solved the debt problem of the major global economies. For example, the European debt crisis that followed later; Japan's national debt crisis in recent years; overheated property market in China, which led to foam and industrial overcapacity. Besides, some economists believe that the US dollar may be over issued after the epidemic hyped by different various of medias in the past two years, and the US debt has reached a new historical high, which also led many people to worry about US stocks and US debt; also, the Federal Reserve has entered a new cycle of interest rate hikes, and many developing and poor countries are panicked about the outflow of their domestic capital; in addition, the recent Russian-Ukrainian operation has indirectly led to global fears about possible energy and currency issues. As a result, people have started to doubt whether there would be a more serious situation than the year of 1929, when the Great Depression of the global economy started before World War II [1; 4]?

#### **Discussion on global long-term and recent issues**

From the above global long-term and current situations, that shows how difficult to completely avoid a new round of global economic crisis. According to the historical law, if any of the above conditions were met in the past, such as World War I and World War II, including the subsequent Cold War, would have been ready to erupt immediately. An according to the above laws and theories in current situation, the Third World War and the New Cold War would have had the potential to erupt in the basic conditions. But one of the reasons why it has not broken out yet, is that there has a terrible nuclear balance among the major powerful countries. Besides, people and different governments around the world still do not give up the hope of finding a new way for mankind [1].

In the past, such difficulties might be solved within the country itself. For example, the government and other social organizations

have forcefully adopted policies but indirectly achieved the so-called “robbing the rich to help the poor” in their own society inside. However, sometimes in history there had extreme and uncontrollable cases and times, such as the French Revolution in 1789, the Russian October Revolution in 1917. These examples show that the typical society has to evolve into the above-mentioned slogan activity to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor inside through internal class struggle, but the cost is that it has to go to the point of complete revolution within the whole society. Of course, when the social internal reform reaches this level, the process and results will sometimes be bloody. Another extreme and bloody way is necessity to pass on the internal contradictions of the country by waging wars against other countries, such as Germany and Japan in World War II. Of course, this does not rule out that in addition to the hot war, the warm war and even the “new cold war” in the world today, the “chess games” among the major countries in recent years more or less has led to a smoke-free monetary and financial war, trade war, information war, science and technology war, and biochemical war to weaken the opponents and indirectly shift their own contradictions [1; 4].

However, this does not mean that mankind has no experience of global peace and development. For example, since the end of the cold war in 1991 until today, the world as a whole has been developing peacefully for more than 30 years, even if there are some individual regional wars. Besides the balance of nuclear weapons among the major powers (reason one), another important reason is that the victorious Western countries after the cold war, led by the United States. US military had invested in the so-called “sunk cost” earlier through the military input which had targeted to the so-called “Star Wars Plan” of the former Soviet Union at that time. The Third Industrial Revolution and the vigorous development of globalization were connected with the so-called “Military to Civilian” project which was mainly marked by satellite communication and IT industries developed by NATO countries led by the United States. At the same time, due to the so-called new and huge “cake” of the Third Industrial

Revolution and globalization, western countries, mainly the United States, are the main beneficiary countries. Therefore, the debt of the previous cold war time was directly offset by their technology products sold to the new large global market and new big dividends. At the same time, the financial industry was also booming more at that time in western countries. Thus, the world was deeply cooperating with the United States as the center, and each country had a clear division of labor in this round of globalization basically according to the design of the United States [1; 4].

However, there are also three problems in this sharing of benefits and labor contributions. The first is how to achieve fairness and satisfaction to all different countries, regions and groups of people? After all, some developed countries, powerful organizations and groups of people were ready to share easily parts of the “dividend cake” of the Third Industrial Revolution through technology and finance. The second is the contradiction between financial capital and industrial capital. For example, industrial capital is often more invested than financial capital, but it needs a longer investment cycle, but the return rate is often relative lower, and the time to get the return is also longer. However, although the return rate of financial capital is sometimes relative higher and quicker, it will also lead to foam and financial crises. Moreover, many developing countries in the world need capital and physical infrastructure as well as industry, but many financial capitals often cannot go to these physical projects in these countries and regions because of relative lower interest points, longer time or higher risks. Therefore, a lot of financial capital can only “idle” in the financial markets of some developed countries that feel safe until a large number of financial foams appear. Third, and most important, after years of deep global cooperation, the Third Industrial Revolution in developed countries has reached the so-called “ceiling” in terms of the boundary of its technology and dividends. The developing countries, especially China or India, after years of efforts, except for a small number of fields in technology, the vast majority of them have caught up and even surpassed some of the

technical fields of traditional Western countries. Therefore, the rise of these developing countries has indirectly eroded the “dividend cake” of the Third Industrial Revolution that many developed countries were able to get a large share of. So, in the Post Third Industrial Revolution Era, there is fierce competition among major countries, but the so-called “cake” is only this size now, recently no new way to let it bigger, each country has a lot of debts need to be solved quickly. If the whole world wants to make the “cake” become bigger, to solve the current debts, and achieve orderly unity and cooperation among countries, even continuing keeping the world relatively peaceful, the world can only look forward to the outbreak of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. But in the short term, no country or civilization can light up the “new science and technology tree” of the Fourth Industrial Revolution alone. The current debt and the huge venture capital required by the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This has also led to the current the “incremental competition” among major countries from the previous global development to today’s brutal “stock competition” of global resources. Similar to the “doubt cloud” of the “new cold war”, it once again has enveloped the world [1; 4].

Thus, under these conditions that the “dividend” of the global Third Industrial Revolution has been getting closer and closer to the marginal effect, and the situation that countries all over the world have to engage in vicious competition is similar to the “more wolves but with less meat”, and the new bigger “cake”, that is the outbreak period of the human Fourth Industrial Revolution seems to be far away. So, in this context, China first put forward the Belt and Road Initiative in the year 2013 to at least attempt to explore a wider way [4].

### **Conditions for the Belt and Road Initiative: new technologies and industries**

The first is the maturity of high-speed railway and heavy haul railway technology, as well as the completion of international and domestic infrastructure constructions of various related routes through China’s output of its production capacity. In addition, the maturity of technology and production capacity of large-scale aircraft projects such as Yun20,



C919, ARJ21, etc. Thus, these technical and industrial factors make the Belt and Road Initiative theoretically to be better to revive the ancient Silk Road that has been sealed for hundreds of years from the perspective of technology and production capacity construction. At the same time, this is more or less a sign that the “sea power countries” that rely on the sea for hundreds of years have been challenged again by the “land power countries” that are rising up totally. Moreover, “land power countries” seem to be able to move back to the historical stage. At least in the future, there may be a trend of balance between “sea power” and “land power” countries. Meanwhile, that will be even not impossible that the “land power countries” will surpass sea power countries in the future. At the same time, China is a country that objectively has ability of both – “sea power and land power” [4].

Over the past 500 years, the global civilization has been dominated by the combination of pirate civilization and industrial and commercial civilization from western countries, which has completely suppressed other civilizations based on nomadic, farming, fishing and hunting. It means that in the past countries, which had important ports or countries which had strong navies to control important global shipping routes, had more advantages to control the world’s resources, trade, and wealth. Such countries will also play a leading role in the world. Therefore, the “sea power countries” have successively influenced the world’s modern history for more than 500 years, starting from the discovery of the new continent in the era of Portugal and Spain’s navigation, then to the Netherlands, Britain, France, Germany, and today’s United States and then the whole so-called western countries along the North Atlantic coast. However, as described above, the relevant new and mature technologies and production capacity construction make the new situations seem that the traditional “land power civilized countries” are trying to revive after hundreds of years of the ancient Silk Road [4].

Because of high-speed railway and heavy haul railway, international trade may not only go by sea in accordance with the idea of “sea power country” in the future. Moreover, the unmanned large transport aircraft transformed from the existing large aircraft

will be also more suitable for the huge middle parts of the sparsely populated Eurasian continent [4].

In particular, the Eurasian continent, which has bred mainstream human civilization and wisdom, occupies the center of the world economy and culture due to its large number of countries, large size, large population and deep historical and cultural heritage. Therefore, Eurasia tends to become an independent trading body itself firstly, the regional powers with a long history and typical “land power countries” in Eurasia are also more motivated to try to reactivate the ancient Silk Road by means of railways and roads in the future. Even in terms of transportation volume, ocean transportation is still difficult to be completely replaced in the short and medium term. After all, ocean transportation has relatively lower cost and larger transportation volume. However, the technological progress of high-speed railway and heavy haul railway has also gradually brought in the gap between the advantages of high-speed railway and sea transportation. At the same time, compared with air transportation, the current these kinds of land transportation costs are lower and the transportation volume is larger [1; 4].

However, according to the current sea, land and air transportation situation, such as ordinary clothes, scrap metal and other goods that are not afraid of long storage time are more suitable for sea transportation. Even though the sea transportation time is long, the cost is low and the transportation volume is larger. However, high-tech products, luxury goods with high added value, as well as fruits and vegetables that need to be kept fresh, must be transported by rail (in this regard, high-speed rail is more advanced). Although the transportation cost is higher now, this is faster than sea transportation and cheaper than air transportation. The transportation capacity of railway transportation and large unmanned transport aircraft, whether in terms of cost or volume, might be totally close to that sea transportation in the future [4].

### **The Belt and Road Initiative will try to meet the needs of all countries**

Obviously, the vision and blueprint of the Belt and Road Initiative are grand but not means it is without hidden dangers. For example,

there still have wars and terrorism in some regions of Eurasia, which will affect the smooth implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative. Therefore, relevant main “land power countries” and organizations in Eurasia, such as China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, need to establish cooperation to jointly maintain the security of trade routes in Eurasia, and try to avoid war and terrorism. The “Shanghai Cooperation Organization” and the “Collective Security Organization” have formed relevant organizations to maintain land security on the Eurasian Continental Bridge [1; 4].

At the same time, within the framework of the United Nations, how to achieve the so-called “seeking common ground while reserving differences” and common cooperation with the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund once established by the United States and Western Europe, as well as with the European Union, the Five Eye Alliance and NATO, is also an important point for the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative. How to avoid trade wars, currency wars, financial wars and even direct military and cultural conflicts between major countries is also an important research topic for the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative. In particular, this is also an aspect of the Maritime Silk Road that needs to be done well [1].

The Belt and Road Initiative will certainly drive a large number of infrastructure construction in relevant countries, further optimize and complement their resources, and make trade and travel more open and accessible. At the same time, relevant countries will share 5G network, big data, cloud computing, aerospace and other information. This will also enable relevant countries to continue their cooperation in different aspects. Even though the “science and technology tree” of the Fourth Industrial Revolution has not been lit up by human beings vertically, the Belt and Road Initiative has made the “cake” bigger horizontally and avoided various conflicts and challenges facing mankind as far as possible [1; 4].

The Belt and Road Initiative is an initiative put forward by China. Because of different countries and different nationalities

have various national conditions and interests. China cannot force its own ideas. At the same time, the Belt and Road needs to refer to the ancient Silk Road, and also use the current United Nations and WTO as the framework to compensate and extend, rather than directly overthrow these international orders. In addition, the Belt and Road also needs to take into account the interests of Western Europe, the United States and other traditional maritime trading countries. Therefore, China needs to communicate and negotiate with relevant countries to avoid mutual suspicion, rather than to completely challenge some of the international orders they have formed. In addition, the Belt and Road Initiative should also pay attention to military and financial issues, as well as the impact of values on relevant countries, so as to avoid misunderstanding [1; 4].

At least in the short term, the Belt and Road Initiative will be a buffer program between the Third and Fourth Industrial Revolutions to maintain the world's continued peaceful development. This might be also the beginning of a foundation for the Fourth Industrial Revolution of mankind [4].

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