

The Global Status Quo and Future of Maritime Cooperation Under the Belt and Road Initiative



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ABSTRACT

The sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019 has severely impacted the world economy. Many countries, especially developing countries, are encountering great difficulties. Faced with a period of major changes rarely seen in a century, China has re-asserted its adherence to peaceful development, mutual benefit and win-win cooperation in this environment. China is willing to work with partners to build the “Belt and Road” into a road of cooperation to meet challenges; a road to safeguard people’s health and safety; a road to economic revival and social recovery; and a road to growth that unlocks development potential (Xinhua net, 2020). Driven by China, the “Belt and Road Initiative” (hereinafter referred to as “BRI”) is moving forward steadily. This article focuses on the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and analyzes the future of maritime cooperation under the BRI by reviewing its basic contents, construction highlights, and challenges.

Keywords: Belt and Road; blue economic passage; ice silk road; maritime silk road; port construction

The Contents and Characteristics of Maritime Cooperation under the BRI

In September and October 2013, during his visit to Central and Southeast Asian countries, Chinese President Xi Jinping raised the initiative of jointly building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which attracted great attention from the international community. After the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) was proposed, its scope has been refined and clarified gradually. In 2015, the Chinese government issued *The Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road*, which suggests promoting policy coordination, connectivity of infrastructure and facilities, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds, adhering to the principle of achieving shared growth through consultation and collaboration in propelling the Belt and Road’s construction.

Moreover, it states that the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road is designed to go from China’s coastal ports across the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean, extending to Europe in one

route, and from China’s coastal ports across the South China Sea to the Pacific Ocean in the other. At sea, the Initiative focuses on jointly building smooth, secure and efficient transport routes connecting major sea ports along the Belt and Road. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor are closely related to the BRI, and therefore require closer cooperation and greater progress (Xinhua net, 2015a). On this basis, the openness of China’s economy will be improved in an all-round way.

In order to further deepen maritime cooperation with countries along the Road, in 2017, the Chinese government issued *The Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative* (hereinafter referred to as the Vision) to expound the core idea of building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road to the international community. *The Vision* points out that China advocates for the Silk Road Spirit, i.e. “peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit”, and that China adheres to certain cooperation principles: “shelving differences

and building consensus; openness, cooperation and inclusive development; market-based operation and multi-stakeholder participation; joint development and benefits sharing”. On this basis, *The Vision* proposes to focus on the construction of three blue economic passages. Supported by the coastal economic belt in China, ocean cooperation will focus on building the China-Indian Ocean-Africa-Mediterranean Sea Blue Economic Passage, by linking the China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor, running westward from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean, and connecting the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor.

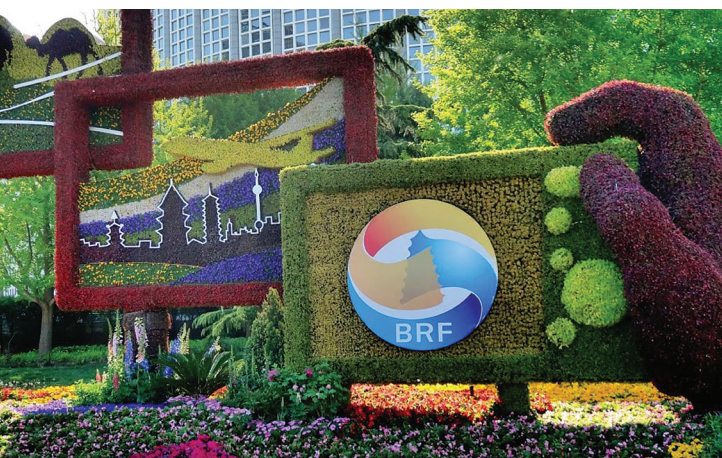
Efforts will also be made to jointly build the blue economic passage of China-Oceania-South Pacific, travelling southward from the South China Sea into the Pacific Ocean. Another blue economic passage is also envisioned leading up to Europe via the Arctic Ocean. Focusing on building a blue partnership of mutual benefit and win-win cooperation, *The Vision* points out that the cooperation focus of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road is on a path of green development, ocean-based prosperity, maritime se-

curity, innovative growth and collaborative governance together (Xinhua net, 2017a). Under the guidance of *The Vision*, China has implemented a series of cooperation projects with countries along the Maritime Road, whose overall progress has been smooth.

The total trade volume of goods with countries along the Belt and Road now exceeds 7.8 trillion US dollars.

Since its inception, the BRI has conceived of development from point to line and from line to surface, and has made remarkable achievements. As of the end of July 2019, China has held two Belt and Road Forums for International Cooperation. The first Belt and Road Forum was held on 14 and 15 May 2017 in Beijing with a wide attendance of 29 heads of states and governments, more than 130 countries and 70 international organizations. During these forums, China has signed 195 inter-governmental cooperation agreements with 136 countries and 30 international organizations. The range of regions involved has been extended from Asia and Europe to Africa, Latin America, the South Pacific and other regions. The total trade volume of goods with countries along the Belt and Road now exceeds 7.8 trillion US dollars (Belt and Road Portal, 2019a). From infrastructure to the improvement of people’s livelihood, from trade to cultural exchanges, the BRI has greatly benefited the world and won widespread praise. The achievements of the BRI are inseparable from the characteristics of the initiative itself. Specifically, it mainly includes the following two aspects.

Firstly, the BRI is a public good that China has provided to the world in the context of profound changes at home and abroad, and it aims to promote the in-depth development of inter-



(CGTN, 2019)

national cooperation. Having been subjected to foreign aggression and poverty for more than a century, China knows full well the importance of development and stability. China hopes that its own development and that of its neighbors will complement each other, and welcomes its neighbors to board the fast train of its development so that they can share more from China's development (Xinhua net, 2015b).

All countries willing to join the BRI, no matter big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, are all equal builders.

Under the guidance of this concept, the BRI has been adhering to the principle of achieving shared growth through consultation and collaboration since its inception, which makes it non-competitive and non-exclusive. All countries willing to join the BRI, no matter big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, are all equal builders. The Belt and Road Initiative emphasizes equality, mutual benefit and win-win cooperation, instead of "dependence", "core and periphery" or other relations that are common in traditional international cooperation, making it an innovation and development of relations between countries under the Westphalian system.

Secondly, the BRI is a concrete manifestation of the implementation of a community of a shared future for mankind. In the process of advancing the construction of the Belt and Road, China respects the diversity of countries along the Road in terms of stages of development, historical traditions, cultures and religions, customs, etc. Meanwhile, China neither imposes its own ideology and social system on others, nor engages in closed mechanisms, let alone geopolitical or military alliances. As

an open and inclusive community of interests, the BRI abandons zero-sum thinking, insists on promoting mutual benefit and win-win cooperation on the basis of multilateralism, and emphasizes the "gradual, procedural, consultative and long-term nature" of cooperation (Sun, 2020), thereby broadening the content of traditional international cooperation and realizing inclusive development. These measures coincide with the inherent requirements of a community of a shared future for mankind.

Highlights of Maritime Cooperation under the BRI

Since 2013, the BRI has achieved remarkable progress in policy coordination, the connectivity of infrastructure and facilities, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds, and a number of landmark achievements have been established. Whether it is for China itself or for the development of the world trade, maritime cooperation under the BRI is of great significance.

International shipping is the most important mode of transportation in international trade. This being said, more than two thirds of the total volume of international trade is transported by sea. Sea transportation undertakes nearly 90% of China's foreign trade cargo transportation, 95% of imported crude oil and 99% of imported iron ore (Xinhua net, 2014). Among China's exports to the Belt and Road countries, water transportation accounts for the highest share. In 2017, the export value of water transportation reached 567.93 billion U.S. dollars, accounting for 73.4% of China's export value to the Belt and Road countries (see Figure 1).

Among China's imports from the Belt and Road countries, water transportation also accounts for the highest share. In 2017 alone, the

import value of water transportation reached 384.19 billion U.S. dollars, accounting for 57.7% of China's import value from the Belt and Road countries (National Information Center, 2018) (see Figure 2).

In view of this, for maritime cooperation under the BRI, the security of maritime passage

is the key to maintaining the stable development of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, while port facilities constitute the basis for the security of maritime passage. For this reason, this article focuses on the construction of port facilities along the Belt and Road. The highlights are listed as follows.

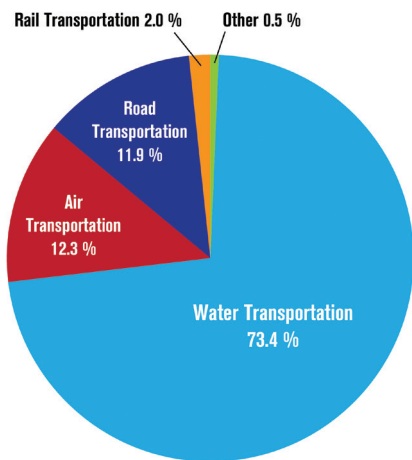


Figure 1: China's export transportation mode to Belt and Road countries in 2017.

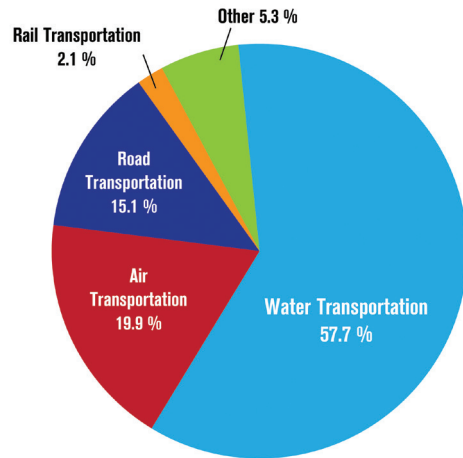


Figure 2: China's import transportation mode from Belt and Road countries in 2017.

Gwadar Port in Pakistan

Gwadar deep water port is located in Gwadar City, Baluchistan, southwestern Pakistan, about 460 kilometers east of Karachi, and about 120 kilometers west of the Pakistan-Iran border.

It is adjacent to the Arabian Sea in the Indian Ocean in the south and is located at the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz. It is not only a bridge connecting Central, Western and South Asia and Middle East countries, but also a balance point in regional strategic transformation, a regional transit port and a logistics business center. As the third largest port in Pakistan, Gwadar Port was officially opened for navigation in November 2016. At present, routes for

regular container liners have been opened and supporting facilities in the starting area of the Gwadar Free Trade Zone completed, attracting more than 30 companies into the area (Belt and Road Portal, 2019b). Gwadar Port is an important fulcrum on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor starts at Kashgar and ends at Gwadar Port. It has a total length of 3,000 kilometers. It is connected to the Silk Road Economic Belt in the north and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road in the south. It is a key hub linking the north-south Silk Road, as well as a trade corridor including roads, railways, oil, gas and optical cable channels, which makes it an important part of the BRI.

Gwadar Port is of great significance to the realization of Pakistan's long-term peace and stability, the expansion of China's energy cooperation with North African and Middle Eastern countries, and the opening of the western strategic channel.

The opening of Gwadar Port can solve China's long-standing energy transportation dilemma. Oil from the Middle East entering Xinjiang by land via Gwadar Port will shorten the transportation distance by 85% as compared to the Malacca Strait, which is of great significance to the realization of Pakistan's long-term peace and stability, the expansion of China's energy cooperation with North African and Middle Eastern countries, and the opening of the western strategic channel (Yang & Gao, 2019).

Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka

Hambantota Port is the capital of Hambantota District in Southern Province of Sri Lanka. It faces the Bay of Bengal to the north and India across the sea to the west. The Hambantota Port is only 10 nautical miles away from the main international shipping line of the Indian Ocean. Since 2/3 of global oil transportation, 1/2 of container freight and 1/3 of the bulk cargo shipping all pass through the Indian Ocean, the port is superior in terms of geographic location. Hambantota Port is an all-round deep-water port capable of berthing very large ships. It has the potential of a world shipping center and is also an important node along the Belt and Road.

Since 2007, China has helped to build the Hambantota Port, which was severely damaged by the Indian Ocean tsunami, at the request of Sri Lanka. At the end of 2016, the first and second phases of the Hambantota Port Project

undertaken by the Chinese were completed. A total of eight 100,000-ton docks and two 10,000-ton docks were built in the two phases of the project, which are deep-water ports that can accommodate very large ships. In December 2017, the Sri Lankan government officially announced the transfer of the rights of management and operation of Hambantota Port to China Merchants Port Holdings Co., Ltd. through a joint venture. At present, preliminary work has been completed for Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port Special Economic Zone, including defining the zone's industrial functions and making conceptual plans.

Thanks to China's aid and investment, the once deserted small fishing village has now become a deep-water port with huge economic potential. The construction of Hambantota Port has improved the living standards of residents in the area, enhanced the competitiveness of Sri Lanka's ports in South Asia, and promoted the economic rise of Sri Lanka's Southern Province. Meanwhile, Hambantota port connects with China's BRI and is one of the most important transit ports in the future Indian Ocean international routes. Once its huge potential is released, it will reshape Sri Lanka's important position in the Maritime Silk Road in history.

Port of Piraeus in Greece

The port of Piraeus is located in southeastern Greece and is the largest port in Greece. It is 9 kilometers away from Athens and is one of the largest container ports in the eastern Mediterranean. Due to the Greek sovereign debt crisis, the port was once on the verge of bankruptcy. In 2008, China Ocean Shipping Group (hereinafter referred to as "COSCO SHIPPING") signed an agreement with the Greek government to obtain part of the right to operate the Port of Piraeus. In 2016, COSCO SHIPPING completed the acquisition of 67% of the Piraeus Port authority and became the operator of the entire port.

Driven by the BRI, the Port of Piraeus has become one of the fastest growing container ports in the world. The container throughput here has increased from 880,000 TEU in 2010 to 5.8 million TEU in 2019. Its ranking in global container ports has also jumped from 93rd at the beginning of China's taking over to 32nd (Qi, 2020). At present, an important transit hub has been completed at the Port of Piraeus, and Phase III port construction is to be completed.

For the China-Europe route, the Port of Piraeus is the nearest and most cost-effective replenishment and transshipment hub for container ships after crossing the Suez Canal. Containers can either be replaced by more economical medium-sized container ships in Piraeus and continue to Northwest Europe, or they can be unloaded on site and directly transferred to the hinterland of the European continent through the Balkan rail network. The rapid development of the port is vital for solving the problems which existed in China's cooperation with Central and Eastern European countries, facilitating the construction of the China-Europe shipping express, accelerating the BRI to dovetail the Western Balkan transportation network, and promoting the in-depth development of China-EU relations (Sun & Wang, 2020).

The Problems that Turkey Faces in the Eastern Mediterranean Are Similar to these of China in the South China Sea

Turkey's unique position in the BRI lies in that this country will serve as a gate to Europe and Africa for China's trade operations along the BRI.

Around 1,000 Chinese companies are currently operating in Turkey. They mainly carry their operations in the logistics, electronics, energy, tourism, finance and real estate sectors and are expanding their businesses. They have increased their operations in Turkey after the launching of the BRI.

In order to increase connectivity on the BRI, the Turkish and Chinese transport ministries signed an agreement during the Belt and Road Initiative Summit held in Beijing in 2017, which involves an international passenger and cargo transport company. The agreement is expected to unlock international road transport channels between China and Europe, with Turkey serving as the middle corridor of the route. The agreement, which symbolizes China's willingness to render the BRI integrated into Turkey's development strategy, will also help strengthen the exchange between China and Turkey, promoting the facilitation of international transportation among the countries located on the Silk Road.

Turkey has developed the "Blue Homeland" concept in order to highlight its sovereign rights in the seas surrounding the country on three sides. The problems that Turkey has been facing in the Eastern Mediterranean are similar to these of China in the South China Sea. Due to the involvement of foreign countries outside the region, the problems already existing –which could have been solved through mutual negotiation– have been exacerbated so as to generate military conflict.

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Belt and Road Forum, 14.05.2017. (TCBB)

Challenges in Maritime Cooperation under the BRI

Maritime Cooperation under the BRI mainly concerns cooperation in the construction of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road is composed of three blue economic passages. The countries along each economic passage have different levels of socio-economic development and attitudes towards the BRI. Therefore, to better promote maritime cooperation under the BRI, it is necessary to consider the specific challenges in each economic passage.

China-Indian Ocean-Africa-Mediterranean Blue Economic Passage

This Passage is broad in scope, involving many countries in Asia, Europe and Africa. Being the most complex and most important of the three economic passages, it also faces the most severe challenges. Closely related to the Indo-China Peninsula, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor, this passage is of highly strategic international political importance and most countries along the passage are developing countries. Therefore, it is crucial to properly handle the relations between all parties involved.

Firstly, there exists fierce strategic competition between China, the United States and other countries in this region. In November 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump proposed the “Free and Open Indian-Pacific Ocean Strategy” at the APEC forum held in Vietnam (hereinafter referred to as the “Indo-Pacific Strategy”), and then restarted the four-party security dialogue among the United States, Japan, Australia and India. In June 2019, the US Department of Defense released the latest version of the *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report*. The report states that the Indo-Pacific region is the most important battlefield for the United States in the future, and that this region is vital in maintaining the stability, security, and prosperity of the United States. The

United States regards Japan, Australia and India as its allies in advancing Indo-Pacific strategic activities. In terms of policies towards China, the report points out that China is a “revisionist” force that will undermine the autonomy of countries in the Indo-Pacific region and challenge the dominance of the United States.

The “Indo-Pacific Strategy” will interfere with the implementation of China’s BRI, worsen China’s surrounding environment, and increase the resistance to China’s good-neighborhood diplomacy.

As a contemporary neo-imperialist country, the United States’ “Indo-Pacific Strategy” has brought great challenges to the peaceful development of China and the region. On the one hand, the implementation of this strategy will not only trigger a strategic conflict between the United States and China, but will also further aggravate the already complex situation in the South China Sea and endanger China’s legitimate demands for the protection of maritime rights and interests. Since the Trump administration took office, he has continuously put pressure on China over the issue of “free navigation” in the South China Sea, and has frequently sent aircraft carriers to exercise in Chinese waters. Since the end of June 2020, the U.S. military has held three dual-carrier exercises in Chinese waters, and even sent strategic bombers to participate in the exercises. In addition, the US military has also dispatched coastal warships to carry out investigation missions near China.

These actions are undoubtedly red flags to the peace of China and the South China Sea. At present, the issue of the South China Sea has become the starting point for the United States to

contain China’s further expansion of economic, political, diplomatic, and military power (Wu & Colomberg, 2019). On the other hand, the “Indo-Pacific Strategy” will interfere with the implementation of China’s BRI, worsen China’s surrounding environment, and increase the resistance to China’s good-neighborhood diplomacy (Wei, 2020). In the eyes of many biased American politicians and scholars, the BRI is essentially a geo-strategic arrangement aimed at expanding the scope of China’s geopolitical and geo-economic influence. For this reason, part of the United States’ consideration when formulating the “Indo-Pacific Strategy” is to restrain and offset China’s growing influence in the region. This is particularly reflected in the fact that the United States clearly intends to strengthen the construction of energy infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region, especially in the southeast Asian countries in this strategy.

In addition to implementing the “Indo-Pacific Strategy”, the United States has also taken advantage of its dominant position in the field of international power discourse to continuously smear China and damage China’s international image. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, politicians represented by US President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo have disregarded facts and spared no efforts to demonize China on various occasions and even stigmatize the novel coronavirus as “China virus” (In fact, the United States has not accounted for the doubts from the international community that the novel coronavirus originated in the US). As a result, a new Sinophobic wave has been triggered in the international community, leaving a negative impact on the advancement of the BRI.

Secondly, there exist disputes over territory, islands and maritime rights and interests among China and some countries along the passage.



As a typical land-sea country, China has 14 land neighbors and 7 maritime neighbors. Due to historical reasons and competition over natural resources, there exist disputes over territory and maritime rights and interests among China and some neighboring countries, which directly affects the smooth operation of the Belt and Road maritime economic passage. On the one hand, border disputes still exist between China and India. In recent years, India has been plotting against Chinese territory. On June 18, 2017, a military confrontation between China and India took place in the Donglang area. In June 2020, serious incidents occurred in the Galwan River Valley on the western section of the China-India border. These incidents provoked by India have greatly damaged the normal development of China-India relations, and directly affected the construction of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor.

On the other hand, there exist disputes among China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and other countries in the South China Sea. The frequent intervention of the United States, Japan, the European Union and other extraterritorial forces has further exacerbated the tension in the region. In addition, there still exist disputes over affiliated islands among China, Japan and South Korea. Although China has always advocated

for “pursuing joint development while shelving disputes”, the relevant issues have not been fundamentally and effectively resolved. Once China and other countries involved fall into conflict due to certain emergencies, cooperation under the BRI will be affected or even interrupted.

Thirdly, most countries along the passage are relatively poor and their infrastructure is backward. Some countries (such as Myanmar, Yemen, etc.) have turbulent domestic situations and unstable regimes. Moreover, there are serious contradictions and conflicts among some countries (such as India and Pakistan, Middle East and Mediterranean countries, etc.). In addition, this maritime passage passes through several regions in the world where piracy and maritime terrorism are the most rampant - South Asia, West Asia, and East Africa. The safety of maritime navigation is at great risk (Li & Xue, 2015).

In brief, the China-Indian Ocean-Africa-Mediterranean Blue Economic Passage has very important commercial value. However, there are severe traditional and non-traditional security challenges along this passage, which need to be addressed by joint efforts of countries along the passage.

China-Oceania-South Pacific Blue Economic Passage

At present, the South Pacific region is still one of the regions in the world populated by least developed countries. Excluding Australia and New Zealand, there are 27 countries and regions in the South Pacific region. Since the 1970s, 14 countries have achieved independence, many of which are pocket countries. The total land area of this region is only more than 550,000 square kilometers, and its population accounts for only 0.5% of the world's total population. However, it has 7.25% of the votes in the

United Nations General Assembly. Therefore, it is the object of cooperation for major countries in the world (Wang & Wang, 2015). The South Pacific island countries have more than 30 million square kilometers of sea area and more than 10,000 islands. This region is extremely rich in minerals, oil, gas, fishery and other resources. Located at the intersection of traffic routes in the Pacific, the geo-strategic position of this region is vital (Cheng, 2020a). As an important part of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, this maritime economic passage currently encounters the following challenges:

Firstly, except for Australia and New Zealand, which are developed countries, most of the countries in this region are small and micro island countries. Dominated by marine economy, these underdeveloped countries are in severe lack of infrastructure and are backward in terms of the level of economic development (Jin, 2019). The traditional trading partners of the region are Australia, the United States, New Zealand and Japan, while trade with China is relatively rare and small.

Secondly, from a historical point of view, the South Pacific region has always been regarded as being located within the sphere of influence of countries such as the United States and Australia, and its perception of China has been greatly influenced by the media of the United States, Australia and other countries. According to mainstream think tanks of the United States, China's strategic intention to promote the BRI in South Pacific island countries mainly includes "optimizing the geo-strategic situation, acquiring natural resources, enhancing China's political and diplomatic influence, and compressing Taiwan's 'diplomatic' space" (Cheng, 2020a). Some Australian media frequently and unreasonably hype China's "malicious interference" with Pacific island countries, and wantonly exaggerate

that "China's rising influence in the South Pacific region will undermine regional stability". Under the influence of "China threat theory" spread by the United States, Australia and other countries, the South Pacific island countries are full of misgivings about China's proactive action, and have a low level of political mutual trust with China.

Thirdly, with the improvement of China's comprehensive national strength and the unfolding of the BRI, the United States has adjusted its policy in the Asia-Pacific region and strengthened its assistance to Pacific island countries, thereby enhancing the strategic position and value of Pacific island countries in US foreign policy. From the perspective of the US, assistance to Pacific island countries is not only a tool for safeguarding its regional security interests and advancing its foreign policy, but also a tool for conducting a great power game with China at important strategic points and balancing the influence of the BRI (Cheng, 2020b; Wu, 2020). The confrontational attitude of the United States has become an important factor that cannot be ignored in deepening the BRI.

The Arctic Blue Economic Passage

Global warming in the past thirty or so years has accelerated the rising of temperature and the decreasing of summer sea ice in the Arctic region, which has continuously improved the value of the Arctic in terms of strategy, safety, economy, scientific research, environmental protection, navigation and resource exploitation. Against this backdrop, on July 4, 2017, when Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Russian Prime Minister Medvedev in Moscow, he proposed for the first time that cooperation on the Arctic passage should be carried out to jointly build the "Ice Silk Road" (Xinhua net, 2017b).



President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping meets with President of Russia Vladimir Putin. (Official Internet Resources of the President of Russia)

"Ice" is the Arctic Ocean, and the "Ice Silk Road" refers to the Arctic waterway that traverses the Arctic Circle and connects the three major economic centers of North America, Asia and Europe. It mainly includes the Northeast Passage passing through Russian waters, the Northwest Passage passing through Canadian waters, and the Central Passage across the central waters of the Arctic Ocean. At present, the ice floes in the Northeast passage are decreasing at the fastest speed, offering opportunities for large-scale commercial navigation. As a result, the Northeast passage has become the main support of the "Ice Silk Road".

In January 2018, the Chinese government released the white paper *China's Arctic Policy*, which clearly defined the relationship between China and the Arctic. Geographically, China is a "Near-Arctic State", one of the continental states that are closest to the Arctic Circle. China is an important stakeholder in Arctic affairs. On the basis of the principles of "respect, cooperation, win-win result and sustainability", China, as a responsible major country, is ready to cooperate with all relevant parties to seize the historic opportunity in the development of the Arctic, to address the challenges brought by the changes in the region, to jointly understand, protect, develop and participate in the governance of the

Arctic, and to advance Arctic-related cooperation under the BRI, so as to build a community with a shared future for mankind and contribute to peace, stability and sustainable development in the Arctic (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2018). As a result, the construction of the "Ice Silk Road" has been shifted from concept to action. As of January 2020, China has reached 6 cooperation projects with countries along the "Ice Silk Road" (Zhoushan Port, 2020).

The opportunities brought by the opening of the "Ice Silk Road" are obvious. On the one hand, Arctic routes can save a lot of economic costs. It is estimated that the "Ice Silk Road" will shorten the route from ports north of Shanghai to ports in Western Europe, the North Sea and the Baltic Sea by 25%-55%, saving between 53.3 billion and 127.4 billion US dollars in international trade and shipping costs every year. Furthermore, the passage can avoid the invasion of pirates and international emergencies to a greater extent. On the other hand, as the Arctic region and its ocean floor continental shelf abound with oil, natural gas, forest, fishery resources and a large number of mineral resources, the opening of the Arctic route will provide a safe and stable energy channel for China, and affect the economic layout of China's coastal areas.

In the meantime, it should be noted that the "Ice Silk Road" is also facing severe difficulties and challenges. On the one hand, the areas along the "Ice Silk Road" are characterized by high latitude, harsh natural environment, great difficulty in development which require strong technical support and high cost. On the other hand, with the change of Arctic climate conditions, countries around the Arctic have participated in the upsurge of Arctic development. As a non-Arctic country, China's participation in

Arctic affairs in accordance with international law will inevitably arouse unfounded suspicion and opposition from the United States, Canada and other countries.

Countermeasures and Future for Maritime Cooperation under the BRI

The BRI is in line with the general trend of economic globalization and has broad prospects for development. In the process of advancing the construction of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, the risks should be faced squarely, and possible countermeasures should be explored and discussed.

Properly handle the relations with the United States and neighboring countries

As the leading power in the world, the major concern of US foreign policy is the maintenance of hegemony. At present, China has become the world's second largest economy, the world's largest exporter and second largest importer. As the most important engine of global economic development, China's growing strength has caused fear and panic in the United States as a neo-imperialist country. After taking office as President, Donald Trump has constantly provoked trade frictions between China and the United States under the guidance of the "America First" slogan. In 2017, the *National Security Strategy Report of the United States* further defined China as a "rival power". Sino-US relations have changed from "coexistence of cooperation and competition" to "intensified strategic competition" (Gong, 2020). Since then, the United States has continuously strengthened political sanctions against China by using human rights and COVID-19 as excuses, intensified its control of high-tech exports to China, mobilized allies to illegally suppress Huawei's legitimate opera-

tions, frequently threatened the use of financial sanctions, and strengthened capital decoupling. The Sino-US relationship has gradually evolved into the most unstable and unpredictable relationship among major powers. At present, the United States has become a country that suffers the the worst consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the world, and 2020 coincides with the year of the US presidential election. Under the economic downturn at home and abroad, the confrontation between China and the US has further intensified. In this context, the promotion of the BRI requires considering more of the latest developments in Sino-US relations, estimating possible changes in advance, and preparing for the worst scenario.

As an important ally of the United States, Japan's attitude towards the BRI has been greatly influenced by the United States, and it has undergone a change from resistance and wait-and-see to active participation (Zhang & Hu, 2019). Immediately after the BRI was raised, Japan took a cautious and wait-and-see attitude towards China's initiative on account of historical issues, territorial disputes and geopolitical competition between China and Japan. Later, due to the changes in US foreign policy and the consideration of Japan's own interests, the Japanese government has obviously changed its attitude towards the BRI since 2017 and began to take measures to participate in it. It should be noted that while Japan has expressed its willingness to cooperate with China's BRI, it has not weakened its strength in using policy means to "multi-angle hedging". Instead of smooth sailing, cooperation between China and Japan will be full of twists and turns. Under such circumstances, it is even more necessary to take advantage of various means and policies flexibly to actively promote the development of Sino-Japan cooperation under the BRI for a better direction.

As China's comprehensive strategic partner, Russia welcomes the BRI. The joint construction of the "Ice Silk Road" by China and Russia can greatly promote the development of Russia's Arctic region, as well as the Russian economy. Given that conditions in the Arctic region are complex and have a great impact on the global ecosystem, special attention should be paid to protecting the ecological environment of the Arctic region in the process of Sino-Russian cooperation.

Strengthen the construction of "the five-connectivity program" according to the specific conditions of countries along the Road

Generally speaking, most of the countries along the three blue economic passages are economically backward and lack infrastructure. In the process of promoting the BRI, specific policies must be implemented according to the different characteristics of each country, and a "one size fits all" plan must not be blindly adopted, let alone acting with undue haste. It is necessary to fully respect the characteristics of each country's history, culture, religion, etc., and implement policies according to national and sea conditions. For instance, when advancing the construction of the China-Oceania-South Pacific Blue Economic Passage, we must fully consider the most urgent needs of the countries in the South Pacific region. Due to global warming and other reasons, global sea levels continue to rise, and many island countries in the South Pacific are facing the danger of being submerged by the Pacific Ocean, among which, Tuvalu has been called "sunken island country". It is reported that according to the current sinking rate, 60% of Tuvalu's land will be completely sunk into the ocean in less than 50 years. In cooperation with countries in the South Pacific region, we should first consider their environmental protection demands and help them better cope with the challenges of global warm-

ing, instead of blindly emphasizing the promotion of infrastructure construction.

In the process of promoting cooperation under the BRI, attention must be paid to strengthening the construction of China's international discursive power

International discursive power does not only refer to the right of a country to express its own views and opinions on international affairs, but also concerns the power of a country's external discursive system in the international arena. In the process of proposing, advancing and implementing the BRI, China's acts of goodwill have been misreported and even maliciously speculated by many Western media. One of the important reasons for this phenomenon is that China does not possess international discursive power. In order to fundamentally solve this problem, we should take the initiative to dovetail media at home and abroad, and promptly show the world what China has done in the areas along the Belt and Road in the process of implementing the BRI. Moreover, we should invite people in the areas along the Road to tell their stories and friendship with the Silk Road, so as to make people across the world know and understand the BRI and eliminate all kinds of misunderstandings about the BRI. In conveying China's true position and voice, we should also promptly refute the slander and attacks from media and politicians with evil purpose. Only by proactively exposing and actively opposing the fallacies and evil deeds of the neo-imperialist United States and its anti-China allies, can we fundamentally get rid of the passive situation of being misunderstood and scolded. Only by eliminating the fanatical academic worship of American social sciences, can we fundamentally establish China's due position of international discursive power based on academic studies. ☸

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