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HISTORY AND ESSENCE OF THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE (BRI)

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The importance of logistics, i.e., transportation from one point to another of already manufactured goods, can hardly be overestimated. This principle is important not only in the modern world, where it is not enough just to quickly deliver goods from point A to point B, but was important thousands of years ago.

Despite this, in the modern world the main way to deliver goods from one point to another is sea transportation. According to the Big Russian Encyclopedia, since the end of the 20th century, intensively develop sea container transportation of goods [1]. There are several reasons for this:

1. Marine vessels have a much larger cargo capacity than trucks or trains. Economies of scale allow for lower unit freight costs.
2. Marine vessels typically have lower energy consumption per ton kilometer than trucks or trains. This is due to more efficient use of fuel and less water resistance compared to traveling on land.
3. Ports and marine terminals, although requiring infrastructure investment, generally have lower tariffs and service charges than rail or road terminals.
4. Fuel for ships is generally cheaper than for other modes of transportation. This is because many marine vessels use diesel fuel, which generally costs less than gasoline or jet fuel [2].

Based on the above, the modern world uses maritime transportation as the main way to deliver goods from one point to another based on practicality, and it plays a key role in international trade and logistics, ensuring efficient and cost-effective movement of goods around the world.

But if we look at the world from a historical prism, the main mode of trade and logistics in ancient times was caravan travel. Caravans, consisting of caravan animals such as camels or horses, transported goods across long distances overland, traversing deserts, mountains and other rugged terrain from East to West.

Important trading cities were Samarkand, Bukhara, Kashgar, Dungan, Baghdad, Damascus, Constantinople, Antioch, and Alexandria, and important goods were silk fabrics, spices, porcelain, precious stones, metals, silk, and many other commodities.

These caravan journeys were not only a means of trade, but also a means of cultural exchange, sharing knowledge and ideas between different regions of the world. They played a key role in the formation and development of economic, political and cultural ties.

On September 7, 2013, within the framework of the First State Visit of the President of the People's Republic of China (*hereinafter – PRC, China*) to the Republic of Kazakhstan (*hereinafter – RoK, Kazakhstan*), President Xi Jinping made an important speech titled "Promote People-to-People Friendship and Create a Better Future" at Nazarbayev University [3][4].

According to the President of the People's Republic of China, more than 2,100 years ago, the Western Han Dynasty opened the door for friendly contacts between China and Central Asian countries, which made it possible to connect Asia and Europe through the Silk Road Economic Belt project. At that time, Kazakhstan was one of the major stops on the ancient Silk Road and made important contributions to the exchange and cooperation between different states.

Xi Jinping, in this historic speech, proposed to strengthen political communication between Central Asian countries and China; open a transportation channel from the Pacific Ocean to the Baltic Sea and gradually form a transportation network connecting East Asia, West Asia and South Asia; strengthen monetary circulation, thus making the region more economically competitive in the world; and, of course, strengthen friendly exchanges between their peoples to promote mutual understanding and friendship with each other.

This speech was one of the first announcements of a larger project – "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)", where Belt is an abbreviation for "Silk Road Economic Belt", i.e., the New Silk Road project that will run through the whole of Eurasia. And Road is also an abbreviation of the name of China's strategic initiative "21st Century Maritime Silk Road", first put forward by President Xi in Indonesia in October 2013. The goal of this project is to create a Maritime Silk Road that runs through Southeast Asia, India, Africa, the Middle East and Europe.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is deeply rooted in history, drawing inspiration from ancient trade routes. These historical routes facilitated cultural exchange, economic cooperation, and the movement of goods and ideas between East and West. The modern incarnation of the Silk Road, proposed by President Xi Jinping, seeks to revitalize these connections and create new pathways for global cooperation and development.

The essence of the Belt and Road Initiative lies in its ambition to enhance connectivity and foster cooperation across continents. By investing in infrastructure projects and promoting economic integration, the initiative aims to create a network of trade routes that spans Asia, Europe, and Africa. This network encompasses land corridors, maritime routes, and digital connectivity, linking diverse regions and economies in a shared vision of prosperity and development.

Since its establishment and as of March 13, 2022, China has signed cooperation agreements under the "One Belt and One Road" initiative with 148 countries and 31 international organizations. [5] The cooperation agreements under the Belt and Road Initiative cover various sectors, such as infrastructure development, trade, investment, cultural exchange, and people-to-people connectivity.

Infrastructure projects focus on building roads, railways, ports, airports, and energy facilities to enhance connectivity and stimulate economic growth. Trade and investment agreements aim to facilitate bilateral and multilateral trade, reduce market access barriers, and foster business cooperation. Cultural exchange initiatives promote mutual understanding and educational cooperation through programs like

student exchanges and cultural festivals. Financial cooperation agreements support infrastructure financing and economic development, involving collaboration between financial institutions. Additionally, some agreements include provisions for environmental protection and sustainable development to address environmental challenges and promote green finance along the Belt and Road routes.

Overall, China's cooperation agreements under the Belt and Road Initiative reflect its commitment to promoting international cooperation, connectivity, and shared development. By working together with partner countries and international organizations, China seeks to build a community of shared interests, common development, and win-win cooperation along the Belt and Road routes.

Due to these factors, BRI is often viewed as China's attempt to expand its geopolitical influence and challenge the dominance of Western powers in global affairs. By financing and implementing infrastructure projects across Asia, Europe, and Africa, China is perceived to be reshaping the geopolitical landscape and potentially undermining the influence of Western-led institutions and alliances. Belt and Road Initiative represents a challenge to the Western-led international order, as it offers an alternative approach to development and global governance that diverges from Western norms and principles. While the BRI has the potential to promote economic growth and connectivity, its geopolitical implications and potential contradictions with the Western system have sparked debates and concerns among policymakers and analysts worldwide.

In conclusion, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is deeply rooted in history, drawing inspiration from ancient trade routes that facilitated cultural exchange, economic cooperation, and the movement of goods and ideas between East and West. President Xi Jinping's proposal to revitalize these connections through modern infrastructure projects aims to create new pathways for global cooperation and development.

Since its establishment, China has signed cooperation agreements with numerous countries and international organizations under the BRI, covering various sectors such as infrastructure development, trade, investment, cultural exchange, and people-to-people connectivity. These agreements reflect China's commitment to promoting international cooperation, connectivity, and shared development.

However, the BRI has also raised concerns and controversies, particularly regarding its geopolitical implications and potential contradictions with the Western system. Some view the BRI as China's attempt to expand its geopolitical influence and challenge the dominance of Western powers, potentially undermining Western-led institutions and alliances.

Despite these concerns, the Belt and Road Initiative continues to evolve, shaping the global landscape of economic cooperation and development. As China works with partner countries and international organizations to implement BRI projects, it remains to be seen how the initiative will influence geopolitics and international relations in the years to come.

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