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Belt and Road 2.0 Leading New Globalization Postprint

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Abstract

The evolving global development landscape and the imperative to address challenges in the Belt and Road Initiative compel us to upgrade the initiative and contemplate a version 2.0. Version 2.0 of the Belt and Road Initiative represents three major transcendences compared to version 1.0: temporally, it is not about returning to history, but about moving beyond history; spatially, it expands from managing the Eurasian stage to shaping the global landscape, pioneering a Eurasian Continental Era 2.0—characterized by land-sea connectivity, and a Maritime Era 2.0—encompassing the deep-sea era, the Arctic, and South America; in terms of self-development, it evolves from interconnectivity to the Internet of Everything—from “heaven-earth-humanity” to “heaven-earth-humanity-sea-space-cyber,” upholding human-machine interaction, integration of heaven and earth, and the interconnection of all things. It pioneers a new human civilization for the 21st century and leads a new type of globalization: (1) inclusive globalization—leaving no blind spots in globalization; (2) globalization of the South—transitioning from seeking foreign aid to seeking investment; (3) interconnected globalization—featuring North-South linkage and land-sea linkage to build a community with a shared future for mankind.

Full Text

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“Belt and Road” 2.0: Leading a New Type of Globalization

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Abstract

The evolving global development landscape and the practical challenges confronting the Belt and Road Initiative urgently demand its upgrade to a 2.0 version. Compared with its 1.0 predecessor, Belt and Road 2.0 represents three fundamental transcendences. Temporally, it does not seek to return to history but to step beyond it. Spatially, it expands from managing the Eurasian stage to shaping a global pattern, ushering in Eurasian Continental Era 2.0—characterized by land-sea connectivity—and Maritime Era 2.0—encompassing the deep sea, Arctic regions, and South America. In terms of its own development, it evolves from connectivity to interconnection of all things—moving from “heaven, earth, and humanity” to “heaven, earth, humanity, sea, air, and cyberspace,” embracing human-machine interaction and integrating heaven and earth into a unified network of interconnected everything. This initiative aims to create a new human civilization for the 21st century and lead a new type of globalization: (1) inclusive globalization that leaves no corner behind; (2) Globalization of the South—shifting from seeking foreign aid to attracting investment; and (3) linked globalization—connecting North and South, land and sea, to build a community with a shared future for mankind.

Keywords: Belt and Road, new globalization, global commons, community with a shared future for mankind

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At the end of 2015, I participated in a dialogue on the Belt and Road Initiative organized by the Counselors’ Office of the State Council with American counterparts. When discussing oil and gas pipelines beyond railways and highways, and their importance to the Middle East and Central Asia, an American participant responded that since the United States had already achieved a shale gas revolution, what use would China have for building so many oil routes and pipelines? Such divergent perspectives were frequently encountered during research, and the proposal for version 2.0 stems primarily from these practical and theoretical confusions.

1.1 Overcoming Various Practical Challenges

While the Belt and Road Initiative is well-known domestically, overseas it has encountered several categories of misperceptions. Initially, the United States regarded the initiative as an illusion. When implementing the Marshall Plan across 23 Western European countries after World War II, the U.S. commanded over half of the world’s foreign exchange reserves and nearly half of global GDP, leading some to question what China could accomplish with its current economic strength on such a massive scale. However, after the success of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the U.S. began to take the initiative seriously. Some American strategists have suggested that the initiative might lead China into “imperial graveyards” and “quagmire regions” like Afghanistan, hoping to see China decline on land rather than encroaching on maritime domains. Such

rhetoric can easily strain China' s relations with other countries, representing a strategic exploitation of the initiative.

1.3 On the Rationality, Legitimacy, and Purposiveness of Belt and Road

Recently, the EU launched an investigation into the Hungary-Serbia railway constructed with Chinese participation, citing failure to conduct open bidding within the EU framework. This undoubtedly exacerbates perceptions of unfair competition for Chinese high-speed rail in Europe, and this is not an isolated case. In India and throughout South Asia, despite the initiative' s significant influence, authorities are actively working to offset or dilute its effects. These represent another form of strategic pushback.

Theoretical confusion also persists. Western audiences often ask after my presentations: “Can you explain this in accessible theoretical terms?” They struggle to comprehend the “Dao” (Way), whether expressed through economic development theory, geopolitical theory, or international relations theory. No existing Chinese theory can adequately capture the Belt and Road Initiative. If one were to be developed, it would need to be a grand theory—but what would that be?

When we mention the Belt and Road Initiative, we first invoke its temporal dimension: the revival of the Silk Road based on over 2,000 years of history, which provides a certain rationality. Spatially, we emphasize consultation, contribution, and shared benefits rather than overthrowing existing international structures, arrangements, or order, which provides legitimacy. But can it achieve what Kant termed purposiveness? The initiative itself advocates peace, inclusiveness, benefit-sharing, and balance, but can this be realized in practice? This is what rationally-minded Westerners constantly examine: “You speak beautifully, but can you deliver?” Without convincing answers, our arguments lack persuasive depth.

Peter Frankopan' s *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* sells well in airports worldwide. Chinese reviewers hail him as the most authoritative expert on the Belt and Road Initiative, yet the “Silk Roads” he discusses are fundamentally different from our “Belt and Road.” We view the Silk Roads as routes for trade, peace, and cultural exchange between East and West. However, when German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen coined the term in 1877, maritime expansion had reached its limits, necessitating legitimacy for land-based expansion. He unified East-West routes under the “Silk Road” concept primarily for geopolitical expansion needs. This represents a distortion of the original concept.

1.2 Overcoming Three Major Risks Calls for an Upgraded Belt and Road

The aforementioned challenges can be summarized as three major risks. The first is temporal risk. The UK Ministry of Defence' s *Global Strategic Trends*:

2010-2040 report suggests the world will remain in transition until 2040, facing challenges including climate change, rapid population growth, resource scarcity, ideological resurgence, and power shifts from West to East. Phenomena like Trump's election and Brexit are merely manifestations of this "black swan" turbulence. This constitutes the era background for building the Belt and Road Initiative, distinct from the prosperous globalization era when China joined the WTO in 2001. We are entering a long historical period of great transformation.

The second risk is spatial. The 65 countries along the Belt and Road closely overlap with the strategically "unstable arc" covering transitional zones between civilizations and tectonic plates—regions where military conflicts frequently erupt and terrorist attacks regularly occur.

The third risk is internal. The Belt and Road Initiative involves long cycles and widespread projects that are difficult to construct and even more challenging to maintain and operate.

1.5 Transcending Existing Paradigms: "Linear Catch-up" and "Industrialization as Necessary Stage"

The concept of a "community with a shared future for mankind" can help explain some confusions. A 2015 McKinsey report [Figure 1: see original paper] states that the world's economic center has continuously shifted from East to West. The first turning point came in 1735 when Emperor Yongzheng died and Qianlong ascended the throne, marking the shift from East to West. After World Wars I and II, the center moved from Europe to the United States. Between 2001 and 2025, Western predictions suggest China will reverse the 1,000-year westward shift of the world's economic center. In 2001, China joined the WTO and fully embraced globalization, while 2025 is predicted to be when China's economic aggregate will surpass that of the United States.

According to catch-up theory, China's current GDP is 70% of America's, while its per capita GDP is only one-seventh of America's. At this pace of catch-up, how could Americans not feel threatened? However, the question now arises: if globalization itself faces "de-globalization" and the world demonstrates increasing uncertainty, will simple "linear catch-up" logic withstand the test of chaotic uncertainty?

A watershed moment in human history is approaching. McKinsey's world economic long-cycle prediction: "After a millennium, the world's economic center returns to the East."

[Figure 1: see original paper] World Economic Long Cycle

This model indicates that after the Song Dynasty, the world's economic center shifted from China to Europe, then to the United States, and will return to China by 2025—a "world repositioning." The fastest eastward shift occurred during 2000-2010. Humanity will make strides between 2000-2025 surpassing those of the nearly century-long period from 1820-1913.

Based on past experience, world development must undergo industrialization and globalization, with current institutional arrangements built upon this logic. When presenting the Belt and Road Initiative abroad, we describe it as a new type of industrialization and urbanization for humanity, yet this faces challenges. Few have noticed that in 2010, the same year China surpassed Japan to become the world's second-largest economy, China's industrial output value exceeded that of the United States for the first time, making it the world's largest industrial manufacturer. Today, China's industrial output is 150% of America's. While the Soviet Union was once thought to have reached the limit of steel production at 200 million tons, China today produces 870 million tons. In a dialogue with Martin Jacques in London, he noted that the subway built in London over 150 years is far less extensive than the 20,000 kilometers of high-speed rail China built across 9.6 million square kilometers in just ten years.

China's industrialization is transferring industrial chains to Pakistan, the Indian Ocean, and Africa. In recent years, Western developed countries have begun pursuing re-industrialization. However, from the perspective of UN sustainable development assessments, industrialization may not be a necessary stage for human progress.

These are the questions we must contemplate. In Western scholar Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, it is suggested that world power may not simply shift from West to East, but could also move downward or sideways. Originally, the "Silk Road" represented civilizational exchange, but should it now evolve into civilizational integration rather than simple barter? We must create a new human civilization.

In practice, the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation held in May 2017 saw the participation of presidents from Chile and Argentina and the British Prime Minister. What is their relationship to the Belt and Road Initiative?

Some ask whether we should wait until Belt and Road 1.0 is completed before developing 2.0. China has never operated this way. In its modernization journey, China has pursued industrialization and informatization simultaneously, and now proposes "Made in China 2025" to align with overseas "Industry 4.0." This requires us to adopt a forward-looking perspective on the Belt and Road Initiative. Theoretically, we must propose a more inclusive framework; practically, we need a clear roadmap. Otherwise, the initiative will face significant challenges.

1.6 Three World Capabilities: China Must Move from Application to Innovation

The world possesses three capabilities: China's application capability, America's innovation capability, and Europe's spiritual capability. China's greatest achievement in reform and opening-up has been the marketization of technology application. Version 2.0 must address innovation and spirituality, with theoretical innovation being a capability in itself. I propose a three-step process: revival,

inclusiveness, and innovation. All civilizations need self-revival; then they must embrace other civilizations; most critically, they must innovate world economic civilization. The economic world involves billions of people pursuing industrialization. The “universal values” that could explain systems for tens of millions of people are far inadequate for institutional arrangements facing hundreds of millions. We must innovate theoretically.

2.0 Differences Between Belt and Road 1.0 and 2.0

How does 2.0 differ from 1.0? I compare them across three dimensions: time, space, and self-development.

2.1 Temporal Dimension: Stepping Beyond History, from Catch-up to Innovation

Temporally, we previously based the initiative on history; now we “step beyond history.” During a speech in Afghanistan, I emphasized that Belt and Road should help Afghanistan escape its history and cease being the “imperial graveyard” and “political chessboard” of modern times. Therefore, 2.0 will shift from reviving the Silk Road spirit to leading the future, from catch-up logic to overtaking on curves, and from industrialization’s gradient industrial transfer to innovation in the new industrial revolution.

2.2 Spatial Dimension: From 65 Countries to the Arctic and South America

Spatially, the original initiative involved 65 countries plus extended and radiating countries. Now, our vision extends to the Arctic. South Korean think tank Yushi Zhai has mapped a “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly Chart” : as Arctic glaciers melt, the left side represents the Eurasian continent via Northeast Asia through the Bering Strait, the right side represents the route through Alaska to the United States, with South Korea positioned at the butterfly’s center, calling this Belt and Road 2.0. Southward, it can extend to Chile and Mexico, reaching the era of the Manila galleons, enabling “intelligent global connectivity.”

2.3 Self-Dimension: Pursuing Global Governance in Four Global Commons

Regarding the initiative’s self-development, the first phase of the Eurasian (and African) continental three-dimensional transportation network aimed to create infrastructure effects, industrial clusters with agglomeration and radiation effects (capacity cooperation), and economic corridors with linkage effects. These three aspects primarily embodied the connectivity concept, targeting the vast Eurasian (and African) market. However, during implementation, market failures emerged. Many countries lack developed market economies, so China uses development finance to create market conditions. For double-landlocked countries like Uzbekistan, no company would invest in railway construction under

pure market economics, making loans impossible. But China provides open loans through the China Development Bank. For Indonesia's Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail, Japan lost the bid to China precisely because it insisted on local government guarantees, while China secured the project through CDB guarantees.

Version 2.0 must design more strategic high ground in its funding models. For instance, the four unknown frontiers—information, deep sea, space, and polar regions—are considered global commons not owned by any single sovereign state. The earlier we enter, the more discourse power we gain.

President Xi Jinping's concept of managing the "Eurasian grand stage" represents Maritime Era 2.0. When Europeans discovered the world and new continents, oceans served as transportation channels; today, we must explore the deep sea era. China's "Jiaolong" submersible can dive to nearly 10,000 meters, yet we still know little about the deep sea. For example, algae—plants without roots, stems, or leaves—have lived on Earth for 900 million years. From polar to tropical regions, in both freshwater and saltwater, from surface to 90 meters deep, algae thrive everywhere, producing 80% of atmospheric oxygen. Without algae, there would be no life. Marine animals communicate through sound, light, chemicals, and electricity, receiving signals through touch and smell. The deep sea era transcends mere road construction, requiring comprehensive exploration of marine development, marine ecology, big data, and marine information.

In the information domain, the *National Informatization Development Strategy Outline* issued in July 2016 explicitly states the need to expand international development space, promote information development along the Belt and Road, coordinate planning for submarine and cross-border land cables, enhance international connectivity levels, and build a digital Silk Road. This includes opening land routes through Central Asia to West Asia, through South Asia to the Indian Ocean, and through Russia to Central and Eastern Europe, while actively promoting submarine cable construction toward the Americas, Europe, and Africa. Thus, we can see that in Belt and Road 2.0, information becomes digitalization, deep sea represents human-sea integration, space embodies heaven-earth integration, and polar regions signify global governance .

Comparison Between Belt and Road 1.0 and Belt and Road 2.0

Belt and Road 1.0	Belt and Road 2.0
Revival of Silk Road spirit	Industrialization gradient transfer: scale effect → New industrial revolution: innovation
65 countries (including China)	Related countries: UK, US, etc., depending on different fields

Belt and Road 1.0	Belt and Road 2.0
Bilateral as primary, multilateral as supplementary; Globalization of the South as primary	Arctic: new China-Europe route; South America: Manila galleon era; Networked globalization: intelligent connectivity
Eurasian (and African) continental three-dimensional transport network: infrastructure effect	Industry clusters: agglomeration and radiation effects (capacity cooperation)
Economic corridors: linkage effect	Eurasian (and African) large market: correcting market failure
Information: digitalization	Deep sea: human-sea integration
Space: heaven-earth integration	Polar regions: global governance

Following this logic, we can transcend from revival to leadership, and from general connectivity to “interconnection of all things.” “Inter” means connecting with international standards—comprehensive opening up. “Link” means interconnection of all things, human-machine interaction, and heaven-earth integrated artificial intelligence. “Inter” also means becoming the West’s market—building a Eurasian-African market of our own. “Connectivity” evolves from the “five connections” to leveraging capital and technological advantages to set standards, such as establishing industrial standards for 5G technology and gaining pricing power for bulk products like energy pipelines. During research in Kazakhstan, the ambassador to Kazakhstan asked whether we could create a Caspian Sea index for energy and natural gas pricing in RMB rather than relying on the U.S. dollar. In the internet domain, Jack Ma has the power to formulate e-WTO/e-WTP rules. China is providing public goods for the information world, thereby enhancing its institutional discourse power in global governance.

3 Case Study: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor 2.0

Unlike China’s traditional historical research approach that fills gaps, we must now adopt a forward-looking perspective on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). As a flagship corridor, it symbolizes and elevates China-Pakistan friendship. It has “four pillars”—infrastructure, energy, ports, and development zones—primarily to fill industrialization gaps. CPEC is now entering version 2.0, with significance extending beyond bilateral relations to become a major demonstration project for South Asian continental and even regional cooperation.

CPEC has “five major effects” : First, the China-Pakistan cooperation demonstration effect. If China introduces its development zone model, capital, and energy corridor development to help Pakistan become a medium-power, it will inspire more countries to learn from the Chinese model. Second, the industrial transfer effect. Transferring industrial chains through CPEC to Africa for industrialization will fundamentally change the situation where Western colonial

powers never built railways or infrastructure in Africa over centuries. Third, the North-South balancing effect. CPEC connects the “World Island” of Eurasia with the “World Ocean” of the Indian Ocean, significantly addressing development imbalances between North and South and achieving logical shifts in geopolitics, geo-economics, and geo-civilization. Fourth, the greater South Asian regional cooperation effect. Through China-Pakistan-Afghanistan, China-Pakistan-Iran, and China-Pakistan-India cooperation, CPEC’s spillover effects serve a “trinity” of development, security, and governance for greater South Asian regional cooperation—the UK’s participation further demonstrates regional spillover effects. Fifth, the global governance effect, particularly practical China-Afghanistan-Pakistan cooperation to address Afghanistan and Pakistan’s chronic cycles of poverty, tribal violence, and terrorism, which is why the UN has twice included Belt and Road in its Afghanistan resolutions.

[Figure 2: see original paper] China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

Africa has yet to achieve connectivity, and neighboring countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan lack even direct flights between them, making them welcome the Belt and Road Initiative. China has “four confidences” and hopes that through connectivity, Pakistan and other countries can also enhance their own “four confidences.”

4 The Vitality of Belt and Road Itself

Since its proposal, the Belt and Road Initiative has become a practice, an organization, and a theory with its own vitality. Version 2.0 must particularly consider three questions: relations with the United States, how to address global uncertainty, and how to think prospectively about longer-term planning.

4.1 China-U.S. Cooperation, Starting with an Infrastructure Alliance

How can we cooperate specifically? There are maritime order, global climate, maritime transport, maritime logistics, maritime environmental protection, and marine science. The United States was built on the oceans, while China’s modern maritime system construction has just begun and needs to learn from America. Although the U.S. has the world’s largest maritime territory, aircraft carriers and military bases are no longer the most advanced forms of order and require Eastern wisdom from China. China can coordinate within the G20 or certain regional organizations.

For instance, addressing Afghanistan’s chronic problems of terrorism and drugs also serves U.S. national security and strategic interests. Where China and the U.S. appear to conflict may precisely be areas for cooperation.

4.2 Overcoming the Paradox of Globalization: Livelihood Projects + Globalization of the South

How can the Belt and Road Initiative overcome the paradox of globalization? First, it must change one-dimensional globalization. The information super-highway transforms the original partial or one-dimensional globalization model. It must also change the “center-periphery” division of labor system, alter civilizational hierarchies, and resolve contradictions between regionalization and globalization. Brexit proves that regionalization is not necessarily a path to globalization and may contradict it. Only after Brexit can the UK better sign an FTA with China and embrace globalization.

The Belt and Road Initiative focuses on Eurasian connectivity as a sublation of neoliberalism-dominated globalization. To pioneer new globalization, it must concentrate on the real economy and infrastructure, such as livelihood projects that give ordinary people greater sense of gain, participation, and happiness. American strategist Parag Khanna argues in *Connectography* that infrastructure investment over the next 40 years will exceed that of the past 4,000 years. While traditional globalization’s tariff reductions can boost world economic growth by at most 5%, new globalization’s connectivity can drive growth of 10-15%. Therefore, Belt and Road provides stronger momentum for globalization and will reform traditional globalization toward openness, balance, inclusiveness, and benefit-sharing.

New globalization is also inclusive, leaving “no dead corners” in globalization. Westerners pioneered globalization, but the world’s nighttime lights concentrate mainly on coastal areas of North America, Japan, and Europe, while 1.3 billion people still lack electricity: 500 million in Africa and 300 million in India. Ninety percent of world trade occurs via maritime routes, with maritime logistics concentrated in the Atlantic. The internet is similarly concentrated, with 9 of 12 root servers in the U.S., one in Norway, one in Japan, and one in the UK. China is now participating in internet governance rule-making. Therefore, we must make globalization more balanced to address underdevelopment, social security, and development issues in inland regions. Belt and Road will highlight Globalization of the South, enabling greater Southern participation and helping African and other developing countries shift from seeking foreign aid to attracting investment, from which the U.S. and West will also benefit.

4.3 Path and Prospects: Common Civilizational Revival + Localization of Globalization

The path and prospects for building new globalization include four aspects:

- (1) Achieving common civilizational revival. This represents the overall revitalization of humanity, transcending modern competitive logic with the logic of common civilizational revival. Belt and Road connects humanity’s four great civilizations—Egyptian, Babylonian, Indian, and Chinese—through comprehensive, three-dimensional connectivity comprising rail-

ways, highways, aviation, shipping, oil and gas pipelines, power transmission lines, and communication networks. This promotes the revival of inland and riverine civilizations, helps developing countries escape poverty, and enables emerging countries to rise sustainably.

- (2) Creating civilizational order. Belt and Road creates a civilizational order with civilizational states as basic units, transcending the modern international order based on nation-states. It achieves a leap in international politics from geopolitics and geo-economics to geo-civilization, innovating civilizational logic through three approaches: transcending civilizational estrangement through exchange, transcending civilizational conflict through mutual learning, and transcending civilizational superiority through progress. We must change Western thinking patterns and return the world to its proper pluralistic era, stimulating creativity in every individual and pride in every nation. This is where I believe the Chinese Dream connects with the world dream. Belt and Road must be responsible to the world. The world needs public goods to the extent that China's rise needs space, and China's rise serves the world.
- (3) Land-sea connectivity. Of the world's 44 landlocked countries, which beyond Europe have achieved industrialization and subsequently democratization? Very few.
- (4) Globalization must be localized. Today, we must create a state where civilizations can "appreciate their own beauty, appreciate others' beauty, share beauty together, and achieve great harmony." No civilization is superior to another. Is agricultural civilization necessarily backward compared to industrial civilization? Agricultural civilization is more sustainable. We must change this notion and enable globalization to take root locally.

The Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation aims to revive the global economy, rebalance the world, foster global innovation, and achieve global connectivity, completely breaking away from dependence on the West and the era of monism. In the future, we may need to downplay the concept that Belt and Road is China's proposal, because it is a global public good, human creativity, and scholarship that follows the dual logic of recreating China and recreating the world.

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