

CHINA MOVES WEST

The Evolving

Strategies of the

Belt and Road Initiative

edited by
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13

China Moves West: Ten Years of the Belt and Road Initiative

Hongda Fan

When Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Kazakhstan and Indonesia in September and October 2013, he proposed the idea of jointly building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Twenty-First-Century Maritime Silk Road. Since then, the Belt and Road Initiative has gradually become one of the core issues of China's foreign relations. In 2015, the Chinese government published *The Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road* to promote the implementation of the initiative, instill vigor and vitality into the ancient Silk Road, connect Asian, European, and African countries more closely, and promote mutually beneficial cooperation to a new high and in new forms. At the Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China held in October 2017, promoting the construction of the Belt and Road was written into the party constitution, which shows that China's ruling party regards the BRI as a long-term development plan. The BRI, which is characterized by westward development, has survived its first ten years. As such, it is time to review its first decade and build on the research forwarded in this volume and elsewhere to develop some insights into key issues for the BRI going forward.

The Belt and Road Initiative in China

According to information from China's official website Belt and Road Portal, as of January 6, 2023, China has signed more than 200 cooperation documents on the joint construction of the Belt and Road with 151 countries and 32 international organizations. The cooperative countries are all over Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, South America, and

Oceania. In the view of the Chinese government, the BRI is a vehicle to achieve win-win cooperation that promotes common development and prosperity and a future of peace and friendship that enhances understanding and trust and strengthens exchanges in many areas. Naturally, if the BRI dream is fully realized, it will be a major contribution not only to China but also to the world.

In the past ten years, the BRI has been a very hot topic in Chinese academic circles. On January 19, 2023, I searched on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), the most influential Chinese literature database in China, using “one Belt and one Road” (in Chinese) as the keyword, and obtained a total of 55,048 results, including academic articles, media reports, and dissertations, 40,609 of which were from academic journals. This shows the enthusiasm of Chinese scholars for the Belt and Road. The 55,048 results are distributed across each year from 2014 to 2023 (see Table 13.1). As can be seen from Table 13.1, the BRI’s popularity in China increased or remained at a high level since the inception of the project until around 2019. Table 13.1 also shows that, compared with the previous period, the number of Chinese articles on the Belt and Road has dropped significantly during 2020–2022. While this is likely due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is nonetheless noteworthy.

During the Covid-19 period, China implemented very strict epidemic control measures, which seriously affected its foreign affairs. The BRI was no exception to this. Moreover, during the period when the Covid-19 pandemic and its prevention and control caused domestic difficulties to rise sharply, the BRI, which required a large amount of investment abroad, encountered varying views within China—the BRI has not simply been viewed through a positive lens in the PRC. In fact, from the very beginning, views on the Belt and Road Initiative in China have varied greatly from one analyst to the next. On January 20, 2023, I searched on CNKI with “one Belt one Road” plus “challenge” as the title keywords and got 1,256 results. There is clearly no monolithic—and unapologeti-

Table 13.1 Number of Chinese Articles on the Belt and Road, 2014–2023

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Articles	287	4,479	5,537	10,400	9,873	9,373	6,393	5,039	3,235	48
Journal Articles	158	3,405	4,326	8,085	7,547	6,998	4,717	3,218	2,087	30

Source: China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) website.

cally positive—opinion of the Belt and Road Initiative in China; debates in the PRC are vibrant and multifaceted. Chinese scholars are not naive to the many challenges facing the BRI in the upcoming decades.

With the gradual lifting of China's pandemic prevention and control measures, and Xi Jinping's reelection as the party's general secretary at the Twentieth National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October 2022, I cautiously believe that the BRI will continue to be valued by the Chinese government. Moreover, in the current era characterized by prominent contradictions among major powers and the adjustment of the international order, the BRI still has obvious positive significance for China.

However, as pointed out by other authors of this book, the BRI still faces many problems. If China cannot respond well to this and further improve the BRI, then this grand plan will inevitably encounter more difficulties. Of course, the international community also needs to analyze the BRI carefully, something that will have a positive effect not only on China and the partner countries of the project but also on the stable development of the entire world. After all, the dangers of states that are wary of Beijing misreading Chinese intentions regarding the BRI could be very costly for global peace.

In a critical official document on the BRI in 2015, China stated that the one belt and one road runs through Asia, Europe, and Africa, with the active East Asian economic circle at one end and the developed European economic circle at the other. The vast hinterland countries in the middle have huge economic development potential. According to this statement, at least in the initial design of Chinese policymakers, Central Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe are the key cooperation areas of the BRI. The scope of research covered in this book fits nicely with this vision. This book focuses on the significance of the BRI to China's revival, the relationship between China and Central Asia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Israel, the Persian Gulf, Türkiye, and other countries, and the promotion of the BRI from the perspective of major power relations.

The BRI from the Perspective of Asianization

The Chinese government launched the BRI ten years ago. In his chapter, Anoushiravan Ehteshami discusses the significance of the initiative to China. Starting from the macro changes of global power transfer and the rising status of Asia, Ehteshami emphasizes that the Asianization of

globalization has become a phenomenon that cannot be ignored by the international community. He believes that Asia is returning to the center of the world stage, and China can be said to be the core power of this Asianization process. It is against this background that the great rejuvenation of the country has become the common aspiration of Chinese policymakers and people. China increasingly sees itself as a country equivalent to the United States. At the same time, the relative decline of the United States' global influence is regarded by China as an opportunity for itself to rise again. In China's view, the era of global multipolarity rather than unipolarity has arrived.

To a large extent, the BRI is the response of Chinese policymakers to the changing global times described above. According to Ehteshami, the scale of the initiative is breathtaking, and its structure and expanse are such that it offers China the opportunity to deliver both regional multilateralism and global multilateralism with one stroke. However, in Ehteshami's view, vulnerabilities in China's own socioeconomic situation and its economic model may be impacting the intensity of the BRI. While China's great revival is no longer in dispute, it faces important challenges that will tax the Chinese leadership. Ehteshami believes that China's structure is being weakened by geopolitical tensions in Eurasia and that Beijing's response to Russia's actions in Ukraine has dented China's image and messaging.

It is understandable that some countries will not be happy with the Asianization of globalization, the rise of China, or the great rejuvenation. So, rising China is also facing its own challenges. Ehteshami believes that China has to contend with the efforts of the G7 and the West to balance against it. Also, China must deal with the challenges of the Australia–United Kingdom–United States (AUKUS); the Quad of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States; and the Asian democracies forum of India, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. As far as the BRI is concerned, Russia, Japan, and the United States have also proposed their own relevant equivalents to the project, which obviously cannot be ignored by China. All in all, Ehteshami aptly explains the opportunities for China amid shifting geostrategic landscapes, as well as the opportunities and challenges faced by the BRI as a strategic choice for China's great rejuvenation.

The BRI in Central and South Asia

As China's close neighbors, Central Asia and South Asia, which are closely related to the security and development of Northwest China,

are areas of special concern for the BRI. In this book there are two chapters focusing on the presence of Chinese interests in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

China–Central Asia Relations

In September 2013, when President Xi Jinping visited Kazakhstan in Central Asia, he publicly proposed the Silk Road Economic Belt for the first time abroad, which became one of the cornerstones of the BRI. The significance of Central Asia to the BRI can be seen from this. Julie Yu-Wen Chen's chapter, which draws on a survey of Central Asian states' views on China, focuses on China's promotion of soft power and hard power in Central Asia.

Chen believes that China has primarily utilized soft power in Central Asia. Further, Chen regards China's economic strength as its key source of soft power. In her opinion, China's focus on economic development is attractive for Central Asian states that not only need economic support but also wish to maintain their internal political stability. Economic development is believed by China and the Central Asian states to be useful in maintaining the regimes' political stability. While Central Asian governments do have reservations about China's economic expansion in Central Asia, they all understand that Chinese economic power is strong, and they hope that such engagement with Beijing would benefit them. The Central Asian states also see the benefit of using China to balance the dominance of Russia from time to time.

In terms of economic cooperation, Chen also warns that, while China does increase its overall economic clout through government initiatives such as the BRI and other private investments in Central Asia, one has to be cautious in concluding that the Chinese side can single-handedly use such soft power or economic clout in the region. In order to enhance its soft power in Central Asia, the Chinese government has also launched cultural programs represented by Confucius Institutes. Chen believes that although some propaganda materials exaggerate China's cultural influence in Central Asia, some existing academic research does not seem to support this. China's cultural soft power has its limits.

Central Asian countries still have many problems, including security issues, and key global powers are interested in this region. It is certain that China will not be able to achieve the ideal results of its diplomacy with Central Asia only by relying on soft power. Therefore, Chen agrees that attacks on Chinese infrastructure in various parts of the

world have led Beijing to take the security dimension of its BRI projects more seriously. However, because Russia regards Central Asia as its security responsibility zone, China's military cooperation with this region will inevitably attract Moscow's attention. So, despite China's growing hard power in Central Asia, China is cautious not to overstep Russia's traditional clout in this region. It is worth noting that, in the opinion of Chen, the informal mutual respect between Russia and China in carving out influence in Central Asia has been successful at least insofar as it has kept the United States excluded from the region.

One of the criteria to measure the success of China's diplomacy in Central Asia is the positive perception of China by the local people. In this regard, Chen examines Central Asian perceptions of China's soft and hard power. Through the survey of residents in Central Asian countries, she found that, compared with Russia, China is generally believed to have sizable influence, and it is also believed that its influence will even grow in the future. At the same time, her survey and other scholars' research also showed that Sinophilia and Sinophobia coexist in Central Asia. It should be noted that although the Chinese government has repeatedly promoted the BRI and signed relevant intergovernmental agreements with many countries, there is a phenomenon in Central Asia that people or local governments know little about the initiative. This lack of awareness of the BRI contradicts China's efforts in propagating it and in claiming that its initiative has received widespread support in Central Asia.

Chen's conclusion is particularly worthy of China's attention. Despite the Chinese government's efforts to use soft power strategies to undermine anti-Chinese or anti-China sentiments in Central Asia, the China threat narrative is still quite pervasive in Central Asian societies.

China-Afghanistan Relations

Let's shift our focus from Central Asia to South Asia. Afghanistan also shares a border with Xinjiang in northwest China. Decades of almost nonstop internal conflicts, wars, and turmoil have made this South Asian country a hotbed of international terrorism and illegal trade in drugs, posing a direct threat to neighboring countries, including China. Obviously, it is impossible for China to develop westward without paying attention to Afghanistan. Jia Liu's chapter analyzes China's policy toward Afghanistan before and after the Taliban came to power again, trying to respond to whether China will fill the vacuum in Afghanistan after the United States withdrew its troops from the country in 2021.

In Liu's view, whether before or after the Taliban reclaimed power in Afghanistan, China's Afghanistan policy was marked by noninterventionism. China's position is closely related to its own experience. The historical experience of the Chinese state has left it sensitive to violations of sovereignty. The interventions of the United States, and the West more broadly, challenge China to fully achieve the status of standing tall. Noninterventionism is the principle by which the PRC wants the United States and the West to treat China. So, China emphasizes its insistence on noninterventionism in its relations with Afghanistan. China is also unwilling to stand by and watch conflict in Afghanistan destabilize its neighboring countries, which will become long-term threats to China's western border. For this reason, China is devoted to ensuring its domestic security by fighting against terrorism and stabilizing Afghanistan. For this goal, before and after the Taliban reclaimed power, China has been actively working with relevant countries to ensure that Afghanistan can restore stability as soon as possible.

Economics is a key area in China-Afghanistan cooperation. Liu makes it clear that China's economic motivation in Afghanistan is not so much economic gain as it is for the stability of Afghanistan. Namely, this is because the Chinese government believes that economic development can promote stability in Afghanistan, and the stability of this country is China's most urgent need. Therefore, despite the Chinese government's fierce criticism of the United States' rash withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan in 2021, Beijing has continued to cooperate with the United States on the stability of Afghanistan. Moreover, it is quite obvious that China has also stepped up its bilateral and multilateral diplomatic efforts on the Afghan issue so that the Taliban-ruled country will not become a hidden danger to regional security and the security of Northwest China.

For the future of China-Afghanistan relations, Liu believes that, with China becoming more actively involved in Afghanistan-related issues, China's influence in Afghanistan may expand. But China is unlikely to be a predominant power in the way that the United States was in Afghanistan. This is mainly because China's noninterventionism will limit its involvement, particularly precluding a military presence in Afghanistan. I agree with this point of view. So far, I don't think China will take action akin to the US stationing of troops in Afghanistan. Moreover, no matter which faction is in power in Afghanistan, I believe the country's policymakers will basically not seek to endanger China's core national interests.

The BRI in the Middle East

Although the Middle East does not border China, it is regarded as the big periphery of China's diplomacy. Many factors in the Middle East, including rich oil resources, relatively backward industrialization processes, complex internal and external conflicts, and the desire, similar to China, to shape a new international order have made China pay more and more attention to this region. China regards the Middle East as one of the important cooperation areas of the BRI. This book examines China's relations with Iran, the Gulf Cooperation Council states, Syria, Israel, and Türkiye.

China-Iran Relations

Since the Iranian government announced the approval of the draft twenty-five-year comprehensive cooperation plan with China in June 2020, China-Iran relations have received a higher degree of attention. Considering that the relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States and other Western powers has been unstable for a long time, and the current competition among world major powers is also intensifying, there is more room for discussion on China-Iran relations.

Jacopo Scita's chapter presents the most salient challenges faced by Sino-Iranian relations in three overlapping domains: the bilateral dimension of the partnership; its regional implications; and its global location. In his opinion, the China-Iran partnership is characterized by apparent intrarelationship asymmetry and possesses the features of the quintessential great power–middle power relationship. This represents an inherent challenge to the expansion of the partnership, making its development exceptionally sensitive to the behavior of the more powerful partner, China, which ultimately dictates the partnership's limits and conduct.

At the regional and international level, Scita believes that China-Iran relations also face obvious challenges. He argues the positive effects of China's balancing act and the substance behind Iran's top place within the partnership hierarchy have been mainly illusory. China has recognized the centrality of three pivotal countries in the Persian Gulf subregion—Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—granting all three the status of comprehensive strategic partners. But for China, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi are more accessible, more lucrative, and less controversial partners to deal with than Tehran. At the global level, Scita believes that Iran's relations with the United States and China are structurally configured as great power–middle power relationships. Contextually,

Washington-Beijing relations are structurally significantly less asymmetrical. Therefore, intuitively, Sino-US relations are supra-ordinated to Sino-Iranian relations.

Scita takes a stark view of China-Iran relations. That is, throughout history, it appears clear that, at specific junctures, China has openly preferred nourishing its relationship with the United States at Iran's expense. In his view, the best way for Iran to overcome the abovementioned triple obstacles in its relationship with China is to get rid of Iran's international isolation. Iran has all the interconnectivity, economic, and strategic potential to become integrated into China's BRI, but such potential is nonexistent under international isolation.

China-GCC Relations

In December 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Saudi Arabia aroused widespread concern in Iran. During this visit, China's statements with Saudi Arabia and the GCC, respectively, made Iranian officials dissatisfied. This shows the complexity of China's diplomacy toward Iran and the GCC. Benjamin Houghton's chapter focuses on the relationship between China and the GCC. The chapter examines whether China's economic inroads in the region, particularly those associated with the BRI, are likely to herald an era of Chinese predominance in the Gulf and assesses the key challenges that Beijing must overcome *if* it wishes to become the primary and predominant external power in the region.

After examining the close but problematic relationship between the United States and the Gulf countries, Houghton reviews the uneven development of China's relationship with countries in the region. Although there are obvious contradictions between the two sides at certain times, the overall relationship between China and the GCC countries shows a trend of continuous improvement. This process is accompanied by the mutual needs of China and GCC countries and the promotion of third parties. Therefore, the current deepening of bilateral relations is not without foundation. The emergence of the BRI is a great benefit to China-GCC relations. Houghton explains that since the launch of the BRI in 2013, the GCC states have shown a strong interest in engaging with the project. Nevertheless, he also notices the differences in cooperation between China and various GCC countries. Compared with the rapid growth of cooperation with the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, the progress of China's cooperation with Qatar and Bahrain is quite limited. Houghton believes

that this may be related to the closer security cooperation between the latter two countries and the United States.

If China wants to achieve prominence in the Gulf, Houghton believes China must overcome at least three obstacles. The first is whether the United States would even allow China to play a more engaged role in regional security. The second is whether China is able and willing to project enough power in the region so that Beijing can ensure regional stability and protect the vast energy supplies on which it depends. The third is establishing an acceptable and sustainable strategy that allows it to maintain relations with all regional states without undermining its credibility or the very regional stability that it would be required to uphold. Clearly, as far as China-GCC relations are concerned, it is not an easy task for China to achieve security breakthroughs akin to those made in the economic sphere. The question now is whether the Chinese-brokered deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia will entail regional stability, thereby providing fertile ground for the emergence of a new regional security order that relies on the defusing of tensions—rather than military responses to tension—and the prioritization of areas of mutual benefit.

China-Syria Relations

In the years after 2011, Syria was in turmoil and war due to the violent impact of the Arab Spring and terrorist forces. It was not until the past two years that the Assad regime gradually stabilized the country with the help of external forces such as Iran and Russia. Although China sided with the Assad regime in several UN Security Council votes since the war broke out in Syria, the extreme instability in Syria clearly affected Beijing's willingness to cooperate with the country on the BRI. Kasia A. Houghton's chapter examines China's policies before and after the outbreak of the conflict in Syria, in addition to the challenges facing the BRI in this country.

As Syria's domestic situation gradually became clear and the Assad regime basically passed the survival crisis, the BRI opened the door to Syria. The Chinese foreign minister invited Syria to join China's BRI in September 2017, planning to revive and modernize Syria's historical position within the ancient Silk Road. According to Houghton, since then there has been much excitement among Syria's political and economic elites about the prospect of Chinese investment in Syria's reconstruction with no political strings attached. In order to consolidate the Sino-Syrian partnership, Damascus and Beijing signed a memorandum

of understanding (MoU) on January 12, 2022, making Syria a beneficiary of China's BRI. The signing of this MoU signals not only that Syria is a viable and desirable economic and political partner but also China's willingness to take on greater risks as a global power.

Although China had established good trade and investment relations with Syria before the civil conflict broke out in 2011, and although the two countries have officially signed a memorandum of cooperation on the BRI, Kasia A. Houghton believes that China's investment in Syria is still facing some outstanding risks and challenges. Security is still a major concern for Beijing and has been a major deterrence to making and fulfilling investment pledges there. China, without a moderate military presence or base in Syria, relies on the security architecture underwritten by more involved actors. Beijing must rely on the already existing security architecture guaranteed by other powers within the BRI, such as domestic governments, the United States, and Russia. Houghton also emphasizes it is precisely China's purported approach of balancing relations with all key regional states that inhibits popular buy-in to China's global governance, as it risks providing domestically unpopular regimes the tools to evade the political reform demanded by populations, as may be the case if China funds the Assad regime's reconstruction projects.

Competition over lucrative contracts is another big problem for China. Competition and corruption in Syria are not conducive to Chinese investment here. Kasia A. Houghton argues the Assad regime awards contracts to domestic and external actors based on their loyalty and support to the regime, rather than fair competition and merit. This entrenches, rather than transforms, the political economy that contributed to the conflict's outbreak and continuation. Also, China is in stiff competition in Syria with Russia and Iran, both of which have dedicated vast amounts of resources to the Assad regime's prosecution of war in Syria and have also been promised priority in securing deals related to Syria's reconstruction by Syrian officials. In particular, Syria is still facing many international sanctions. Compared with Russia and Iran, which are also subject to international sanctions, it is more difficult for China to break through the sanctions and deepen cooperation with Syria.

China-Türkiye Relations

Türkiye, which straddles the Eurasian continent, is in a key position along the Belt and Road. Türkiye is also a country that has significant

influence on the Middle East and has been very active in the international community in recent years. Derya Göçer and Ceren Ergenç's chapter focuses on Türkiye's interaction with the BRI after reviewing the tortuous China-Türkiye relations from 1971 to 2015.

According to the two authors, the Turkish government welcomes the BRI because the potential of China's investments and collaborations in Türkiye have been contributing to the autonomy that Ankara is pursuing. Türkiye officially joined the BRI in November 2015, by cosigning an agreement entitled "The Harmonization of the Silk Road with the Middle Corridor Vision of Turkey." The Turkish parliament ratified the agreement in February 2016. Logistics infrastructure was at the forefront of the collaboration. Other collaborative goals include increasing dialogue to harmonize development and growth goals, create barrier-free trade relations, foster financial unification (such as swab deals), and increase people-to-people interaction.

Nevertheless, Derya Göçer and Ceren Ergenç also believe that Türkiye's increased engagements with China do not prove an increased affinity in public opinion of China. Turkish people remain notably skeptical of China. So, the overall tone of Türkiye's engagements would be best understood as transactional, a term that covers Türkiye's foreign policy in the 2010s and early 2020s. The overall tone for the Chinese interests in these engagements is also transactional. So, as China moves West, Türkiye has not been going East. The two authors believe that China did not create a debt trap in Türkiye. Perhaps the single most important factor that prevented the emergence of that debt has been the limited scope of Chinese engagements.

Overall, Göçer and Ergenç are not optimistic about the prospects of the BRI in Türkiye or even China-Türkiye relations. On the one hand, Turks' perceptions of China remain remarkably volatile. Despite the increasing visibility of Chinese investments and the rhetoric of embracing the rise of China, there is no systematic set of policies or long-term planning to engage the BRI more productively. Türkiye's China policy remains scattered. So, China moves West, but not necessarily through Türkiye.

The BRI from the Perspective of Global Power Relations

China's relationship with other world powers also sometimes affects the BRI's progress. Four chapters in this book focus on China's cooperation with different countries and regions from the perspective of China-US,

China-India, and China-Russia relations, in addition to one that examines the impact of the Ukraine war.

China-Israel Relations amid Sino-US Competition

The influence of the US-China relationship has gone beyond the bilateral scope and has a wide-ranging impact on many global affairs. Yitzhak Shichor's chapter focuses on Israel's policy choices amid Sino-US competition.

Over the past few years, Washington has stepped up pressure on Israel to limit Beijing's access to the country. Shichor believes this is the continuation of long-term US influence on Israel-China relations. He comments on US-China relations, stating that with the Soviet Union gone, the United States, in a fateful misjudgment (certainly in retrospect) has begun to see China as its main enemy. It was at such a moment that Israel, the United States' closest ally in the Middle East, normalized relations with China in early 1992. Washington has always been very sensitive to military cooperation between Israel and China, forcing Israel to abandon some cooperation projects with China.

Specific to the BRI, Shichor writes that Israel is not officially associated with the BRI and never signed any membership or association document, not even an MoU. Nevertheless, the trade growth with Israel is more obvious after China proposed the BRI. Israel ranked sixth in 2021 as China's source of imports from the Middle East and fifth in 2022 as a destination for China's exports to the region. In the eight years from 2014 to 2021, China undertook seventeen major investments in Israel, totaling \$14.78 billion, ranking fifth in the Middle East. Shichor believes that, in addition to economic considerations, Israel's strengthening of cooperation with China also has political considerations. Israel hopes to use this to push China to implement a more balanced Middle East policy, especially on the Palestinian issue and on Iran.

Washington, which is vigorously trying to contain China, has often expressed dissatisfaction with Israel's growing cooperation with China. Washington is apparently concerned mainly about Beijing using its involvement in Israeli infrastructure for espionage. Shichor strongly disagrees with this view and believes that the concern of the United States is a vestige of the Cold War. He thinks there is no evidence of the Chinese using their involvement in Israeli infrastructure for collecting intelligence. The Americans are interested in blocking any interaction with China, not just military or economic.

In the opinion of Shichor, Washington's pressure on Israel to adopt its anti-China policy is counterproductive. Washington is wrong in marking China as its primary enemy. Although Washington considers Israel a client state that should obediently follow its orders after having received so many US favors, this is not the exact reality. Overcoming China-US antagonistic contradiction, or bridging it, should not be regarded just as an Israeli policy but as a Jewish mission.

China-Pakistan Relations amid Sino-Indian Competition

Pakistan has been in a state of confrontation with India since its independence in 1947. These two South Asian countries fought border wars in 1947, 1965, 1971, and 1999. Since the 1960s, China has been a key partner for Pakistan's military, providing equipment, advice, and training. Meanwhile, this enemy of India has maintained a close relationship with China. As the two most populous countries in the current world, India and China, both Asian powers and neighbors, warred in 1962. In recent years, frictions between the two countries have also continued to emerge.

Therefore, India views the BRI and Sino-Pakistani cooperation very cautiously and sensitively. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is regarded as the BRI's flagship project by the Chinese government. Jeremy Garlick's chapter examines the role of CPEC in Sino-Indian rivalry. According to the author, the primary driver of Sino-Pakistani cooperation over the long term has been their common confrontation with India. CPEC cannot be viewed as a purely economic initiative and is also a product of long-term China-Pakistan cooperation in the context of their regional rivalry with India. It is noteworthy that CPEC was set up and continues to be administered under the oversight of Pakistan's civil-military elites. Apart from the India problem, China and Pakistan also share a common interest in suppressing separatism.

Garlick believes that India's views on its relations with China and Pakistan are mainly based on the perspective of national security. India is suspicious of Chinese intentions in the Indian Ocean region. Indian strategists worry that Beijing is trying to build a "string of pearls" around India. CPEC—and especially Gwadar port—is therefore perceived as part of China's strategy to encircle or contain India's power in the Indian Ocean region. So, it is easy to understand that New Delhi refuses to endorse or participate in either CPEC or the BRI. After all, there is copious evidence to demonstrate that constructing pipelines from Gwadar port to Kashgar would not make logistical or economic

sense, and that China is not planning to build any such pipelines anyway. Moreover, no matter in terms of economic conditions or relations with neighboring countries, it is difficult for Pakistan to assume the role of a regional economic center. CPEC cannot be given too high expectations in this regard.

In short, in Garlick's view, Sino-Pakistani-Indian securitized threat perceptions undercut any notion of CPEC as a viable platform for regional economic integration, assuming that this is what was intended for it.

The BRI and the Russia Factor

Two chapters in this book focus on the impact of Russia and its military actions on the BRI in different regions. As mentioned earlier, Central Asia is a region that China values very much, and it is also a key cooperation area of the BRI. As a former Soviet Union region, the significance of Central Asia to Russia cannot be underestimated. Therefore, the intersection between China and Russia in Central Asia is inevitable. Giulia Sciorati and Kristiina Silvan's chapter examines the policy pursuits of these two world powers in Central Asia and the resulting features of their relationship.

In the opinion of the two authors, the strategies of Russia and China in Central Asia are maintaining and (cautiously) developing a sphere of influence, respectively. The two countries are constantly interacting with each other indirectly in the region and exhibit different characteristics of their bilateral relations: cooperation, containment, competition, and a continued absence of conflict. It is worth noting that although both Russia and China regard Central Asia as their important interest area, so far there has been no serious conflict between the two countries here. The two authors argue the absence of conflict in Central Asia between Russia and China is primarily attributed to calculated attempts on both sides' part not to escalate their regional competition.

There is no doubt that Russia's military operations against Ukraine, which began in 2022, have had major and multiple impacts on the international community. In particular, it has a non-negligible impact on Eurasian geopolitics. Mark N. Katz's chapter notes that China's interests, especially China's geopolitics, have also been seriously challenged by this war. While the chapter does not specifically examine how the war in Ukraine affects the BRI, it does focus on how the war affects the Eurasian geopolitical space in which China operates.

As Katz argues, the war has led to a sharp geopolitical divide within Eurasia and across the globe. On the one hand, the war has galvanized

Europe to join with the United States in supporting Ukraine. On the other hand, non-Western states in Eurasia and beyond have for the most part not been willing to either help Ukraine or sanction Russia like the West has done. China's stance on the Russian-Ukrainian war is more in line with non-Western states than with Western ones. As a result, China has been negatively evaluated by Western politicians and public opinion.

At the same time, Katz argues the United States' traditional allies in the Middle East are increasingly turning to China amid fears that Washington is withdrawing from there. But, in this process, China has to deal with the complex relationships among Middle Eastern countries. As for Central Asia, the author thinks that the Ukraine war has accelerated China's rising influence and Russia's declining influence there. Regardless of how the Ukraine war ends, it could hasten the decline of Russian influence, with Eurasian geopolitics increasingly becoming an arena of US-China rivalry that overlaps with many other conflicts in the region.

Conclusion

In recent years, in both Chinese and international academic circles, the Look East approach is a common term in the field of diplomacy or international relations studies. On February 3, 2023, I searched on CNKI with the keywords "look east" (in Chinese) and got ninety-five results, involving Russia, the Middle East, Arab countries, Africa, India, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and Europe's eastward diplomacy. Of course, articles in the Chinese media and academic journals believe that the main target of these countries and regions looking east is China. More articles related to the Look East approach can be found on Wiley and JSTOR, some of which are also related to China.

The Look East approach and China's moving to the West attract each other. On the one hand, China's rapid economic development has attracted countries and regions that are in urgent need of development or encounter certain difficulties. On the other hand, those countries and regions are also partners that China, a country facing some domestic development difficulties and international challenges, is actively seeking. Under such circumstances, the BRI has become a bridge for cooperation between the two parties.

Judging from the discussions in *China Moves West*, especially those specifically regarding the BRI, there are indeed many opportunities for China's westward development. The Chinese government will undoubtedly actively promote the BRI in the future. One of the biggest challenges

facing China in its BRI diplomacy is the need to balance relations with states that oppose each other, not to mention Beijing's need to navigate its rivalries with India and the United States, not to mention the tricky state of "coopetition" that it has with Russia. After all, in this increasingly multipolar world, maintaining good relations with all world powers as much as possible is a better foreign policy choice for most countries.

However, as scholars argue in this book, there are also other obvious challenges and obstacles to China's westward development and the BRI, which must be taken seriously by all parties involved, especially Beijing. The focus of this book is basically the outward development of the BRI. In fact, in China, the BRI is not only a matter of foreign relations, but also a matter of domestic development. It requires various departments and provinces in China to have a clear understanding of the external world, and they also need flexible and effective cooperation. There are still many problems in China's perception of the outside world even at the national level, let alone at the provincial and municipal levels. This is an important internal problem in China that restricts the better development of the BRI. Furthermore, the BRI is also a cooperation plan for China to invest heavily in foreign countries. Although I think China will definitely stick to the BRI, after three years of the Covid-19 pandemic and its prevention and control, at least for a certain period of time China's ability and willingness to invest abroad from the central government to local governments needs to be reassessed.

The pandemic, first of all, will have an impact on China's economic development and political situation in the future, both internally and externally. The experience of these three years may have, or has already had, an impact on the ideology of many Chinese people, including their perception of China and the world. Of course, the international community's perception of China is likely to change or has already changed over the past three years. When looking at China's BRI, at least for the next few years, the pandemic factor is certainly something worth watching out for.

There is no doubt that we are in an era of intensified competition among world powers, and China's westward development and the BRI will certainly be affected by it. The authors of this book have made some in-depth discussions in this regard. Unfortunately, in recent years, the rift between the Western world and the non-Western or Eastern world represented by Russia and China has widened. Some countries in the middle ground also have difficulties and concerns about whether they will be forced to choose between the two—Yitzhak Shichor displayed the extent to which this has proven an issue for Israel. Will China's interests be

enhanced or damaged in the face of such an international situation? This is also an issue that needs further observation.

Another development trend of our era is that many states are seeking influence amid growing international multipolarity—the GCC states serve as a perfect example of this. In this process, the rise of Asia is obvious. The global influence of East Asia and West Asia has opened an upward channel. In particular, the global influence of East Asia, represented by China, has changed from being purely economic to highly multifaceted. Western powers need to adapt to such changes in the international arena, and China also needs to understand that tensions with other world powers in the process of global multipolarization are natural but nonetheless in need of careful management.

The global trend of multipolarization does provide China with a good opportunity. Asia is undoubtedly growing to be at the center of the global economy. But, as other authors of this book have discussed from many aspects, on its journey onward, China faces many challenges from within China, from among its many BRI partners, and from other world powers, several of which can be considered rivals or challengers to China's rise. Therefore, as the flagship project of China's westward move, the BRI still has much room for improvement, and China needs more targeted cooperation with other countries. In particular, China needs to have a more objective and clear understanding of the rest of the world, because this is one of the basic prerequisites for accurately positioning itself in the world.

As such, *China Moves West*, with its timely arrival almost exactly a decade after the introduction of the Belt and Road Initiative, comes with stark advice to global powers, especially China, and states across Central, South, and West Asia. The project undoubtedly has great potential amid the already swiftly progressing process that Ehteshami terms the Asianization of Asia, but key trends from these three regions suggest that great caution is required in how China approaches its BRI diplomacy, how BRI states navigate great power competition and regional power competition between Beijing and the likes of the United States and India, and how other major powers, such as the United States, approach China's rise. In particular, the volume displays the careful balancing act that China is playing in pursuing increasingly ambitious foreign policies abroad. While this is appropriate for a state of China's size and economic capabilities, given that states along the BRI will exist for many decades amid competition between China and its rivals, Beijing and its foes need to do their best to manage moments of tension and areas of controversy carefully. This, among other important insights, is the central message of this volume.