China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

# The Chinese World Order in Historical Perspective:

## *The Imperialism of Nation-states or Soft Power*

*Prasenjit Duara*

*History Department, Duke University*
*1356 Campus Drive, 224 Classroom Building*
*(East Campus), Box 90719, Durham, NC 27708, USA*

**Prasenjit Duara** is the Oscar Tang Chair of East Asian Studies at Duke University, USA. Born and educated in India, he received his Ph.D. in Chinese history from Harvard University. He was previously Professor and Chair of the Department of History and Chair of the Committee on Chinese Studies at the University of Chicago (1991–2008). Subsequently, he became Raffles Professor of Humanities and Director, Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore (2008–2015). He was elected as President of the Association for Asian Studies, USA, from 2019 to 2020.

In 1988, he published *Culture, Power and the State: Rural North China, 1900–1942* (Stanford University Press) which won the Fairbank Prize of the AHA and the Levenson Prize of the AAS, USA. Few among his other books are *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian*

*China and the World: Ancient and Modern Silk Road*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1–33
© World Scientific Publishing Company
DOI: 10.1142/S2591729319500238

*Modern* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), and most recently, *The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian Traditions and a Sustainable Future* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). He has presented over 175 keynote and distinguished lectures globally since 1996 and his work has been widely translated into Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and the European languages. He was awarded the honorary doctorate (*doctor philosophiae honoris causa*) from the University of Oslo in 2017.

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

**Abstract:** I seek to grasp the genealogy of China's Belt and Road (BRI) in relation both to the imperial Chinese world order and the historical sequence of forms of global domination, i.e., modern imperialism, the 'imperialism of nation-states' during the inter-war and Cold War period as well as the post-Cold War notion of 'soft power'. While we may think of BRI as poised uncertainly between the logics of the older imperial Chinese order and the more recent logic impelled by capitalist nation-states, there are significant novelties in the new Chinese order, mostly in relation to debt, the environment and digital technology which constitute new realms of power not easily dominated by a hegemon.

*Keywords*: Imperialism; national imperialism; Tribute Order; BRI; debt; environment; Pakistan; soft power.

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

## Introduction

My goal is to assess the historical conditions and "genealogy" of China's emergence as a global power. "Genealogy" refers not to a linear sequence of historical causations, but to the different historical modes of power relations that generate the possibilities of the present.[1] I reference the various periods of Western and Japanese imperialism and dominance and revisit the imperial Chinese notion of the world order. In particular, I explore the Chinese Imperial Tribute Order discussed by Fairbank (1968) and others several decades ago.

The argument is not a historicist one suggesting that the present expansion of Chinese power and influence in the One Belt One Road (OBOR) policy (*yidai yilu* officially translated as Belt Road Initiative, BRI) is somehow a return to those conceptions. Rather, I suggest that there are continuities and novelties with these different modes of dominance and *responses*, including unexpected convergences between the imperial Chinese order and BRI. But each mode of dominance also generates novel realms of power that I will address, particularly with regard to BRI, in the later part of this paper.

The Qing imperial order was very different from the Westphalian/Vatellian, Panchasheela, and Cold War orders. As is well known, it was not a system of theoretically equal states, but a paternalistic, hierarchical order based on tribute. The Westphalian system was formulated theoretically on the equality and non-interference between *recognized* states; in

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

practice, these states were highly intrusive in each other's affairs, territorially competitive, and dominating. As far as the non-Western world was concerned, imperialism and plunder tended to dominate the relationship between sovereign Western states and the rest. The competitiveness for global resource control, combining both the above factors, generated the two World Wars of the twentieth century.

There has been a historical sequence of forms of global domination since the end of the nineteenth century that I will try to trace here in order to grasp the contemporary Chinese order, poised uncertainly between the logics of the older imperial Chinese order and the more recent logic impelled by capitalist nation-states. After a brief discussion of modern imperialism, I will move on to what I have called "the imperialism of nation-states" which represented the principal form of domination among states during much of the twentieth century and show how it continued in some form through the Cold War. Despite continued warfare conducted by the US and other states, post-Cold War geopolitical dominance is said to be shaped by the pull of "soft power". In the second part of this paper, I will examine the extent to which this notion — which is popular in the Chinese media — has any purchase in understanding the rise of China.

## The Imperialism of Nation-States

During the nineteenth century, as Hobsbawm (1990) and Arendt (1973) have argued, imperialism was largely the business of competitive nation-states and nationalism was mobilized to further their interests; but by the twentieth century, *nationalism had become the driving force behind imperialism*. Arendt (1973) commented that imperialists appeared as the best nationalists because they claimed to stand above the reality of national divisiveness and represent the glory of the nation (Hobsbawn, 1990, pp. 87–90). While nationalism represented the incentive of glorious recog- nition and resources to drive global competition, it also entailed the granting of the rights of citizenship and the obligations of discipline to enable the nation-state to transform itself into a sleek competitive body. In the process, imperialism not only became an important goal for

some nationalisms, it also became an important means of the formation of this nationalism.

Even as nationalism became the principal driver of imperialism, the theory of nationalism — in the words of Lord Acton — became its own principal enemy. The late-comer competitors of the premier imperialist powers of Britain and France, including Germany, Russia, United States of America, and Japan, were fired by nationalism in their quest for global resources and power, and the turn of the century saw the massive stirrings of nationalism in the colonized and semi-colonized world. Until then, the great imperial powers of Britain and France had established their cultural hegemony in the colonial world with the idea of the *civilizing mission*. Naipaul (2010) described this project thus, "The Europeans wanted gold and slaves, like everybody else; but at the same time they wanted statues put up to themselves as people who had done good things for the slaves. Being an intelligent and energetic people, and at the peak of their powers, they could express both sides of their civilization; and they got both the slaves and the statues."

But World War I wrought great disillusionment on the idea of the "civilizing mission". "The nature of the battle on the Western Front made a mockery of the European conceit that discovery and invention were necessarily progressive and beneficial to humanity", writes Adas (1993). The final triumph of nationalism or national self-determination over imperialism as the hegemonic global ideology was clinched by two political developments: the Soviet revolution and Woodrow Wilson's advocacy of the right to national self-determination in the aftermath of World War I (Barraclough, 1967).

The discrediting of imperialism led even the most hardened colonial powers to change their techniques of imperial domination. In Britain, Joseph Chamberlain's neo-mercantilist ideas of colonial development (which had been largely ignored before the war) and of "imperial preference" began to be taken more seriously. But as a consequence of entrenched ideas of colonial self-sufficiency, post-war capital needs at home, and, not the least, demands for protection by the British industry, only once before 1940 did expenditure on colonial development creep above 0.1% of Britain's gross national product (Constantine, 1984; Havinden and Meredith, 1993).



China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

The post-World War I transformation of French attitudes toward the colonies was summed up by Albert Lebrun: the goal was now to "unite France to all those distant Frances in order to permit them to combine their efforts to draw from one another reciprocal advantages" (as quoted in Bruce Marshall, 1973, p. 44). But while the French Government extended imperial preference and implemented reforms, particularly with reference to legal and political rights in Africa during the 1930s, investments in economic and social development projects were insignificant until the creation of the Investment Fund for Economic and Social Development in 1946. Both evolutionist ideas of backward races (and their incapacity for modernity) as well as protectionist pressures from agrarian society served as impediments to development (Bruce Marshall, 1973, pp. 48, 224–226).

## Late-Comers and the Imperialism of Nations

The most radical ideas and technologies for embedding the quest for power within a new *global* ideology — of nationalism — were developed by the late-comer competitors and most systematically, as we will see, by Japan. The United States, in part because of the consciousness of its own colonial past, and with the exception of a few places (most notably, the Philippines), had long practiced imperialism without colonialism. After the Spanish-American War in 1898, the United States created a system of client states around the Caribbean Basin in Central America. These nominally independent states became increasingly dependent on the United States, which accounted for more than three-fourths of the region's foreign trade as well as the bulk of foreign investment.

During the decade of the 1920s, when Japan was experimenting with indirect imperialism in Manchuria, the United States too was seeking to develop and refine informal control over Central American countries, especially as it faced revolutionary nationalism in the region. Officials, diplomats, and business groups stressed on means such as US control of banking, communication facilities, investments in natural resources, and the development of education — particularly the training of elites in American-style constitutions, "free elections", and orthodox business ideas. But the threat and reality of military intervention remained close at hand (Smith, 1972).

The Bolsheviks — including Stalin, who would famously work from the 1920s to curtail their autonomy — were theoretically committed to the rights of nations to self-determination based on the right to secede (Stalin, 1913). The Bolshevik position on national self-determination entailed territorial autonomy *without* party autonomy. Communist parties in the non-Russian territories were not particularly nationalized, and the Soviet goal was to subordinate national loyalties to "proletarian" (i.e., party) interests. Japanese empire builders in the 1930s were quick to study the Soviet model of the multi-national state for Manchukuo. To these observers, Soviet nationality policy fulfilled the goals of federalism and protected minority rights while at the same time strengthening the power of the Soviet state. Thus, nationalism was not suppressed but utilized positively for the goals of the state (Tadashi, 1943). Although for different reasons, the strategies of utilizing nationality policy for state control failed in both Manchukuo and the Soviet Union.

Of course, the Soviet Union practically prevented secession until the very end. But according to Brubaker (1996), it did a great deal to institutionalize territorial nationhood and ethnic nationality as fundamental categories of political and personal understandings. The Soviet strategy was to contain, control, and even harness different sources of dissent by creating national–territorial structures of administrative control and fostering loyal national elites (including mobilizing modernizing women against the socially conservative men in some Central Asian Republics). The Soviet state may have said to have produced both quasi-nation-states and ethnic nationalities where there were often none before (Brubaker, 1996). Ironically, it ended up fostering national consciousness in places where it had been very weak or non-existent, often at the expense of identification with the Soviet Union which never succeeded in generating its own narrative or symbolism of nationhood.

## The Japanese Empire

But it was in Japan that this approach was most systematically developed. While pan-Asianism had emerged among intellectuals in the early 1900s, it was encouraged as an ideology incorporating Japan's distinctive role as both victim and victimizer in the imperialist game; this ideology permitted the Japanese the conceit that they were obliged to lead the



China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

Asian nations against the West. Such claims were, however, belied by the vigorous nationalism of Asian peoples against the Japanese. In response to this complicated scenario, Japanese colonial bureaucrats, military officers, and intellectuals in the 1920s began to experiment with modes of association and alliance that would reinvent empire and nation (Duara, 2003).

Japan's imperial ideology during the Pacific War was summed up for the empire and the world in the "East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere" which was, in theory, built upon independent nations and nationalities unified by an economically integrated Yen zone and dominated by the imperial military. Perhaps the most coherent of the experiments that culminated in this mode of imperial expansion was conducted in the puppet state of Manchukuo. Manchukuo sought to synthesize the 1912 Chinese Republican idea of Five Nationalities (itself a mode of federating recalcitrant parts of the Qing Empire) with the Soviet theory of nationalities within Manchuria.

As noted, Japanese empire builders in Manchukuo were very attentive to Soviet strategy. By allegedly granting different peoples or nationalities their rights and self-respect under a state structure, Manchukuo presented itself as a nation-state in the mode of the Soviet "union of nationalities". Japanese policy makers saw Soviet nationalities policy as the one that fulfilled the goals of federalism and protected minority rights, while at the same time strengthening Soviet state and military power particularly with regard to "separatists" in the old Tsarist Empire (Tadashi, 1943).

While the Japanese empire represented a brutal mode of imperialist expansion, it is important to note that the changes it brought about presaged in many ways, the modes of domination during the Cold War. First, the occupied areas were designated as nations and peoples as nationalities. This entailed having locals occupy government positions at all levels with shadow Japanese officers and military personnel at critical levels. Civic, social, and cultural groups were often organized into state mandated and regulated categories. In some places, mobilizatory groups resembling the communist or fascist "youth" or "women" wings were established.

Second, the new imperialism emphasized the idea of developmentalism. The vision of Matsuoka Yosuke, who argued the Japanese case

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

for the independence of Manchukuo from China at the League of Nations in 1933, transcended the old imperialist game of dealing with native allies merely to gain concessions and privileges. Rather, his goal was to bring the puppet government, principally through financial and military ties, firmly under Japanese control, and subsequently to pursue economic policies for developing Manchuria as a whole. Development was to take place not by excluding Chinese and others but by encouraging them to contribute to the prosperity of the region. The Japanese, who were presumed to be the principal actors and natural leaders of this effort, could only benefit from this general development (Matsusaka, 2001).[2]

After the establishment of Manchukuo, the Japanese exploitation of colonies such as Korea was accompanied by increases in productive capacity. As the Korean economist Park (2003, p. 5) has demonstrated, while Indian growth between 1900 and 1946 was under 1% annually, the yearly mean growth rate of gross domestic production in Korea was 3% from 1915 to 1940. The accumulated per capita British investment in India and Japanese investment in Korea were eight dollars and 38 dollars, respectively, in 1938 (Park, 2003, p. 19). The imperialism of nation-states reflected a strategic reorientation of the (colonial) periphery to be part of an organic formation designed to attain global supremacy for the imperial power.

Thus if the "civilizing mission" emblematized the old style of cultural imperialism — based on the colonized ones' desire to emulate, the new *imperialism of nation-states* was built on a cultural paradigm of theoretical equivalence of nations based on common or similar institutions, economic models, and rhetoric of brotherhood or family ties. Nonetheless, military and financial power remained at the base of the Japanese imperium as much as it did in the US and Soviet Cold War empires. It simply became more efficient or effective for the imperialists to foster *modern* and *indirectly* controlled institutions in their dependencies. The aim was to control these areas by dominating the levers of mobilization, such as banks, the transportation infrastructure, and political institutions, which were created to resemble those of the metropole (such as legislative councils, institutions of political tutelage, and political parties like the communist parties or the Concordia in Manchukuo).[3] In short, unlike British free-trade imperialism, several inter-war imperialists

attended to the modernization of institutions and identities. They often espoused cultural or ideological similarities — including sometimes anti-colonial ideologies — even while racism and nationalism accompanied the reality of military–political domination.

## The Cold War

The competition among the superpowers during the Cold War presents us with the lens to analyze the imperialism of nation-states and soft power. In the era of the United Nations, domination and the means to "get others to want the outcome you want" had to do its work through the framework of national sovereignty which was no easy task. Military and, to a lesser extent, economic controls, to be sure, remained the bases of superpower dominance. But the resistance to their global dominance even among their allies or clients from Vietnam to Marcos's Philippines and from Prague to Afghanistan was in fair evidence. At the same time, when it did work, it also had a great deal to do with the military, financial, and political frameworks that had been established to maintain that dominance and not simply with soft power.

Although it became more fully developed in the period after WWII, the Soviet Union's creation of a regional system of militarily-dependent states in Eastern Europe reflected many features of the new imperialism. A shared anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist ideology sanctioned a centralized economic and political system. The Soviet Union combined economic leverage and military threat to integrate what were often states more economically developed than itself into a regional economy. In some ways, the imperialism of the Soviet Union revealed the counter-economic consequences of this logic of empire. Not only were the client-states of the Soviet Union in Europe often more developed, the USSR may have been subsidizing their economies by supplying them with cheap oil and raw materials while importing finished products from their economies. This was the price paid by the imperial power to create and maintain dependence upon it and ensure its security (Marer and Poznanski, 1986).

The role of the US as a superpower during the Cold War may be understood in terms of its interests, military violence, as well as its *designs of enlightenment*. Parrini (1993) has added another factor which he calls



China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

"ultraimperialism". The latter refers to US efforts to maintain cooperation and reduce conflict among imperialist nations who were busily scrambling to create monopolistic or exclusive market conditions in various parts of the world during the first half of the twentieth century (Parrini, 1993, pp. 7–9). "Ultraimperialism" is secured by a chain of military bases around the globe — and structures such as the International Monetary Fund, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and World Bank — to enable the conditions of cooperation among advanced capitalist powers and to facilitate the new (developmental or modernizing) imperialism in the decolonized world. With the Cold War, the US developed a global empire employing, in the words of Arrighi, Hui, Hung, and Selden (2003), a vast system of "political and military vassalage" and fostering a "functional specialization between the imperial and vassal (*nation*) states…" (p. 301). The empire was fortified by a chain of about 1,700 military bases in over a 100 nation-states that had varying degrees of clientelist ties to it. These garrisons were strategic enclaves supervised by the Pentagon and sustained by — as much as they sustained — a vast military industrial complex. In this respect, the post-war United States represents the apogee of the imperialism of nation-states (Johnson, 2004).

My point is not that the Cold War represents the essence of imperialism. Rather, we cannot understand the Cold War fully without analyzing how the historical relationship between imperialism and nationalism came to be configured anew in the post-war circumstances. Imperialism no longer emphasized conquest on the basis of innate differences among peoples and their inevitable destinies of superiority and exploitation. Moreover, as noted, it was development-oriented and there were opportunities for Cold War allied states to move up the economic ladder, chiefly by investments, technology and knowledge transfer, and easy access to US markets for those with the capacity to produce for it (Duara, 2019, pp. 346–375).

To be sure, the post-war international order was not only dominated by the Cold War powers and their allies. The new nation-states sought to form a non-aligned sector which remained extremely weak during this period. However, in Asia a new type of inter-state relationship by the name of Panchasheela was adumbrated by the Indians, Chinese, and the Indonesians. Panchasheela was a kind of Westphalian agreement for the post-colonial states where states would respect each other's territorial

integrity and not intervene in their affairs. Given that there were few non-nation-states left in the world, the question of agreements regarding colonial domination did not arise. Most aspirations for national independence or separation emerged within the territories of these new nation-states such as Kashmir or Tibet. But even without direct imperialism, the Westphalian practices of intrusiveness, territorial competition, and resource competition did not by any means disappear.

## Soft Power and/or the Imperialism of Nation-States

The concept of "soft power" has gained much traction in the post-Cold War era and we will explore its explanatory potential for contemporary international relations. On first sight we note that the imperialism of nations also involved considerable soft power, particularly in the case of the US. Among the Asian client or dependent states of the US, there were great discursive and attitudinal transformations — whether through popular culture, American university education, or the institutions of democracy.

At the same time, the underlying military and economic power of the superpower makes it difficult to distinguish this form from the cultural imperialism of nation-states. The imperialism (of nation-states) lay in the imposition of *designs for enlightenment* upon emergent nations by an enormously superior national power backed by military force. These enlightenment designs were often shot through with paternalism, national interests, and covert racist prejudices that constantly produced contradictions and tensions. Indeed, one could argue that it was this configuration of national imperialism that led to resistance to both the Soviet Union (contributing to its decline) as well as the United States in many parts of the world.

Joseph Nye has several descriptions of what he calls soft power and it is not easy to get a coherent view of it. At one place, Nye (2004, pp. 4–5) defines "soft power" as "getting other countries to want the outcomes that a particular country wants — coopts people rather than coerce them". This is actually a more stringent definition than many other statements by Nye and others about soft power being about the desirability of a power's cultural and political institutions and "the ability to entice and



China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

attract" others to it. While there may be some causal relationship between the two factors, desiring the goodies of another country does not mean yielding to its political will. Indeed, this is what nationalism is all about.

To be sure, Nye's (2004) book *Soft Power* suggests that the thrust of his work is to critique George W. Bush's administration and the Neocon failure to secure a sufficient consensus or even coalition in making the decision to attack Iraq. The work points to the *non-deployment* of US soft power to win allies in Iraq and internationally which could have functioned to win the peace. While this is a worthwhile critique, the notion of soft power appears here to be reduced to the quest for legitimate engagement or legitimacy. There is only a remote connection to the other stuff of soft power — educational and administrative exchanges, Hollywood, democratic institutions, etc.

Besides, the Iraq case states the problem negatively: how soft power was not utilized? There does not appear to be a substantive instance of how soft power was positively utilized in the book (except perhaps during the Marshall Plan, which point, however, is not developed). The causes of the end of the Cold War can be attributed to the soft power of the US in a very diffuse and contentious way. All successful instances of soft power, such as the Marshall Plan and Cold War Pacific Asia, were also based on prior military control or dependence on military. Moreover, this prior dominance allowed the creation of similar institutions which fostered a similarity of interests and goals between elites in the metropolitan and dependent and allied societies. By the same token, it restricted the possibilities for the population at large. Thus Latin American societies found it difficult to sustain socialist states or even large-scale public expenditures without incurring the disfavor of the United States, and the Soviet Union would not tolerate "market-happy" bourgeoisies.

It would appear that co-opting the people to want your outcomes often takes place *post-factum*: after the hard intervention has been made, and soft power is used to mollify and accommodate key allies. It leads me to believe that hard power — military and economic — is an important if not invariable condition of soft power. In other words, the question is that is it possible to agree to a superpower's decisions without the hard power of military or financial/economic pressure? Is it possible to build trust on the basis of fair exchange and reciprocity? If so, that would be soft power.



China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

Although it is from a very different period and context, in some of its structural features explored below, the Chinese imperial order may be seen as an exercise of soft power. Can we conceive of a Chinese soft power? Can a power convey a sense of "fair exchange", of providing desirable goods and values without the threat of overwhelming military, financial, or other dominating forms of power? If so, how will it be established?

## The Imperial Chinese World Order (Qing 1644–1911)

I propose that we consider Chinese imperial tribute practices as a Wittgensteinian "language game" that is opposed to the idea of a system which presupposes stabilities, repetition, rules, abstract principles, and essences (Wittgenstein, 2001).[4] Language games are not well-bounded systems constituted by a single principle or doctrine — say of sovereignty — but open-ended. Rules, norms, and codes (which are learned) are provisional, capacious, and flexible.

Moreover, different games do not have the common essence of "games" but are recognizable by *family resemblances* of overlapping codes and practices. Thus, for instance, when the Qing emperors performed the roles of both the Bodhisattva Manjusri as well as the patron who descends to meet his spiritual mentor the Dalai Lama half-way, the Tibetans and Qing were engaged in overlapping language games (the ambiguity of which would become problematic in a different epistemic context of sovereign states). All this is, of course, different from his role as the Son of Heaven or having treaties signed on his behalf (such as the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689, which approached the principle of Westphalian sovereignty). We may think of the East Asian Tribute Order as a complex language game which incorporated various modes of ritual and other performative procedures with diverse and *changing* roles for the players. Note that the Chinese Song dynasty (10–12th centuries) also had to deliver large values of tribute to the Khitan (Liao) and the Tanggut (Xi Xia).

The kind of flexibility granted by these performative procedures permitted a number of advantages to the parties, their economic interests, and the political values that were involved. In the imperial Chinese rhetoric, tribute, paid by states and communities peripheral to China,

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

was an expression of the subordination of these groups to the imperial state, in return for which the emperor bestowed gifts upon the tribute bearers. However, as Hamashita (1994) has shown, in practice it represented a wider web that did not involve merely the relationship between China and the tribute bearer, but a host of "several other lesser or satellite tribute relationships not directly concerning China and forming a considerable more complex system of reciprocal relationships."

By the middle of the Qing dynasty in the eighteenth century, tribute trade became meshed with this wider trading order. Commercial transactions based on the price structure in China became intertwined with tributary relationships. For instance, private trade between Thailand and South China was fueled by profits from tributary missions, but when trade in this region declined, traders in South China were able to switch to trading alongside other tributary missions, for example, missions from Ryukyu to Nagasaki. Even earlier, when the Song had to pay tribute to Khitan and Tanggut (10–12th centuries), its superior economic power ensured that the great amounts of silver and silk paid to these "barbarian" states were exceeded by the silver and cash the Chinese gained in return for their merchandise exports to these states (through trade made possible by the tributary mechanism).

During the Ming, China (together with Mughal India) was the "global sink" for silver which became the primary medium of exchange both internal to China as well as regionally and globally. The entire tribute-trade zone became loosely integrated through the use of silver as a medium for settling China's trade surpluses. Key to this development was the huge demand for Chinese goods outside China, the demand for silver within China (especially for tax payments), and the difference in prices inside and outside China. Economic opportunities were for a long time sufficient to keep most of those involved — even the East India Company — vested in the tributary mode until the British Government replaced its monopoly of the China trade in 1833. Arguably, the flexibility of the Tribute Order enabled the interlacing of cultural and economic goals for various players without significant use of military violence.

This is hardly to say that military violence was absent. The Ming naval expeditions led by Admiral Zheng He in the first part of the fifteenth century, forced tribute and captured slaves and even a king in Sri Lanka in a bid to demonstrate the power of the Chinese emperor.

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

However, such military authority over the sea route was not maintained beyond a brief window in the fifteenth century. Nor did China control the land routes over Central Asia; these routes were controlled by nomadic groups.

Rather one might say that Chinese military power outside the empire was mostly expressed as expeditions undertaken largely as punitive measures against bordering states, including Korea, or tribes who often harassed and threatened the empire at its periphery. For example, during the eighteenth century, the Burmese state conducted raids along the southwestern frontier. This prompted several punitive military expeditions with mixed results (Zhou, 2011). Military campaigns were often very expensive and were designed principally to stabilize the Tribute Order and manage the bordering states rather than for colonial and territorial expansion beyond the empire.

The restricted, albeit credible, use of military power and the more important economic, financial, and political–cultural dimensions of the tribute-trade zone suggest the possibility of thinking of this mode as the exercise of soft power. If we can conceive of BRI as combining culture and economics of investment and trade with an apparently cooperative and light military presence, it could well be comparable to the Chinese imperial tribute system of the last millennium. Can BRI reproduce such a win–win condition? Is it possible to convey a sense of "fair exchange", of providing desirable goods and values without the threat of overwhelming military and financial power? Can the contemporary Chinese strategy express a "neo-traditional soft power"?

## Promise and Perils of BRI as Neo-traditional Soft Power

Of course, as a modern nation-state with great power ambitions, the goals and imperatives of the imperial Chinese state have undergone a revolutionary transformation. The same conditions of capitalism, nationalism, and statism did not exist in the imperial era. As is well known, BRI represents a massive expansion of Chinese economic investments in infrastructure partnerships including high-speed railroads, telecommunications, new ports, and energy cooperation. This has been facilitated by the Exim Bank, CITIC Group, Chinese Development Bank, and others

who have invested and sought to develop the region from China's reserve of its USD 3 trillion treasure-chest. The public and scholarly media are awash with data and information on the BRI and there is little point in repeating all the information here. My principal goal is to inquire if there are new modes of expansion, domination, and fair exchange in the twenty-first century represented by the BRI.

The Chinese government and intellectuals who have taken a great interest in soft power debates, place a significant role for culture in this initiative. Chinese leaders have taken historical memories as their launching pad. Invoking the ancient Silk Road at the start of the Chinese "One Belt One Road" policy in the fall of 2013 on a visit to Central Asia, President Xi Jinping said, "My home, Shaanxi Province, is the start of the ancient Silk Road. I can almost hear the ring of the camel bells and smell the wisps of smoke in the desert." In his speech at the Boao Forum for the Asia Annual Conference in 2015, Xi declared that the Belt and Road will "promote inter-civilization exchanges to build bridges of friendship for our people, drive human development and safeguard peace in the world."

The Central Asian Belt remains particularly important in Chinese thinking of BRI because as Jisi Wang and Tim Winter (2012) of Peking University declared, "Not only is Central Asia rich in natural resources and ripe for investment, an "anti-China alliance" led by US is unlikely to be formed because of diversity of powers and interests." Winter (2016) has suggested that the various countries on this road from Kazakhstan to Iran, to Turkey, and the Gulf states have started to develop their heritage sites — each striving to get as many sites on the World Heritage list — on the Silk Road to enhance their status and craft contemporary commercial and political strategies on this emergent platform. Although the historical reality of the overland Silk Road was also marred by warfare and disease, the image promoted in these countries is that it represents the legacy of peace and prosperity.

In general, BRI may be seen as a principally cultural and economic approach to the earlier strategic Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) founded in 2001 and consisting originally of the Russian Federation and Central Asian republics. China's SCO initiative was designed to increase military, counter-terrorist, and anti-separatist cooperation in the



China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

region, but BRI encompasses these strategic considerations under a much wider plan that covers not only the "one belt" across Central Asia to Europe but also "one road", the maritime route that historically linked Eurasia from the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea.

According to Callahan (2016), Xi Jinping's foreign policy embodied in BRI is a vision of a Sinocentric world order contained in the rhetoric of a "community of shared destiny" (*gongtong mingyunti*). It is a comprehensive plan integrating domestic needs and relations with neighboring countries and other partners. The goal is to weave these countries into a network of economic, political, cultural, and security order that reflects China's vision of global governance that includes its norms and rules (Callahan, 2016).

At one level, it is a version of soft power that builds upon infrastructural investments and finance. Many countries involved with BRI require capital for infrastructure development not easily available to them. Moreover, they can also partake of the advanced digital technology such as 5G, BeiDou, the Chinese geophysical positioning system, and other technology connected with the Digital Silk Road that is accompanying infrastructure-building. The BRI vision is also informed by ideals of harmony and authority that are non-contentious, and not liberal.

To be sure, Chinese investments abroad — whether state-owned or private — have been driven by the search for outlets of excess capital, labor, and older, especially coal-mining, technology within China. The investments also tend to be extractive and energy-hungry. Chinese state policies appear to follow the Panchasheela principles of non-interference in the internal matters of sovereign states. Hence, in its dealings with governments in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere, it responds to the kind of regime that is operative. Where civil society groups are well developed, the Chinese representatives can be responsive to demands made by them. This was the case with the demands by local environmental groups in Kenya to make way for elephant crossings across the Nairobi–Mombasa railroad or the Chinese response to Southeast Asian groups seeking amelioration or curtailments related to dam-building and other projects in the Mekong.

On the other hand, where civil society is not well developed, investments in mammoth logistical and infrastructural ventures have tended to



China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

by-pass the interests of local communities, favoring state elites. Here in states with weak governance structures, Chinese state corporations are seen to be hand in glove with crony capitalists. Moreover, Chinese investors also have to tread very carefully across minefields of local conflicts, civil wars, extremism, and separatist movements.

## The China–Pakistan Relationship

The China–Pakistan relationship through the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) exemplifies the new challenges and opportunities for the two sides and is worth reviewing as one of the largest BRI investment destinations, of USD 62 billion. Pakistan is a lynchpin in the initiative because it is at the crossroad of BRI, linking the Central Asian belt with the maritime road through the new port city of Gwadar. But, as Robert Bianchi (2019) has shown, the Chinese did not bargain for the difficulties in dealing with the contentious pluralism of Pakistani political society. Caught between ethnic, tribal, regional, independence fighters (especially, but not only in Baluchistan), fundamentalist, and civilian–military disputes among others, the blueprints of proposed Chinese investments have had to be redrafted to satisfy different segments while still producing dissatisfaction among those who are left out and expected to bear the future consequences and debt (Bianchi, 2019; Chatzky and McBride, 2019). Indeed, Chinese workers and engineers have also lost their lives to these tensions and the threats of large-scale violence remain palpable.

To be sure, the Pakistan Government has welcomed these investments and the benefits to Pakistan are also enormous. Apart from the massive infrastructure as well as port and energy development, the Pakistan military has been the only recipient of China's BeiDou military satellite navigation system allowing some of the world's most precise guidance for missiles, aircrafts, and ships (Abi-Habib, 2018). Moreover, one of the world's largest solar plant will be constructed by China in Pakistan. At the same time, however, it has also invested US$1.2 billion for coal mining in the Thar Desert and the construction of 660-MW coal-fired power generators. The environmental effects of CEPC investments are a matter of concern.



China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

Until around 2014, Pakistan's energy source from coal constituted only a very small percentage of its total energy production. At the request of the Pakistan Government, China developed the lignite coal mines over roughly 9,000 $km^2$ of Pakistan's Thar Desert with Chinese loans, technology, and labor. In the last five years, coal has become by far the biggest source of energy production, although not all of it is from the Thar coal fields (World Nuclear Association, 2018).[5] The project has also been politically and socially very controversial, involving displacement of over hundreds of villages, causing land speculation, encroachment, and community conflicts that have escalated to one between the province of Sindh versus the Pakistan Government and the Chinese corporations (Meghwar and Ali, 2016; Martinez Alier, 2003; Turi and Ashraf, 2018). Similar problems have been reported over large-scale investment projects elsewhere in Pakistan, for instance in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Baluchistan (EFSAS, 2018).

## Environment and Debt

While China has emerged as the world leader in the urgent drive towards renewable energy domestically, ironically Pakistan's new mines have rapidly changed the composition of its sources of energy production to favor coal, and particularly from lignite, a poor grade of coal with very high levels of carbon emission. The Thar case is not an exception. Between 2014 and 2017, six Chinese banks participated in US$143 billion worth of syndicated loans to the BRI region's energy and transportation sectors. Almost three-quarters of the total volume of this finance went to the oil, gas, and petrochemical industries. Of the finance that went to the power-generation sector, more than half financed fossil-fuel power plants, including US$10 billion for the coal plants in places as diverse as Turkey, Kenya, and Tajikistan (Zhou *et al*., 2018, pp. 12–13; Gilbert *et al*., 2018; Hurley, Morris, and Portelance, 2018, p. 10). As Nicholas Stern recently pointed out, "I feel that there is a split between the ideas behind the Belt and Road Initiative and what has actually been financed under the initiative. It would be good if China's Belt and Road financing can get closer to the idea and to the great changes that are happening inside the country" (Hao, 2019).

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

The environmental issue is a deeply problematic one for the win–win claim of BRI. The debate and choices in the developing world about the relationship between development and environmental protection — regardless of its merits — already complicate BRI projects in countries where there are environmental movements and concerns. Just as significantly, there is a growing perception that China which is a global leader in the production of renewable energy and more recently, in conserving its environment, is doing so by outsourcing its natural resource requirements. Given that China's water and soil conditions are highly compromised and need to be conserved, it is seeking to draw on those resources abroad. The acquisition of vast tracts of agricultural lands in different parts of the world as much as the extraction of minerals and other natural resources is by no means a novel phenomenon in world history. But global consciousness of environmental unsustainability is particularly acute and does introduce a new dimension to the claims of BRI.

A second dimension readily evident in the Pakistan case is the problem of debt. The impact of the CPEC-related outflow was originally estimated at only 0.1% of GDP per annum by Pakistani authorities. Yet, according to the IMF, those repayments will peak at 1.6% of GDP per annum by 2024. In addition, in the first quarter of 2017, Pakistan already had an external debt of $75.747 billion, and according to Pakistani economists, it is expected to grow to $110 billion in the next four years. The combination of high upfront tariffs, interest rates, and surcharges will probably force the state to increase its domestic and export prices, making it difficult to compete with other countries which maintain lower prices. Additionally, the volatility of the Pakistani rupee against the dollar and its effect on its export competitiveness do not bode well for its debt problem (Hurley, Morris, and Portelance, 2018; EFSAS, 2018).

These same trends are reflected in several other countries. In Sri Lanka, where Chinese companies are building massive, and as yet little used, infrastructural and port facilities in Hambantota and Colombo, indebtedness is already a very troubled political issue. The detailed database of China's loans and investments involving Africa, shows that China lent a total of $143 billion to African countries between 2000 and 2017. It has also extended $140 billion in loans to Latin American and Caribbean countries since 2005. According to the thorough and balanced study of

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

BRI debt by the Center for Global Development (CGD), while the details and terms of contracts are not easily available for BRI bilateral projects, the report's authors have concluded that eight countries are at risk of debt distress on the basis of available data on debt to GDP ratios (Hurlet, Morris, and Portelance, 2018; Takata, 2019).

Leveraging financial power and recovering debt in the contemporary era and in the present geopolitical situation may not be as viable as in the past. Recent studies of sovereign debt and their restructuring programs across a wide range of cases reveal that defaults are not uncommon and restructuring can take as long as 15 years until the final resolution. These delays, which are frequently extended by political unrest, are very costly for creditors who may be stuck with defaulted loans or bonds and suffer what came to be popularly known as "haircuts" — deep losses — during the Greek crisis earlier in the decade. Although under different circumstances, the recent cases of Greece and Argentina suggest that while debtor countries do suffer, the creditor countries also bear considerable pressure from political instabilities in the debtor countries and pressure from international agencies and technocrats (Ghosal and Miller, 2019; Lim, Moutselos, and McKenna, 2019).

China is also engaged in debt restructuring and forgiveness, but it is very much through a case-by-case approach. China prefers bilateral lending practices and has declined membership in the multi-lateral framework of the Paris Club, at least for the time being (Hurley, Morris, and Portelance, 2018, p. 19). However, since global financial control exercised through the multi-lateral framework still remains concentrated in London and New York, China may control even fewer levers to pressure repayment (Trebesch, 2019). In the last year there have been reports of push-back and pull-back on BRI projects that will probably temper its rapid expansion.

To be sure, the CGD study concludes that it is unlikely BRI countries will be overcome by unsustainable debt; but China will also be unable to avoid debt problems among participating countries. The long-term leasing of sovereign territories and assets such as Hambantota — or possibly, Mombasa — is liable to produce significant political resistance particularly in nations where the opposition and civil society are active such as Sri Lanka and Kenya, respectively (Mwere, 2018; Mutambo,

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

2019). In Pakistan, as the burden of debt to China began to be felt, by 2018 the government turned to the International Monetary Fund and Saudi Arabia for billions of dollars in loans. The IMF has pressed Pakistan to share all existing agreements with China and has required IMF input during any future CPEC negotiations. It has also stated that Pakistan cannot use its bailout to repay CPEC loans (Chatzky and McBride, 2019; Hurley, Morris, and Portelance, 2018, p. 52; Tariq, 2019).

Meanwhile, since 2017 there have been several canceled Chinese investment projects in Pakistan and a general slowdown and delays in project completion (Abi-Habib, 2018). Malaysia's efforts to radically reduce its financial burden by rewriting contracts for BRI projects in 2019 are significant not only in suggesting pushback by assertive partners, but also for China's willingness to enter into what is perceived as fairer terms by these partners (Huang, 2019). At the second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation held in Beijing in April 2019, President Xi Jinping sounded the new principles, including extensive consultation, joint contributions, and the need to "pursue economic growth, social progress and environmental protection in a balanced way" (Beltandroadforum.org, 2019). In response to the perception about the lack of transparency and fairness in contracts among some recipient countries, Beijing has begun to acknowledge the possibility of private and third-party participants in BRI projects. If this prevails, it should contribute to higher standards of viability, transparency, and governance (Liao, 2019).

## Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia is perhaps one area in which the more flexible approaches declared during the BRI forum in April 2019 might be seen. The new approach is evidenced in the Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed's renegotiation of the previous contract for the East Coast Rail Link project which reduced the cost to Malaysia by 30%. Myanmar has also negotiated a better deal for investments in the Chinese-led port project of Kyaukpyu. Similarly, Thailand's Prime Minister sounded a hopeful if somewhat guarded note upon his departure from the BRI forum when he suggested that Thailand views the progress of BRI as

dependent on its compatibility with multi-lateral frameworks (Takahashi, 2019; Green, 2019).

China's political relations with the ASEAN nations has contributed both to the hope and uncertainty. Long before BRI, during the 1990s, China had begun to cultivate very good relations with ASEAN, managing ethnic relations between Chinese (a critical investment group in China's development in the 1990s) and non-Chinese with sensitivity. China's relation with integrating Asia was dramatically enhanced during the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997–1998 when China did not devalue its currency. This restraint was particularly meaningful because the region felt abandoned by the flight of Western capital and helpless in the face of unsympathetic Western criticism and stringent IMF policies imposed upon their straitened economies. Subsequently in October 2003, China was the first country to sign the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) with ASEAN, indicating a commitment to participate by the norms set by ASEAN. Decades since the Asian Crisis, China is the largest importer of Southeast Asian products and an increased number of Chinese students preferred to pursue degrees in Southeast Asia rather than in the US (Duara, 2015).

China lost much of the goodwill and trust that it had built up in ASEAN, despite unwavering support from such nations as Cambodia. The most prominent reason for the loss is the geopolitical tension over China's claims and militarization of the South China Sea that has been building up since 2012. Less conspicuous but perhaps more damaging to China's image in the hinterland of Southeast Asia is the involvement of Chinese hydropower in the construction of gargantuan dams on the Lancang/Mekong and Nu/Salween Rivers. This is beginning to take an enormous toll on the livelihood of thousands of communities who live by these rivers and even more on the environmental damage caused by disrupting the natural flows of the rivers. Experts warn that colossal security disasters made up of food shortages, destruction of livelihoods, and irregular movements of people could — and have already — eventuate into violence and civil war.

While governments in these regions are more willing to compromise and cooperate with these hydropower companies (because of the energy harvest), it is the large-scale protests of civil society groups — both local and international — and their persistent activism in Southeast Asia (and



China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

in Yunnan until the recent past) that have stopped several projects and alarmed the establishment on both sides of the Chinese border. Perhaps the most effective of these was the Myitsone Dam being built in Myanmar in 2011 when a coalition of dozens of Myanmar NGOs with the blessings of Aung San Suu Kyi forced the termination of the Chinese project. The combined forces of Southeast Asian and Yunnan-based civic activism also succeeded in suspending the construction of 13 large-scale cross-border dams on the Nu/Salween River for about 10 years from 2003 to 2013 (Duara, 2015, pp. 265–266).[6]

The dam projects precede and are somewhat separate from the BRI in Southeast Asia, but they nonetheless reflect Chinese foreign investment policies and approaches. Over the last few years, it has been observed that Chinese state-owned hydropower companies have responded in some measure to demands made particularly by the well-organized Mekong civil society groups (Yeophantong, 2013, pp. 4–9, 11–13; Maurin and Yeophantong, 2013). In this context it is relevant to consider one of CGD's proposals for the restructuring of debts owed to China in this and other regions where the environment and livelihoods have been disrupted and even ravaged by large-scale projects. China could adopt debt-for-nature swaps, an approach championed by environmental organizations since the 1980s and used extensively by the United States and some multi-lateral funds like the Global Environment Facility. Under a swap arrangement, borrower country debt is forgiven in exchange for the country's commitment to fund key environmental objectives, such as tropical forest preservation (Zhou *et al*., 2018, p. 24). This could certainly be a winning situation if monitored properly on both sides.

However, not everyone is equally sanguine about the possibilities of BRI 2. Some observers in ASEAN, particularly Vietnamese analysts, have sounded warnings to the Association about the strategic component in China's infrastructural development. Vu (2019) suggests that China's preference for bilateral engagements in BRI with ASEAN nations "would tie each nation individually to China rather than link China with ASEAN as a whole", and this could ultimately pose a threat to regional connectivity, a key principle in the maintenance of the organization's integrity, unity, and security. Without common and uniformly high standards for projects, "the competition for limited infrastructure investments (will)

not only reduce the bargaining positions of Southeast Asia nations, but would likely trigger a "race to the bottom" in terms of project quality, undermining the fragile solidarity among ASEAN members and preventing collective efforts to restrain an assertive China and its ambitions in the region" (Vu, 2019).

## Conclusion: The Reconfiguration of the Realms of Hegemonic Power

I have tried to grasp the various possibilities of BRI in a long historical perspective including both the Tribute Order and the modern, capitalist imperial formations through the Cold War. The changing conditions and circumstances that I have invoked are both political and ideological as well as financial and technological. As the political–ideological conditions — for instance, the rise of nationalism as a global ideology — changed, so did the institutional–financial–technological responses of those who would be dominant powers. The results of this mode of responsive incorporation was the emergence of new realms of power, the potentialities of which for dominance and fair exchange are untested.

The new realms of power configurations enable a dominant or hegemonic power to assert itself, but not without a new deal. During the Cold War, superpower and state-to-state warfare were limited by the principle of deterrence in the atomic age. This led to some analysts in the West to call it the Long Peace. For much of the world outside the West, however, there were hot wars leading to large-scale violence and deaths arising from proxy warfare for the superpowers or intra-national contests which had also unfolded into the Cold War rivalry. Nonetheless, there were several client-partners who benefited from it.

If debt and environmental damage have always been part of hegemonic or imperialist expansion and domination, the new conditions under which they operate and are perceived to operate make a major difference to the nature of hegemonic power in the world. Whether it is because of unrecoverable loans or damage to the environment, the push-back from societies with strong opposition and civil society groups, or those where sovereign governments are subject to popular nationalist pressures (e.g., Vietnam), the assertion of the will of the dominant power is not easily



China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

exercised nor is it easy to "get others to accept what you want". If China can take a more positive approach to these concerns and problems, as it has suggested it will, we can expect the expansion of BRI to be more of a win–win situation.

We have touched upon the emergence of a more novel realm of power in the twenty first century that may not fit earlier definitions of hard or soft power, but can partake of both. This is what I have called "digital power". Artificial Intelligence (AI), 5G networks of inter-mechanical communication and action, sophisticated geosatellite navigation equipment, and new ways of combining surveillance technology with social credit systems are part of this digital power. To be sure, they have been and will increasingly be applied to military systems, but they are also capable of producing relatively bloodless but devastating damage, e.g., to electricity grids, military installations, communication networks, and electoral systems. We do not need much more evidence to support the idea that the current trade dispute between the US and China is increasingly about control of digital power perhaps more than the trade in goods.

Current opinion holds that China is ahead of the rest of the world in much of these technologies, especially AI and 5G through which it has been able to build a powerful digital and biometric surveillance architecture that applies to people and the movement of goods and communication. These technologies have been applied across China but in especially unprecedented detail over the movement and behavior of the population in Xinjiang. Those countries who receive the BeiDou navigation systems and other digital technologies for logistic, communication, and, in the case of Pakistan, military purposes, may or may not be aware that this flow of information will undoubtedly also be received by the relevant authorities in China. More significantly, China is also beginning to sell this pioneering technology to authoritarian regimes abroad who will seek to use it to deter popular movements against unpopular projects (Polyakova and Meserole, 2019).

To what extent can the cultural, economic, and political flexibility of the imperial Chinese tribute framework prevail over militaristic, nationalistic, and expansionist ambitions? China is not playing in the same world as 70 years ago when the US was able to combine its cultural



China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

soft power with military and economic infra-power. Unquestionably, China will continue to "walk on two legs" to apply a Maoist phrase. Traditional soft power, including infrastructural development and economic diplomacy, will proceed even while military flexing and threats will be undertaken in some zones. Sooner or later China will be called upon to secure its investments and commitments. In the age of many deterrents to open warfare, the military component will probably also be found in proxy wars whether in intra- or inter-national contests. In this situation, arguably digital power will be very important.

At the same time, the "softer" approach including economic negotiation, consultation, and cooperation will play a greater role. BRI has the potential to become a more collaborative platform, particularly with regard to potentially unpopular projects and those which pose severe threats to the environment. The great eagerness shown by many countries to participate in a more consultative and transparent BRI could make these projects more of a multi-stakeholder enterprise and China may well develop the capacity to "influence outcomes". Whatever China's vision of national power, its soft power will have to incorporate more democratic participation in its ventures abroad and take the leadership in global climate change activism not only by top–down technological approaches but also by creating a framework for community participation.

## References

Maria Abi-Habib, "China's 'Belt and Road' Plan in Pakistan Takes a Military Turn," The New York Times, December 19, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/19/world/asia/pakistan-china-belt-road-military.html?fallback=0&recId=1EwpcWTC0HGJeJVTKaRpImRdTrk&locked=0&geoContinent=AS&geoRegion=RJ&recAlloc=contextual-bandit-story-geo&geoCountry=IN&blockId=signature-journalism-vi&imp_id=873597847&action=click&module=editorsPicks&pgtype=Article&region=Footer.

Michael Adas, "The Great War and the Decline of the Civilizing Mission," in Laurie Sears, ed., *Autonomous Histories: Particular Truths* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 109.

J. Martinez Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2003).

Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), pp. 152–153.

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

Giovanni Arrighi, Po-Keung Hui, Ho-Fung Hung, and Mark Selden, "Historical Capitalism, East and West," in G. Arrighi, T. Hamashita, and M. Selden, eds., *The Resurgence of East Asia: 500, 150 and 50 Year Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 259–333.

Geoffrey Barraclough, *Introduction to Contemporary History* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1967), pp. 118–122.

Beltandroadforum.org, "Xi Jinping Chairs and Addresses the Leaders' Roundtable of the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF)," April 28, 2019, http://www.beltandroadforum.org/english/n100/2019/0429/c22-1392.html.

Robert Bianchi, *China's Statecraft in the Islamic World: The New Silk Road and the Rise of Afro-Eurasia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 18–24.

William A. Callahan, "China's "Asia Dream": The Belt Road Initiative and the new regional order," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (2016), pp. 226–243. doi:10.1177/2057891116647806.

CEIC, "Pakistan Coal Consumption," https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/pakistan/coal-consumption.

Andrew Chatzky and James McBride, "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative," Report (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative?utm_medium=social_share&utm_source=emailfwd.

Stephen Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy, 1914–1940* (London: Frank Cass, 1984), pp. 25, 276.

Prasenjit Duara, 'Nationalism and Development in Asia' in Deepak Nayyar ed., ASIAN TRANSFORMATIONS: An Inquiry into the Development of Nations, Volume II, Oxford Univ Press, Oxford 2019. pp 346–375.

Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, ML: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

Prasenjit Duara, *The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian Traditions and a Sustainable Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

European Foundation for South Asian Studies (EFSAS), "CPEC — An Unfair Deal for Common Pakistanis?" Report, June 2018 (Amsterdam: EFSAS, 2018), pp. 1–8.

John K. Fairbank (ed.), *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).

Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980).

Sayantan Ghosal and Marcus Miller, "Introduction to the Special Issue on Sovereign Debt Restructuring," *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 71, No. 2 (2019), pp. 309–319. doi:10.1093/oep/gpz020.

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

Sean Gilbert, Ye Wang, Lihuan Zhou, and Leonardo Martinez-Diaz, "Will China Seize the Biggest Green Opportunity of the Coming Decade," *Chinadialogue*, November 14, 2018, https://www.chinadialogue.net/blog/10933-Will-China-seize-the-biggest-green-opportunity-of-the-coming-decade-/en.

David Green, "Thailand Pushes China's Belt and Road despite Differing Visions," *Nikkei Asian Review*, May 2, 2019, https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Belt-and-Road/Thailand-pushes-China-s-Belt-and-Road-despite-differing-visions.

Takeshi Hamashita, "The Tribute Trade System and Modern Asia," in A. J. H. Latham and Heita Kawakatsu, eds., *Japanese Industrialization and the Asian Economy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 91–103.

Feng Hao, "Nicholas Stern: The World Cannot Go Net Zero Unless China Does," China's Ecological Leadership in Focus, *Chinadialogue*, April 18, 2019, https://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/11195-Nicholas-Stern-The-world-cannot-go-net-zero-unless-China-does-.

Michael Havinden and David Meredith, *Colonialism and Development: Britain and Its Tropical Colonies, 1850–1960* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 148–159.

Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Program, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 102.

Yasheng Huang, "Can the Belt and Road Become a Trap for China?" *Nikkei Asian Review*, May 23, 2019, https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/Can-the-Belt-and-Road-become-a-trap-for-China.

John Hurley, Scott Morris, and Gailyn Portelance, "Examining the Debt Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a Policy Perspective," CGD Policy Paper No. 121 (Washington, DC: Center for Global Development, 2018), pp. 1–39. https://www.cgdev.org/publication/examining-debt-implications-belt-and-road-initiative-a-policy-perspective.

Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004), pp. 23–37.

David Liao, "South East Asia is Natural Test Bed for Revamped Belt and Road," *Nikkei Asian Review*, June 26, 2019, https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/South-East-Asia-is-natural-test-bed-for-revamped-Belt-and-Road.

Darren J. Lim, Michalis Moutselos, and Michael McKenna, "Puzzled Out? The Unsurprising Outcomes of the Greek Bailout Negotiations," *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2019), pp. 325–343. doi:1080/13501763.2018.1450890.

Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, trans. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), [Translation from French of *La Condition Postmoderne: Rapport sur le Savoir* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979)].

Paul Marer and Kazimierz Z. Poznanski, "Costs of Domination, Benefits of Subordination," in Jan F. Triska, ed., *Dominant Powers and Subordinate States:*

*The United States in Latin America and the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986), pp. 371–399.

D. Bruce Marshall, *The French Colonial Myth and Constitution-making in the Fourth Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 44, 48, 224–226.

Yoshihisa Tak Matsusaka, *The Making of Japanese Manchuria, 1904–1932* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), p. 285.

Cristelle Maurin and Pichamon Yeophantong, "Going Global Responsibly? China's Strategies Towards "Sustainable" Overseas Investments," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 2 (June 2013), pp. 281–303.

Aggrey Mutambo, "Is Kenya Dropping China Loans for Private Deals?" *The East African*, September 8, 2019, https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/Kenya-China-investment-loans/2560-5264280-qb2yns/index.html.

Vikram Das Meghwar and Zaheer Ali, "Thar Coal Mega Power Project: Internal Migration, Desertification and Encroachments," *Lahore Journal of Policy Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (2016), pp. 75–84.

David Mwere, "China May Take Mombasa Port Over Sh227bn SGR Debt," *Daily Nation*, December 20, 2018, https://www.nation.co.ke/news/chinese-may-take-mombasa-port--ouko/1056-4902162-xfphu7z/index.html.

V. S. Naipaul, *A Bend in the River* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2010).

Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004).

Carl Parrini, "The Age of Ultraimperialism," *Radical History Review*, Vol. 57, No. 57 (Fall 1993), pp. 7–20.

Sub Park, "Exploitation and Development in Colony: Korea and India," *Korean Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2003), p. 5.

Alina Polyakova and Chris Meserole, "Exporting Digital Authoritarianism: The Russian and Chinese Models," Policy Brief, Democracy and Disorder Series (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2019), pp. 1–22. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/FP_20190827_digital_authoritarianism_polyakova_meserole.pdf.

Sven Saaler and J. Victor Koschmann (eds.), *Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism, Regionalism and Borders* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

Robert Freeman Smith, "Republican Policy and the Pax Americana, 1921–1932," in William Appleman Williams, ed., *From Colony to Empire: Essays in the History of American Foreign Relations* (New York: John Wiley, 1972), pp. 273–275.

J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, Transcribed by Carl Kavanagh (Place: Publisher, 1913), [First published in *Prosveshcheniye*, Nos. 3–5 (March–May 1913)].



China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

Tominaga Tadashi, *Manshūkoku no Minzoku Mondai* (Shinkyō: Manshu Tomiyamabo, 1943), pp. 43–45.

Toru Takahashi, "Asian Nations Cash in on China's Softer Sell of Belt and Road," *Nikkei Asian Review,* May 12, 2019, https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Comment/Asian-nations-cash-in-on-China-s-softer-sell-of-Belt-and-Road.

Yoichi Takata, "The Vanishing Illusion of China's Financial Might," *Nikkei Asian Review*, May 13, 2019, https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Comment/The-vanishing-illusion-of-China-s-financial-might.

W. Tariq, "Squeezed by Debt and the US, Pakistan Slows Belt and Road Projects," *Nikkei Asian Review*, September 8, 2019, https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Belt-and-Road/Squeezed-by-debt-and-the-US-Pakistan-slows-Belt-and-Road-projects.

Christoph Trebesch, "Resolving Sovereign Debt Crises: The Role of Political Risk," *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 71, No. 2 (2019), pp. 421–444. doi:10.1093/oep/gpy041.

Sibt-ul-Hassan Turi and Usman Ashraf, "Thar Coal Mining Project: The Oppression of Indigenous Hindu Community," *Ecología Política*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (2018). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330662294_Thar_Coal_Mining_Project_The_oppression_of_Indigenous_Hindu_Community.

Truong-Minh Vu, "ASEAN's Infrastructure Dilemma," *AsiaSentinel*, September 19, 2019, https://www.asiasentinel.com/about-us/.

Jisi Wang, "'March West,' China's Geostrategic Rebalance ['西进,' 中国地缘战略的再平衡]," *Global Times* [环球时报], October 17, 2012, http://opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion_world/2012-10/3193760.html.

Tim Winter, "One Belt, One Road, One Heritage: Cultural Diplomacy and the Silk Road," *The Diplomat*, March 29, 2016, https://thediplomat.com/2016/03/one-belt-one-road-one-heritage-cultural-diplomacy-and-the-silk-road/.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), [Originally published in 1953].

Pichamon Yeophantong, "China, Corporate Responsibility and the Contentious Politics of Hydropower Development: Transnational Activism in the Mekong Region?" GEG Working Paper No. 2013/82 (Oxford: The Global Economic Governance Programme, University of Oxford, 2013), pp. 1–26.

Lihuan Zhou, Sean Gilbert, Ye Wang, Miquel Muñoz Cabré, and Kevin P. Gallagher, "Moving the Green Belt and Road Initiative: From Words to Actions," Working Paper (Washington, DC: World Resources Institute, 2018), pp. 1–44.

Fangyin Zhou, "Equilibrium Analysis of the Tributary System," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 4 (2011), pp. 147–178. doi:10.1093/cjip/por005.

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.

## Notes

[1] The concept of "genealogy" is derived from Nietzsche and Foucault. See Foucault (1980, p. 139).

[2] For similar views of Pan-Asianist economic and political thinkers see the essays on Sugimoro Kojirō and Rōyama Masamichi (Saaler and Victor Koschmann, 2007).

[3] Manchukuo too began to resemble (and in several instances, led) the military-dominated *dirigiste* economy and centralized political system that developed in Japan beginning in the 1930s.

[4] I have also been influenced by Lyotard's (1984) understanding of language games.

[5] See the rapid increase — almost four-fold — in coal consumption between 2013 and 2018 of Pakistan's coal (CEIC, 2019). Nuclear Power in Pakistan, https://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/country-profiles/countries-o-s/pakistan.aspx, Accessed 8 Nov 2019.

[6] China has undertaken several other large-scale logistics and infrastructural projects in Southeast Asia which also show mixed results. For instance, the high-speed railroad that it wants to construct across Southeast Asia has faced resistance even from the Laotian Government which has for several years been protesting what they say are excessive Chinese demands and unfavorable financing conditions for its construction.

China and the World 2019.02. Downloaded from www.worldscientific.com
by STANFORD UNIVERSITY on 04/01/20. Re-use and distribution is strictly not permitted, except for Open Access articles.