

Part I

How the Belt and Road Initiative Can Be Perceived

Chapter 1

Global Connectivity, Transformation of the World, and Chinese Foreign Relations of BRI

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Abstract

Global connectivity is creating new opportunities for nearly every country in the current world. Nobody can escape from it, though some students and politicians are trying to take de-connectivity policy to bring the world back to an isolated situation. In the cross road of current international relations, there is no alternative for the world. This presentation will argue that the common benefits of connectivity for the world, and advances that connectivity strategy as a choice, would be better than integration strategy, in promoting regional and trans-regional cooperation. It will also test and criticize about different theories and policies, majorly based on the colonial, hegemonical, or utopia liberalism theories, which are likely to mislead the evolution of international relations. The presentation will also discuss about the implications of connectivity theory for understanding Chinese foreign relations, including BRI, since the newly century.

The presentation will be then focused on Chinese foreign relations of BRI. After we have gone beyond the existing misleading theories and ideas listed above, we could be more clear and clever on understanding of this topic. It doesn't mean that I want to defense for China's BRI, however, if BRI is the second best initiative, even if it maybe not the best, for the world development, why the world should sing a different tune for it? The fact is that more and more countries response it positively.

As an ancient Chinese saying, the foolish people try to seek difference, the smart people attempt to seek uniformity, the wisdom people rush to seek connectivity. One of the reasons to restrain the world development is from non-connectivity, and therefore improving connectivity should be the priority of international development agenda. China correctly catches the focus and then advances the timely BRI, a common development project for the countries who want to develop while keeping its independence. This is the major incentive of China for it. The BRI is inclusive and open launch for all countries, any initiative launched by other country, if it would really benefit for improving development condition for the developing countries, should be as cooperative partner rather than competitive partner with BRI. China welcome America,

Japan, or EU's any project which could really facilitate world development.

Walk is better than talk! The presentation will evaluate some critical points on BRI. Debt crisis, geopolitics expansion, transparency, environmental issue, China model, and other possible and potential strange point would be emerged in the future. All of these points memorized the world about something occurred frequently in developing countries what some countries did in their foreign relations history. In the face of these critics points on BRI, one of African country leaders have to say that your coming bring conflict for us, while China's coming bring common development for us. As a socialist, Eastern, learning, and civilization country, China will respect any reasonable constructive suggestion from all over the world, and humbly transformed them into our policies. Correct the mistake as soon as you know it, while going your own way and let the other talk. And the most important thing is that BRI in practice does face some difficulties, but seeking innovative measures to address them is precisely what China and BRI countries are and will focus.

Two Views of the World

Global connectivity is creating new opportunities for nearly every country in the current world. Nobody can escape from it, though some students and politicians are trying to take de-connectivity policy to bring the world back to an isolated situation. In the cross road of current international relations, there is no alternative but connectivity for the world.

Two views of the world, however, is emerging in current world. One view is prefer to shifting the world to a situation of protectionism, unilateralism, absolute security, and clashes of civilizations. Other one sticks to drive the world around open-ism, multilateralism, common security, and dialogue of civilizations. The world transformation looks more like between two powers, forward and backward, than the rising and declining, as some realist scholars frequently talked in the framework of power transition or traps theory.

In the traditional philosophy of Chinese view of the world, the world is composed of two characters, Yin (阴) and Yang (阳), just like the modern computer science in which everything could be illustrated by the composition of one (1) and zero (0). It means furthermore that the world is not just divided into two different or isolated parts, but is composed of two compatible parts. Therefore, Yin and Yang are not compatible, but could be contacted and then reach to a harmony order.

The major contents of most international relations theories, esp. developed from Anglo-Saxon tradition, are widely accepted and assume that the world could be divided into two parts, one represents good or friend, while the other one represents bad or enemy. According to this logic, the good side has the right to define the definition of the good, and then has responsibility to transform the bad one into good. And therefore, the form of world order in this philosophy will be a typical conflict of extremes order. In my research view, whatever realist, liberalism, constructivism theory, de-link or de-connectivity, strategy, or English School, even all of them looks like different schools, but the basic logic is more or less the same. In the rhetoric of liberal international order, which assumes the world is composed of liberal, decent, and illiberal states, and argues furthermore the liberal state has the right to interfere the politics of illiberal states. That is John Rawls international philosophy. The recent delink strategy by some politicians tries to divide the world into two systems, which activate the terrible memory of economic Cold War. It is easily imagined the world would be trapped quickly in the situation of conflict of extremes if one extreme take intervention and aggressive policy against the other side. That is the model of the Cold War, or the tragedy of world order and great power politics over the international history.

One of Chinese international relations theory, developed majorly from Shanghai international studies scholars, provides an alternative way to surpass the conflict of extremes order model. We live in a world of differences, and the making of order doesn't mean we must eliminate differences and make everything uniformity. So we need to go beyond the conflict of extremes order, and make effort to reach to the contact of extremes order. Dialogue and contact among differences matters. Three ways are used in history to address differences, one is to isolate each other, the second is to transform the differences into uniformity, and the last one is to live and let live. The great innovation for current world politics is not to eliminate differences, but to compose differences into a compatible order. Therefore, the logic of contact of extremes order prompt us to take connectivity and dialogue policy to each other, while if more and more people prefer to the logic of conflict of extremes order, the current world would be likely evolved into the tragedy of confrontational situation, like the Cold War. Nobody wants to back to the era of the Cold War.

China and the world benefits from pushing the progress of the contact of extremes order. There is no reasons for China to retreat from this track. In the other words, stagnation and depression are often coincided with the conflict of extremes order, double lose would be occurred and nobody could gain from it. This is a key logical point for us

to understand the relations between China and the world. As a systematic stability actor and one of the most contribution actors to the world economy, it is hard to imagine what it would bring about for the world if China take retreat and reverse policy to the world.

In terms of facilitating the progress of the contact of extremes order, many measures have been taken by international society. It gives us the bright view of the world. As one of the actors, some measures have been advanced by China over the last decade. In the rhetoric and practice of Chinese foreign relations, people are familiar with the following things, such as global partner network, maintenance of multilateralism and global strategic stability, people to people dialogue, and the BRI is undoubtedly the prominent one among these policies.

BRI's Theoretical Base: Connectivity Theory or Integration Theory?

Most people are inclined to rely on international relations theories with western characteristics to explain and predict the world. To some extent, these theories maybe useful for us to understand the changing world, or maybe correct for us to understand the evolution of internal international relations among western countries over the history. But the speed and space of international relations has been upgraded to the global stage, the existing theories couldn't provide enough thinking and wisdom for us to know the changing world. Since China launches the BRI in 2013, policy-makers and scholars around the world prefer to use integration theory to explain the newly trans-regional cooperation initiation. My presentation, on the contrary, tries to put forward connectivity theory to understand the logic of BRI by China.

As an ancient Chinese saying, the foolish people try to seek difference, the smart people attempt to seek uniformity, the wisdom people rush to seek connectivity. One of the reasons to restrain the world development is from non-connectivity, and therefore improving connectivity should be the priority of international development agenda. China correctly catches the focus and then advances the timely BRI, a common development project for the countries who want to develop while keeping its independence. This is the major incentive of China for it. The BRI is inclusive and open launch for all countries, any initiative launched by other country, if it would really benefit for improving development condition for the developing countries, should be as cooperative partner rather than competitive partner with BRI. China welcome America, Japan, or EU's any project which could really facilitate world development.

The apparent thing between connectivity and integration is that the former just

want to facilitate the flowability and mobility of international relations, while the latter's ultimate end is to try to create a super-state in regional area. Flowability and mobility are key factors for enlarging the speed and space of international relations. And reversely, the international relations would be shrunk and withered with the reduction of flowability and mobility. At least three differences could be summarized when comparing the two regional cooperation theories. (1) sovereignty: integration theory is assumed to transfer member state sovereignty to a high level institution in the end step of cooperation, while connectivity theory just emphasizes the prerequisite role of sovereignty. (2) threshold: integration theory supposes that cooperation should be limited among countries who satisfies the standard and threshold of cooperative steps, while connectivity theory aims to create possible and all aspects flowability and mobility among partners. (3) ex(in)clusive: integration is often limited to a small group of countries, while there is no boundary for connectivity cooperation, it looks more open and inclusive than integration.

I don't agree to the point that China is providing *public goods* for the BRI countries. Many Chinese scholars, or even governmental officials, who are influenced more or less by integration theory and hegemonical stability theory, enjoy the using of public goods concept to describe China's BRI. Actually, if we evaluate the major projects what China has done with the BRI countries, we can easily find that the goods what China is making is not public goods, it is *connectivity goods*! Connectivity goods, such as infrastructure and p 2 p dialogue, supplied jointly by relative countries, are welcomed by BRI countries. What I want to stress is that the great demand for international relations is connectivity goods, which will be of great benefit for connecting the world.

In the end, we may come to a point is that connectivity, rather than integration, is more practical for most regional and trans-regional cooperation. In the case of regional cooperation among CJK and ASEAN, scholars used to prospect the development of ASEAN plus CJK with the theory of integration, and then point out that there will be integrative community of Asia in the future. However, this is an utopia view of East Asia international relations, because nobody wants to lose and transfer its sovereignty. For East Asian scholars, therefore, maybe we need to transcend the West European regional cooperation experience and rethink the regional cooperation within the framework of connectivity theory. Furthermore, as an alternative theory, connectivity strategy would be more suitable than integration strategy, in promoting regional and trans-regional cooperation in Euro-Asia, Africa or Latin-America continent.

BRI: Critics and Reflections

Any great initiative will be accompanied by challenge and skeptics. BRI is no except case. After we have gone beyond the existing misleading theories and ideas listed above, we could be more clear and clever on understanding of this topic. It doesn't mean that I want to defend China's BRI, however, if BRI is the second best initiative, even if it maybe not the best, for the world development, why the world should sing a different tune for it? The fact is that more and more countries response it positively. Up to now, China has signed more than 130 MOUs with the rest of the world.

The important thing is that we need to clarify the detail challenges, critics, and skeptics. What's really wrong with China? And what's wrong with the critics? Both of us need to evaluate them in a rational way. There is an idiom in China which is one feels very happy to be talked by others about his shortcoming (闻过则喜).

The first is from ideological angle, which assumes that communist party-led and socialism-oriented China will definitely generate potential challenge to the US dominated hegemoical order unless China has been politically transformed to be as *democracy* like the U.S. According to this logic, BRI represents an export of values and governance model of China to the world. Presupposition is an obstacle for us to approach the reality and truth. In the issue of ideology, we need to go beyond the conflict of extremes, and reach to a coexistence system (共生) through contact of extremes. If each country in international relations accepts that the opposition side of truth is false, then there will be consistently conflict between the truth and false. On the contrary, one must realize that the opposition side of truth may also be the truth, then dialogue and cooperation could be created. And furthermore, there is no evidence shows that peace will be achieved when all countries accepted the same ideology and political system, as what democratic peace theory illustrates. And lastly, BRI is essentially a development-oriented project for the world. Actually, BRI wants to establish dialogue partner with all existing and possible development projects in international relations. The relationship between BRI and the existing development project is not replacement, but complementary.

The second debating point is focused on the role of Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs), since most BRI projects are operated and implemented by Chinese SOEs. The prevailing view is that SOEs will affect the operation of the market, and because SOEs is owned by Chinese government, therefore, they will represent the willing of Chinese government. Regarding of SOEs in international relations, people are familiar with two points, one is privatization, which supported by the Washington consensus, and the other is competitive neutrality, posed recently by European economics. I want

to provide a newly theoretical framework for us to understand the role of SOEs in modern political economy. In modern state, each country has its own pillar and strategic enterprises, who plays the role of stabilizing national economy, whatever they are state owned or private owned enterprise (POEs). Both of SOEs and POEs are activating in international political economy, could it be said that POEs must be better players than SOEs? There are two sharp distinctions between Chinese SOEs and other POEs is that SOEs in China also play the role of social enterprise for the social order, it means that SOEs in China are often required to take responsibility for the public interests. In other words, the logic of SOEs is not interests maximization oriented. The other distinction is that SOEs often take long view of projects. That would also explain the reasons why the major BRI infrastructure projects are operated by SOEs rather than POEs, since the latter often couldn't afford long-range investment for the burden of its balance sheet. In terms of connecting the world, international society need to provide more and more connectivity goods, like infrastructure projects. This does not mean we should take either this or that view about SOEs and POEs, basically, any Connectivity friendly or social friendly enterprises should be encouraged in current world.

Walk is better than talk! There are other critical points on BRI, for example debt crisis, geopolitics expansion, transparency, environmental issue, China model export, and other possible and potential point would be emerged in the future. All of these points memorized the world about something occurred frequently in developing countries what some countries did in their foreign relations history. In the face of these critics points on BRI, one of African country leaders have to say that your coming bring conflict for us, while China's coming bring common development for us. As a socialist, Eastern, learning, and civilization country, China will respect any reasonable constructive suggestion from all over the world, and humbly transformed them into our policies. Correct the mistake as soon as you know it, while going your own way and let the other talk. And the most important thing is that BRI in practice does face some difficulties, but seeking innovative measures to address them is precisely what China and BRI countries are and will focus on.