

# Connected but Dispersed

Navigating Postmodernity in the Belt and Road Spaces

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**Abstract:** “Postmodernity” or the “postmodern condition” is described as a cultural condition when capitalism penetrates further into the cultural world. Previously outside of global capitalism, Mongolia as one of the third wave of democracies after the fall of the Soviet bloc, is now slowly entering this state of postmodernity with increased exposure and connectivity with the global capitalist system. As postmodernity in effect, societies where cultural life was previously free of capitalist incorporation now left to navigate the world of competing ideas and narratives at increased speed, saturated by information through media presentations and hyperbole. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the most recent all-round project to add to an already saturated condition with its stream of information. As the BRI seeks to increase regional connectivity with China and subsequently with the rest of the world, further strengthening the global capitalist system, it welcomes another channel of various other forces further saturating and exhausting the postmodern condition. Often framed as an anti-exploitative alternative to globalization, the BRI brings competing narratives, ideas and cultural frameworks, fragmenting rather than binding together various other existing bubbles and dispersing them like atoms. Communities and localities located in the BRI sphere, though physically connected, now must navigate a very chaotic flow of information directed at them.

**Keywords:** Postmodernity, postmodern condition, BRI, capitalism, globalization

## Introduction

### Postmodernity/The Postmodern Condition

“Postmodernism” or “postmodernity” are contested terms that can have various meanings. In this paper, I will use postmodernity or the postmodern condition interchangeably, contrary to the use of postmodernism, to refer to a cultural condition developed in the long tradition by the likes of Jean-Francois Lyotard (1979), Jean Baudrillard (1981), Fredric Jameson (1991) and Mark Fisher (2009). While postmodernism is generally understood as a trend or historical stage in philosophy, art and culture that will come after what has been described as modernism, postmodernity is better understood as a cultural condition when capitalism further penetrates the cultural world. Derived from the Marxian notion of base and superstructure<sup>1</sup>, thinkers from the Frankfurt School along with French structuralists have analyzed this long process of what can be described as an incorporation of components of the superstructure into capitalism. This process of incorporation was complete for Mark Fisher as he made a case in his book *Capitalist Realism: Is there no Alternative?* (2008). As the precursor to Mark Fisher’s *Capitalist Realism*, postmodernity or postmodern as a buzzword comes in handy to describe things happening around us in this stage of global capitalism in places other than Western industrialized societies. Though historically precedent, I will therefore use postmodernity rather than capitalist realism to refer to the cultural state or condition that will be observed throughout this paper.

Though coming from two different lines of thoughts, specifically that of French structuralism and Marxism; what connects above-mentioned thinkers into a single category of postmodern thinkers is that, they have all reacted and diagnosed the so-called transition from the modern to the postmodern by examining a wide range of shifts in everyday life: looking at the economy – consumerism, culture – new forms of media and its impact on art and aesthetics which have

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1 Base and superstructure in Marxist theory, in simplest terms, are two components of society: one that comprises economic production – base, the other – superstructure – which refers to the realm beyond economic relations that can be taken in the form of institutions, social structures and culture.

led to fundamental changes in the social order disrupting political and social life. Each of the thinkers have contributed in their own way to diagnosing this new condition. The term postmodern was first used by Lyotard to refer a new historic period where all the previous explanations of the way things work could no longer explain the changing (computerized) world, which he calls the crisis of narratives – the loss of belief in metanarratives (Lyotard 1984). In essence, the idea here is that an all-encompassing framework or system of thought is no longer possible, because every such metanarrative is in conflict with each other and therefore faces a legitimation problem. Treating knowledge as subjective, Lyotard presents the decline of universality in any such metanarratives and instead asks: who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided (ibid, 9)? The agency behind the knowledge then lies in the hands of the prevailing powers: those of governments and corporations. Jean Baudrillard, another French theorist, described the postmodern condition with characteristics that he calls hyperreality (Baudrillard 1994, 1). With the advancement of new media and communication technologies in the 1980s, the introduction of personal computers and satellite TV as the main media, Baudrillard gives various examples of how people make sense and relate to various world events between the representations and the reality that are projected at them in the form of signs and images. As the new media technologies increasingly shift towards screen culture, a field where signs and images constantly circulate, it is difficult to differentiate between representation and reality. However, this does not mean that representations are fake per se, but instead the very fact that reality is masked into the representations creates a simulation. According to Baudrillard, in the postmodern condition representation is primary. These representations are presented to us in the form of simulacrum – a copy without an original – the repeated use of a simulacrum thus creates a hyperreality. In hyperreal postmodern societies, with the appropriation and consumption of signs and images, new forms of identity then emerge beyond the previous fixed identities that were mainly based on economics – those of class hierarchy. In this way, as individuals take up different identities based on their cultural and consumer experience, subjectivities start to weaken and therefore the old framework collapses. In a way

this explains the current surge of identity politics in the Western world, where individuals are assuming various other identities that fragment society into smaller pieces, blurring the line between previously fixed boundaries and structures. While Baudrillard's position towards this new social situation can be described as indifference, together with Lyotard merely observing and describing by providing a new framework, Fredric Jameson, on the other hand, engaged with a more traditional Marxist angle. Generally following a similar description to the other two thinkers, Jameson, though pessimistic, sought to overcome this condition and bring about the return of politics. That is, even though the proliferation of signs and images has created an obstacle to what he calls a banal culture of pastiche, he nevertheless stuck with the Marxist framework of political economy centered around mode of production. That is why in Jameson's writing capitalism is now embodied in something completely different from its previous stages, in the form of multinational/consumer capitalism or what he describes as late capitalism. In that sense, capitalism is still functioning, its inherent contradiction is still apparent and therefore it needs to be overcome.

There are several characteristics and causes that led to the postmodern condition. First and foremost is the shift in capitalism in the West from an industrial economy to what can be described as a service or consumer economy (Jameson 2005). Jameson describes this as "late capitalism", where previously theorized monopoly capitalism has breached global boundaries with the emergence of new multinational and transnational business organizations, as forming the current world system, which has transformed the workplace and national and cultural bonds and led to better connectivity. This newly-formed world system was then stabilized with the development of communications technology, from satellite TV to the Internet and smartphones. With it, the circulation of cultural products and various other narratives was embodied in signs and representations – a culture of pastiche<sup>2</sup> that dominates our modern discourse. Because social life had undergone significant changes due to the shift from industrial capitalism to consumer capitalism as well

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2 Jameson describes the postmodern condition as "culture of *pastiche*" where pastiche refers to the revival of dead styles without its original intent or essence.

as advent of communication technologies, the metanarratives of earlier times, such as Christianity, Marxism and liberalism, though still present in everyday life, were no longer in position to describe the new condition. Even if one considers globalization as a version of the liberal metanarrative hand-in-hand with Francis Fukuyama's "end of history,"<sup>3</sup> The current developments in world politics are already showing signs of reappraisal as China strengthens its position in global capitalism. As a result, culturally it creates a state of limbo, where universality is no longer applicable in various other localities.

While at the time what can be described as postmodernity or the postmodern condition was only observable in developed Western societies which were entering the consumer stage of (late) capitalism, Jameson declared that "modernization was complete" (Jameson 2005). Such a conclusion, however, pays no serious attention to the rest of the world, which was still far from completing modernity, and in some cases was only just entering global capitalism. Since then, discussions around postmodernity or late-capitalism have often revolved around societies in the West, with little regard being given to societies on the peripheries of global capitalism. In some instances, postmodernity was assumed as a universal experience that, though initiated in the West, could spread to the rest of the world with the advent of new communication technology. While it is to some extent true that postmodernity as a cultural phenomenon has an overwhelmingly expansive nature, the very basis of a capitalist foothold was absent in the newly integrated societies at the end of the Cold War. I will argue that, around forty years after China's entrance to the global capitalist system and 30 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new nation-states of the former Soviet bloc often labeled as third wave democracies that started with peripheral positions in the global supply chain with greater exposure to global system, including to its institutions and cultural inflow, are now going through the period that can be described as the postmodern condition.

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3 Francis Fukuyama has famously argued that the current and surviving political system of liberal democracy is the final form of the political system (Fukuyama 1992).

## The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Introduced for the first time in 2013 by Chinese president Xi Jinping during his visit to Kazakhstan (CCTV 2013), the Belt and Road Initiative has now taken the form of concrete strategic plans with its two components of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Maritime Silk Road, together known as the One Belt One Road Initiative (一帶一路 *yidai yilu*). The economic belt of the Silk Road or One Belt refers to the land network of Silk Roads linking China to Europe and various other localities along the way, one of which is the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor. The BRI is described both by Chinese and foreign experts as an extensive all-round plan to connect its member countries' infrastructure, to open their markets for trade as well as an increase in people-to-people exchanges and to align economic development policies with China.<sup>4</sup> As of 2020, 138 countries and 30 international organizations from all five continents have signed around 200 cooperation documents and Memorandum of Understanding with China from all five continents (Belt and Road Portal 2020). As part of the Silk Road Economic Belt, countries that follow the path of the proposed BRI corridors, including Mongolia, will take part in large infrastructure projects that will eventually connect China to Europe via railroads, pipelines and ports.

While the core of the BRI are economic activities to fund and execute large infrastructure projects in receptive countries, further integrating their economies into the global system, the BRI also presents a whole package of overarching Chinese-initiated projects, plans and strategies that have geopolitical implications. It includes cultural exchange and diplomacy with the individual countries as well as potential political influence that might come in various forms. Through this lens, the BRI can be seen as an early sign of what has been discussed in the West as the "Rise of China". Though BRI itself as a slogan is often criticized for its vagueness, it also coincides and fits with various other Chinese initiatives and slogans that predates BRI. "China's peaceful rise" (中国和平起 *zhongguo heping jueqi*), "Community of a shared future for mankind" (人类命运共同体 *renlei*

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4 Mercator Institute for China studies <https://merics.org/en/analysis/mapping-belt-and-road-initiative-where-we-stand>

*mingyun gongtongti*) and more recently Xi Jinping's key concept of "China dream" (中国梦 *zhongguo meng*) and the "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (中华民族伟大复兴 *zhonghua minzu weida fuxing*) are all fits well with the general outlook where China returns to its deserved place in the world affairs as it should be while BRI opens up new channels. In this way, the economic aspect of the BRI is almost certainly supplemented beyond economic processes providing cultural and political frameworks. Firstly, more in the political and economic realm, one of the most iterated of such narratives is China's approach/solution (中国方案 *zhongguo fangan*) in dealing with various other global issues. Listing several strong points including but not limited to those of economic development, political stability, efficiency, flexibility and adaptation which argued as the main reasons that have China fared well in the 2008 global financial crisis as well as more recent success dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in comparison to Western democracies are now used to promote the China model superior to the Western model. The second point is more drawn to culture and has been framed as "Chinese international relations (IR) theory" derived from the ancient Chinese worldview where China posits itself as the center of the world. The idea derives from the reinvented version of the concept of *tianxia*<sup>5</sup> – "all under heaven" – which portrays China as a civilizational state unlike nation-states, which are widely considered as byproducts of the Peace of Westphalia.<sup>6</sup> It imagines a world without borders but with a unifying culture or civilization (in this case the all-encompassing Chinese civilization) which communities and peoples but not nation-states adhere to and from global governance under a moral and cultural framework. Complemented by *tianxia*, those that fall beyond China's dominion are connected to the civilizational state via a tribute system, and while not directly involved with the center are to conform to its moral and cultural superiority. Following this line of thought, though could be seen as an overstretch, the BRI with its participating countries could be framed as

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5 The concept of *tianxia* derives from the classical Chinese thought system coined/reinvented in the modern sense by Zhao Tingyang in 2005 (see Zhao Tingyang 2005).

6 The Peace of Westphalia is widely considered as the foundation of sovereignty of modern nation-states.

a reinstating of a similar type of relationship, where China represented by the PRC places itself at the center while everyone else – the contemporary nation-states – find themselves on the peripheries. Though overemphasized in various Western circles, similar style of thought production is very evident in Chinese academia where search for narratives is looked not in the Western thought tradition but in Chinese one.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to these two main ideas, there are many ways culture can play a role, via cultural diplomacy, conveying the various invented and reinvented ideas, ideologies and thought systems as well as importing Chinese cultural products. As the PRC understands its soft power deficit around the world, it has been increasing both its production as well as the transmission and circulation of new cultural products and platforms across the world. Cultural production may include various types of traditionally understood cultural products that come in films and other new media formats, turning the ideas, narratives and rhetoric into a body of work which is later circulated through its already established media channels. These range from state-run media and official institutions that carry out cultural diplomacy to components of popular culture – music and movies – that are all subject to various kinds of censorship to be shaped into a final form and made ready for circulation. Generally, two-way media channels – those directly under state projection as well as voices from the more independent China's media industry transmit various content and media discourses to the outside world. In recent years, we have seen the increased presence of Chinese state-run English-language media such as CGTN, Global Times, China Daily and CRI, which provide Chinese stories to counterpoint the Western media on various issues China is in dispute with. In addition to English language reportage, its services are provided in other major languages such as Arabic, French, Russian and Spanish, as well as adapting to individual countries' local languages. Another transmission channel is through popular culture resources. With the hyper-commercialization of China's media industry, with its sheer magnitude of popular media in the form of films

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7 See David Ownby's "Reading China dream"  
<https://www.readingthechinadream.com/voices-from-chinas-century.html>



and music, though not to the extent of Western popular culture, it nevertheless influences its immediate neighbors or countries who have already established a cultural bond with China. In addition to the popular media coming out of China, there are those in opposition – various forms of counter-culture or subculture find an appeal outside of China, with better connectivity thanks to the Internet and the general improvement in communication technology. While popular culture resources do not take a strong and overtly political stance compared to state-run media, given the general environment of production and content creation in China it nevertheless has to follow the general guidelines and adhere to the official narrative, and most often these products end up being apolitical and compliant with the projected presentation of the Chinese leadership.

All in all, combined with economic projects already underway, various kinds of cultural channels and diplomacy have been established in individual countries to promote and win local public support. With a large amount of this information flow intensified by new technologies, the localities of the BRI projects are left to make sense of these new narratives, frameworks and systems of ideas being imposed upon them.

### Postmodernity in the Belt and Road Spaces

When discussions on postmodernity were reaching their height in the developed Western societies from the late 80s to early 90s, the PRC was only just entering global capitalism. With Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening mandate in 1978 and in joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, the PRC made itself a full member of global capitalism. Forty years after Reform and Opening and 20 years after joining the WTO, it could be argued that only recently – as China is reaching the consumer stage of capitalism – has it been witnessing the postmodern condition. It should be noted that due to the advances in communications technology of the past 30 years, and with China as one of the key contributors to such developments, it has speeded up the process and contributed immensely to bringing about the postmodern condition. Noticing such a trend in 1979, Lyotard wrote:

*The reopening of the world market, a return to vigorous economic competition, the breakdown of the hegemony of American capitalism, the decline of the socialist alternative, a probable opening of the Chinese market – these and many other factors are already, at the end of the 1970s, preparing States for a serious reappraisal of the role they have been accustomed to playing since the 1930s: that of guiding, or even directing investments (LYOTARD 1984, 6).*

In a similar way, after the so-called third-wave of democracies in the former Soviet sphere of influence that lie along the Chinese-proposed New Silk Road are now following the same trajectory to enter the consumer stage of capitalism. Previously located on the margins of global capitalism, they are now full members of the global supply chain and currently seeking to stabilize their positions in the global competition. With the Belt and Road Initiative, these same countries are looking to deepen their connections to the established system, complementing and further strengthening China's position in global capitalism. Mongolia is residing on the proposed BRI topography in one of the six proposed corridors – the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor. In addition to developing and improving the rail and highway infrastructure, it was recently announced that the present gas pipeline to connect the "Power of Siberia 2" through Mongolia – and much anticipated there – is finally underway (Adiyasuren 2020). Events like these generate many public discussions on whether or not stronger economic ties with its neighbors Russia and China will have a political as well as cultural effect. Mongolia's commitment to the BRI projects also goes hand-in-hand politically with whether it should now join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) – a regional alliance with a strong emphasis on Eurasia, of which both Russia and China are leading members. Currently an observer, it is believed that becoming a full member of the organization will provide better access to various kinds of funding for BRI-related projects.

Often described as an “island of democracy” in the Western media, since the 1990s Mongolia has followed a Western model of free-market and liberal democracy and has been bombarded by various kinds of thought systems, ideologies and cultural frameworks. With the greater connectivity and exposure to a global media discourse, cultural exports of any kind and knowledge transmission have shaped its social world for the past 30 years. In other words, the precondition of postmodernity was of greater importance in the hyper-commercialization and the media spectacle in popular discourse in the present day.

With China’s advance into the global system increasing its presence in all aspects, Mongolia must navigate yet another stream of information that challenges the previous set of ideas, more specifically those that came after the collapse of Soviet Union – a package that came with liberal democracy and the free market.

### The Belt and Road Initiative as an Accelerator of Globalization

Though seen as a challenger in the US-led world order, in many respects, the BRI can be viewed as an accelerator of global capitalism. Since the Reform and Opening that took place in 1978 and joining the WTO in 2001, China has shown all-round progress in strengthening its overall position within the global capitalist system. Its economic miracle initiated by Deng Xiaoping in the Reform and Opening, allowing the Chinese workforce who were previously organized in collectives to work in the coastal factories, complementing the global supply chains. Such integration not only provided a cheap and unorganized labor force for transnational corporations but for the Chinese side it also built the foundation of the new Chinese transnational capitalist class that would emerge from such a symbiotic relationship.

In order to understand China’s motivations behind its participation in global capitalism, a retreat from its communist commitment one must consider the historical trajectory that China has gone through. Since its first interaction with the Western sea powers, Chinese states up until today have always looked for ways in which it could resist Imperial powers of the West. To save the nation (救亡 *jiuwang*), it had to adapt Western ways to bring itself on its foot to be strong again.

From late Qing to the founding of the PRC, it went through numerous phases through nation-building processes experimenting with Western ideas. It could be argued that adoption of communism and founding of the communist party was a result of the Chinese nation-building process where creation of the international communist movement was only secondary to its nationalist project. One important instrument of China's nation-building process is the "century of humiliation"<sup>8</sup> 百年耻辱 *bainian chiru*, an item of early Chinese nationalism in the republican period, which the PRC has turned into a Leninist, anti-imperialist stance toward foreign powers. However, the anti-exploitative nature of Leninist anti-imperialism had to shift with China's reception of global capitalism with Deng's reform. After a period of liberalization that came with Reform and Opening which resulted in the Tiananmen tragedy, the century of humiliation again became a component of Chinese nationalism in the following Patriotic education program to bring China into the world stage. The current Chinese statist transnational capitalist class, who operate within global capitalism, are therefore not seen as an exploitative capitalist class but as a patriotic community against exploitative foreign powers.

Now intertwined more than ever before, with the economic power having the flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) between China and the West doubled its overall political and military strength, strategically China's position would be to rebalance or reconstruct the old system of which the Western transnational capitalist class was the stronghold. Such a shift in power from a Western-centered, particularly US-led world order to a multicentric one, to other members of the Global South's transnational capitalist class, is necessary for China to form an alliance to "correct" the current system. Such alliances with the countries of the Global South to counter the US and Soviet Union were prominent during the Maoist period. China's current approach with the BRI countries is also consistent with its line of thought. The iteration of various slogans of "interconnectedness", "multi-layer cooperation", "community of common interest, responsibility and

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8 The century of humiliation refers to the idea when China was harassed and subjugated by Western imperial powers, starting with the Opium War in 1839. It is one of the main components of modern-day Chinese nationalism and subsequently served both Republican and PRC governments for nation-building purposes.

destiny” instead of “national competition” implies the rhetoric is intended to foster mutually beneficial developments for all participants along the New Silk Road in a non-exclusive manner. The way in which China-led globalization, or to put it better “re-globalization with Chinese characteristics,” differs from the previous Western-centered globalization is that while, in its previous form, countries of the Global South those in Latin America and Africa were often left as suppliers with less chance of capital accumulation and found themselves on the margins to feed the transnational capitalist class mainly represented by Western corporations, China offers a new way of reorganizing – a hope of benefiting from the system – to create their own transnational capitalist class. In doing so, its modernization model, therefore, accelerates the capitalist process in the individual member countries and in theory, giving a possibility to advance its position from mere suppliers into the later stages of the supply chain. With the rhetoric of international and socialist solidarity and with China’s revolutionary past struggle against the West, the new Chinese transnational capitalist class with its newly acquired alliance across the world, specifically countries in the Global South, allows China to further penetrate and elevate its position in global capitalism while at the same time accelerating the deeper penetration of capitalism in the participating countries.

### The “Belt and Road Initiative” as a Breakdown of American Hegemony

At the height of the globalist movement in the 1990s, with the emphasis on trade and open borders, the projection was that there would be all-round development across the world that would turn nation-states in the expanded areas into middle-class economies with the universal virtues of human rights and democracy. This had utopian ideals of liberal progress and was based on liberal metanarrative. But thirty years after the American triumph, the optimism of all-round progress did not fully materialize either in the industrialized societies or in the newly integrated countries. Globalization now faces a long list of problems, including but not limited to rising inequality, environmental degradation, the disappearance of local cultures and subsequently the emergence and collision between identities and various other related conflicts. As China’s path presented an unconventional

way of joining the global system compared to what was recommended by Western institutions, the Chinese model of development was phrased as the “Beijing Consensus” by Joshua Cooper Ramo (Ramo 2004). He identified the following three characteristics of the Beijing Consensus. First, it does not follow a dogmatic line of thought as recommended by Western institutions, instead it is characterized by policies and guidelines that resemble improvisation, a trial-and-error approach, founded on Deng Xiaoping’s pragmatism – the adaptation of global capitalism to existing socio-economic conditions. Second, it breaks down the measures of economic development beyond GDP measures, considering various other aspects including but not limited to the development of key industries and social well-being that are not reflected in purely economic figures. This perspective gives an all-round picture where the state plays the primary role in the development process that considers overall development and all the other aspects as well as economic, including those of socio-political development. Third, the “Beijing Consensus” as a reaction to the Western model that prioritizes local conditions, with a strong emphasis on sovereignty and decision-making independent of imposed policy proposals promoted by international institutions like the World Bank, IMF and WTO.

Though mainly an economic process, globalization often features aspects beyond just economic interactions. The two other aspects that follow economic globalization are cultural and political globalizations. While the two are often interlinked, it is necessary to draw a distinction between them, because they generally tend to refer to different things. I will start with political globalization. In the simplest terms, this refers to a trend towards multilateral global governance with global institutions such as the United Nations, World Bank, IMF and the WTO, with a subsequent effect on nation-states, strengthening democratic institutions and building an all-round global civil society supported by emerging international non-governmental organizations. The 1990s saw a mood that was going in this direction, where American-style liberal democracies were supposed to sweep the world. Today, such a forceful transition is already in decline as China poses its alternative in the “Beijing Consensus” development model, which is both economic as well as statist

in its authoritarian form. As a result, as China is expanding its influence exporting capital as FDI in the Global South as well as to countries that have been boycotted by Western powers as it seeks to strategically accumulate wealth, integrating these countries into a China-centered supply chain, thus breaking down American-led global capitalism and strengthening its posture in the geopolitical landscape. Once we understand the global economic condition, it is therefore clear to understand China's motivation behind the BRI. The BRI therefore, though it accelerates capitalist development in the host countries further integrating them with global capitalism, also breaks down the previous balance of power, therefore strengthening China's posture in global capitalism. The BRI can then be seen as an increased effort to integrate and economically connect countries of the Global South with China and, with that connection established, to win support in the international community as well as to build up cultural and political bonds for more comprehensive relations in the future.

### Postmodernity in Effect

In this chapter, I will examine how the postmodern condition was already noticeable prior to China's increased presence not only in the economic world but also in the political and cultural realms in the extended list of BRI countries. I will argue that ever since Mongolia entered global capitalism it has received supplementary forces that come in the forms of a cultural and political package, consuming and digesting the rhetoric and narratives that came in various forms. Within thirty years of such dogmatic development, Mongolia has already built up what are in many ways still shaky institutions and it has established an ethos of the liberal democratic system with a free-market economy. It took around thirty years and a still ongoing process by which knowledge and other cultural frameworks are transmitted via its connectedness both physically and virtually thanks to the development of communication technology. These channels were opened for the first time when Mongolia declared itself a democracy, opening its market with the intent to participate in the globalist movement that was taking place at the end of the Cold War. As mentioned in the previous section, though

by no means a country with little significance in global production, as Mongolia should be described as entering the later stage of capitalism, I would argue that the overwhelming effect of communication technology has forcefully dragged the country into what can be described as a postmodern condition characterized by an overflow of information through signs and representations. In addition to the previous advances in telecommunications technologies of satellite TV and personal computers, since 1995 Mongolia has been connected to the worldwide web followed by social and other personalized forms of media. In the 2019 figures, Facebook, the most popular social media platform in Mongolia, had 2.2 million users in a country of three million – nearly 70 percent of its population (Ankhtuya 2019). The Facebook/Cambridge Analytica data scandal in 2018 revealed potential ties to the Mongolian presidential election of 2017, when Mongolia was included in the long list of countries that had cooperated with Cambridge Analytica (UK House of Commons 2020). Examples such as these show that Mongolia is fully integrated into the globalized system not only via its economic relations but also in other realms of information circulation. It is therefore evident that, as previously described, countries on the peripheries of global capitalism are susceptible to various external forces that shape the ethos within the dominant system of thought. Increased competition between various other different rhetoric and narratives that flow into one locality result in a disorientation and loss of meaning – a common attribute that is observed in the postmodern condition.

With postmodernity already in effect, and with an increasing Chinese economic presence in the capacity of the BRI expansion, other aspects that fall into cultural or political expansions are increasingly evident in the countries in the BRI areas. In our case, Mongolia is welcoming another stream of information to add to the current saturated state, opening up an alternative channel of the transmission of ideas through various sources. While these new streams of information are not exceptional in comparison to others that were equally projected to a target society, I have picked up three main attributes of what China brings to the table that contributes to postmodernity.



First, the full package of ideas and models China brings to the discourse can be very easily described as another metanarrative. The systematic and interconnected line of thoughts and ideas behind China's model presents it as an alternative to the current global system. It takes all aspects into consideration: global governance – as a China-centered civilization with economic as well as other socio-political interactions with states that fall beyond its dominion – to its economic model, “the China model of development”, and its way of globalization with the BRI, and all simultaneously within global capitalism. As such, its effort at a reappraisal of the global system proposes a clear alternative that poses a stark challenge to the current status-quo. But because postmodernity is described as a decline of metanarratives, the complete package that China presents is there alongside other metanarratives like Christianity, Marxism and liberalism and doomed to exist on equal terms, and when (and if?) successful, left to operate on its own fragmented space only within its sphere of influence.

My second point refers to the increase in the information flow in terms of sheer volume. As the PRC today finds itself confronting the West in many respects, it generates an equal amount of information (if not greater), and actively generates alternatives on each front in order to balance its posture on the world stage. With an expected increase in economic and political strength in the near future, its overseas information circulation is expected to grow even further. We are already witnessing such a trend, as Chinese-generated information is easily visible not only in its immediate neighbors and countries in the Global South but is also very much active in the Western countries, where a fragmentation of society based on various identities is very evident. The exploitation of different groupings based on political leanings as well as different identities is one of the tactics by which China approaches a fragmented West. In addition to the presence of Chinese state-run media in everyday discourse in Western societies, there are other subtle forms of information circulation. The most recent and notable cases of this subtle messaging often go through new forms of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Tiktok.

The last point on the way in which China further saturates postmodernity is the very nature of how the Chinese party-state coordinates its all-round external

activities with a larger toolkit and resources. Unlike Western liberal democracies, which have only a limited role in projecting and conveying their ideas and messages mainly through official channels and often through cultural diplomacy, the PRC on the other hand, controls the entire flow of information that goes abroad and carefully orchestrates and controls its circulation. Even as China's vibrant societies concentrated in the new urban centers generate a comparable load of cultural expressions and products that are on par with Western-originated popular-culture resources, state supervision and various forms of direct and indirect interventions with corrective measures result in tamed and circumscribed end-products that strictly follow the party guidelines. While certain themes and features are permitted, when it comes to content production there are therefore no-go zones for artists and intellectuals to express any sort of subversive and critical stance of the party and state. As a result, receptors in the foreign localities are only exposed to very specific filtered "China stories" that align with party-state interests following the official line.

Today, all three points can be spotted in Mongolian news circulation and increasingly in the online sphere. All of the official media outlets from Global Times (*Delkhiin tsag*) to CRI (*Khyatadyn olon ulsyn radio*) are available in Mongolian language feeding the Mongolian public with its curated information flow. Its delivery of its information is found in different formats from short pieces to more subtle lifestyle-oriented presentations in the forms of popular in China livestreams often with Inner Mongolian and Mongolian hosts with standard Khalkha dialect. In addition to official channels, there are various other unofficial channels that transmit information both by design and by gradual organic flow of information given its increasing economic and cultural appeal.

With these three in combination, the societies that I have referred throughout this study with the example of Mongolia, those that are entering postmodernity with its information overload between competing and conflicting ideas are now left to apprehend another stream of polished and more organized ideas that directs at them in a very coordinated way.

## Conclusion

I opened this paper by arguing that “postmodernity” – a cultural condition that was observed in the Western industrialized societies in the latter half of 20<sup>th</sup> century – was visible 30 years after the end of the Cold War in the countries that have been newly integrated into global capitalism. Although historically separate, two of the main three descriptions that are often found in describing postmodernity contributed to this conclusion. One of these is the rejection of metanarratives which has been witnessed not once but twice in the case of Mongolia. The first such rejection occurred after the end of the socialist system with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and subsequently socialist Mongolia transitioned into another metanarrative of liberal democracy, with equally utopian ideals of progress and development. However, after 30 years on that route, Mongolia is witnessing the dark side of capitalist development complemented by general dissatisfaction with liberal democracies across the world, of which mediatized representations in the form of Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter and the surge of “democratic socialism” has come to Mongolia through the Internet and smartphones. It would not be a stretch to say that the new metanarrative of liberal democracy is slowly losing its credibility. The other characteristic of postmodernity – the changing nature of the communication system with advent of high-speed new technologies – has swept through Mongolia though physically far from global production, bringing it closer to the global postmodern sea of representations, signs and images. With the Internet and smart devices, Mongolians are today very much connected to the global discourse, as they are technologically capable of absorbing and making sense of the floating and sometimes targeted information flow coming at them. I have also argued that China’s efforts to strengthen its position in the global system have generated all-round activities across the world embodied in China’s proposed ambitious Belt and Road Initiative – a complete set of strategy and policy proposals in the form of infrastructure development and financing, mainly in the countries of the Global South, of what can be considered as an alternative to Western-led globalization. In doing so, China does not pose a threat to global capitalism,

instead it accelerates its expansion into previously marginalized countries while strengthening its own posture in the global capitalist system.

In the final part, I have tried to show how the sheer force of Chinese activities further saturates and adds to the existing postmodern condition rather than overthrowing it and providing any kind of emancipatory alternative. I have also attempted broadly to present “the Chinese way of doing things” as another semi-metanarrative with an idealistic and hopeful approach but nevertheless only existing within the global capitalist framework. In conclusion, I argue that the areas on the margins of global capitalism, in our case Mongolia, are most affected by a never-ending stream of contradictory, conflicting and incoherent information that is constantly flowing in their direction. Once we come to such a conclusion, it is easier to grasp the ongoing developments and trends in societies on the peripheries of global capitalism with centers located elsewhere. In conclusion, in the post-industrialized societies where the postmodern condition has already been observed for some time – a field where the fragmentation and dispersion of various streams of ideas and ideologies exist alongside each other in the form of a simulacrum – the same observation can be made in the societies newly-integrated into the global supply chain. At its best, therefore, if we assume that the proposed policies are fully executed completing the physical connection or what can be described as the full integration of the base into global capitalism, the forces that follow – those of superstructure – the BRI will then fragment rather than bind them together into cohesive worldview in the receptive societies. As a result, though the BRI may be able to connect these areas physically, the dispersion and fragmentation within the system are already under way.

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