

The Silk Road as a Model for the BRI

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Abstract: Roads are dynamic. Among various trade roads such as the Great Inka Road, Steppe Road, Silk Road, Tea Horse Road, Tea Road and Maritime Porcelain Road, the Silk Road has been raised three times in its history. Nomads and merchant communities on Silk Road moved more frequently, they had more opportunities to make pathways. The Mongols established their horse courier stations (Mongolian: *örtöö*) in the vast Eurasian plain during the Mongolian Empire. Through the courier service, letters, oral messages and news passed extremely rapidly. The Mongolian Khans or emperors created a management of trade routes across different countries, providing and protecting peace on the territory. They established the *Pax Mongolia* (Mongol Peace) in various countries. During the time of Mongol Peace, many different commodities, methods of trade, forms of international trade, forms of financial instruments and new payment facilities were originated along the Silk Road. The Mongols “globalized” the world at that time.

Nowadays the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is adopting similar operations in its current foreign and economic policies. In 2013, the Chinese president announced the “Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road” strategy; the term was further abbreviated as to the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) expressing a comprehensive economic structure for the land-based economies of Eurasia and sea routes to Europe, Africa and other Asian ports. The concept of the historical Silk Road stays behind the the BRI initiative.

Keywords: Silk Road, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Pax Mongolica, mobility, materiality

Introduction

In the world history there have been many forms of trade roads under the concept of the Silk Road for exchanges of traditions, customs, language and culture. They prosper upon the interest of people along the roads, to trade with other countries to exchange what they have and what they do not. This is the most important motivation behind the emergence of trade-road systems. Important factors that enable such an exchange can be divided into hard and soft factors. Hard factors primarily include the main goods and merchandise, secondly, traders who move the merchandise and, third, roads and pack animals that can carry them. One other hard factor can be centralized commercial cities that lie at the junctions of such roads. A soft factor is the mechanism governing trade relations. Such a mechanism is a soft or invisible connection and formed as a result of human minds. Soft factors include, firstly, monetary and financial systems that enable parties involved in trade to make profit, secondly political stability, peace and a legal system that provides safety for the road, an external environment that ensures risk-free trade, third, road (or infrastructure) and logistics solutions to connect goods, and fourth, a social, cultural and political environment of countries along the road.

In history all hard and soft factors to enable mobility on the trade roads have rarely been favourably fulfilled in all aspects in the during the time of the Silk Road establishment. The aim of this article is to compare hard and soft factors of such revival periods with those of today's New Silk Road (Belt and Road Initiative: BRI).

The Historical and the New Silk Roads

The Historical Silk Road

There were many trade routes in the vast expanses of Eurasia,¹ for instance, for jade, silk, salt, wine, horses and tea. In other parts of the world archaeological and anthropological evidence indicates that roads were important for trade, with both economic and political meaning. In South America, there is the Great Inka Road,² which runs along the Andes and passes through Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina and Chile today, with many crossings all leading to the ancient capital, Cusco. There were ancient Roman roads³ in North Africa as well.

There is a tradition of naming the road after its main merchandise carried on it. It is rare to name a road after a merchant or a place name, but naming after merchandise is common.

Ferdinand von Richthofen's map puts the Tarim Basin at the centre, the Altai Mountains in the north, the lower part of two Chinese Great Tails in the east, Tibet in the south, and the Pamir Mountains in the west. East Turkestan on the whole was considered as part of Central Asia. By examining the relationship between human social development and natural landscape formation, the literature introduced "Silk Road"⁴ terminology, noting the movement of silk over centuries. Today the name has become an emblem for multinational tourism, business and various projects around the world.

Von Richthofen (1833–1905), who in 1877 first mentioned the term "Silk Roads", noticed that the most reasonable and free roads were established based on the human needs of the trade process over centuries. There are such roads

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- 1 Egshig Sh, Gereltuv D, Sukhbaatar O, Badral Yo, *Tsainy zam* [Tea Road], (Ulaanbaatar: Munkhiin useg, 2016), 11.
 - 2 Mendieta, Ramiro Matos & José Barreiro. *Inka Administration on the Road and along the Cord, The Great Inka Road: Engineering an Empire*, (Washington, DC, and New York: National Museum of the American Indian in association with Smithsonian Books, 2015), 61.
 - 3 Goodchild. R. G, *The Roman Roads and Milestones of Tripolitania*, Tripoli: Department of antiquities, British Military Administration, 1948.
 - 4 Richthofen, Ferdinand von. "Über die zentralasiatischen Seidenstrassen bis zum 2. Jh. n. Chr" [On the Central Asian Silk Roads until the 2nd century A.D.]. *Verhandlungen der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin* (in German). 1877 (4): 96–122.

everywhere in the world, both within and across countries. The British historian Susan Whitfield wrote “Movement of the objects – including people – is essential to the concept of the Silk Road”⁵ and she added: “a complex issue of materiality is the question of where, by whom, and for whom things were made. Technologies, materials, fashions and craftsmen all travelled – I would argue this is an important characteristic of the Silk Road [...] the majority of such objects – everyday or luxury, traded or not, have long disappeared; food, wine, and medicines were consumed; slaves, elephants, and horses died; textiles, wood, and ivory decayed; glass and pottery were broken”⁶ Another argument she made was to question the accuracy of the name “Silk Road”, as it is not just silk that has been transported on this road, but various types of merchandise at different periods in history. Hence, Susan Whitfield, highlighted two main points in defining the Silk Road. Firstly, a road refers to a movement. Without merchandise, goods and movement, there will be no conception of trade roads, and as such, depending on the nature, origin and where the demand and needs of such merchandise lie, they are moved by people. Secondly, the intensity of activities of trade roads depends on the nature of each good, piece of merchandise and materials transported.

The origin of the Silk Road is attributed to the Khotans,⁷ who contributed greatly to the history of Eurasia. Especially the lapis lazuli from Badakhshan Mountain in Khotan was traded in the settlement cities over 3000 years ago. It is highly probable that the Khotans were one of the early traders along the Silk Road. According to the Ukrainian scientist L. A. Mamleeva, during the Hunnic period the trade route stretched from the Roman Empire in the west to Korea in the east.⁸ In fact, it was

5 Whitfield, Susan, *Silk, Slaves, and Stupa: Material culture of the Silk Road*. (Oakland: California University Press 2018), 3.

6 Whitfield, Susan, *Silk, Slaves, and Stupas*, (2018), 3-4.

7 Liu, Xinru, “Migration and settlement of the Yuezhi-Kushan: Interaction and Interdependence of Nomadic and Sedentary Societies”, *Journal of World History*, Volume 12, No.2 (Fall 2001), 261-262.

Jeong, Su-il, “Khotan”. In *The Silk Road Encyclopedia, Gyeongsangbuk-do: Korea Institute of Civilizational Exchanges*. (2016), 457-459.

8 Mamleeva, L.A., *Formation of Great Silk Road in the system of transcivilization interaction of the peoples of Eurasian*. Vita Antiqua. No.2. Kiev: Society of Archeology and Anthropology (1999), 53-61.

a trade road over 2000 years ago extending from one end of the mainland to the other, reaching the sea at both ends.

In the 138 BC and 119 BC, the ambassador messenger Zhang Qian (张骞), who was appointed to the west by the Emperor of the Han dynasty, was captured by Chanyu (单于) of the Xiongnu people and imprisoned there for several years, having children with a Xiongnu woman (匈奴). The route he took later became the central line of the Silk Road and established the largest trade route for China with countries from south-east to the west. This happened during the Western Han Dynasty (202 BC to around AD 25). A scholar from the family of historian scholars⁹ in the Eastern Han Dynasty, Ban Chao (班超), abandoned the writing of history and engaged in war lasted 30 years with Huns, who controlled trade relations with countries in the west. He later managed to bring lands of Kashgar, Luolan and Khotan under Han administration in short period of time by military and diplomatic means.

Afterwards, selected western-related parts of the “History of Wei” (魏略) and the “History of Han Dynasty” were translated¹⁰ by Western scholars. For instance, the translation and comparison of China and the Roman Orient by the German scholar Friedrich Hirth is still of great importance. In 1905, the French sinologist, Édouard Chavannes translated these history books and recalled the names of locations along the road to their original languages from Chinese, which is considered of great significance. For this reason, it is apparent that the “Silk Road” connecting Central Asia with western countries took shape before the current era. From

9 吴树平, 2007 《东观汉记校注》, 中华书局, 《后汉书》卷四十七 <班梁列传·班超> 57页

Egshig, Sh., “The Silk Road” created by Mongols and New Silk Road concept”, International Conference on Asian Studies (ICAS 2015). Compilation Vol.I, (Ulaanbaatar: Udam Soyol Publishing Co. 2015), 158-163.

10 Hirth, Friedrich, *China and the Roman Orient*. Shanghai and Hong Kong. Unchanged reprint, (Chicago, Ares Publishers 1885), 1975.

Chavannes Édouard “Les pays d’Occident d’après le Wei lio.” *T’oung pao* 6 (1905), 519–571.

Hill, John E. *The Peoples of the West from the Weilüe 魏略 by Yu Huan 鱼豢: A Third Century Chinese Account Composed between 239 and 265 CE*. Draft annotated English translation, 2004.

Yu, Taishan. *A History of the Relationships between the Western and Eastern Han, Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties and the Western Regions*. Sino-Platonic Papers No. 131 (March, 2004). Dept. of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania.

Chinese history sources, the Xiongnu (匈奴) took this road under their protection and certain duties were levied on outsiders, who travelled only with the consent of the Xiongnu.

The mindset of nomads is also dynamic, as they are in constant movement. Some researchers have traced the origin of the Silk Road in the steppe and recorded Venus figurines found from the Pyrenees up to 10,000 years ago to Lake Baikal as evidence of the Steppe Road.¹¹ Nonetheless, the road's development was particularly prominent at certain phases in history. The main links of the trade route connecting the west to the east were the Scythians in the eighth century BC, the Xiongnu¹² in the fourth century BC, the Göktürks in the sixth century AD, and the Mongols in the thirteenth century AD. All of these were horsemen, meaning that in these periods the roads was under control of nomads.

Ögödei Khan (1186–1241), the successor to the throne of the Mongol Empire from 1228 to 1241, sent relay horses and established the Örtöö¹³ station centres, appointing informers and governors in all directions of the settlement cities. It was reported that the travelling representatives had several ranks, including messengers, ambassadors, merchants, apostles or traders, who travelling through Örtöö stations

11 Jeong, Su-il. *Prologue: Steppe Road, The Heart of Northern Eurasian Nomadic Civilization, SILK ROAD The Photographic Silk Road-Steppe Road*, Seoul: Gyeongsangbuk-Do, (Korea Institute of Civilizational Exchanges 2019), 10-17.

12 Kim, Hyun Jin. *Nomads? The Huns a heterogeneous agro-pastoralist society*, The Huns, (Routledge, London & New York: Taylor & Francis Group 2016), 4.

13 Örtöös are settled gers and other types of accommodation in territory of other countries, established by ordinance of the state or local governor along the road for travellers to stay, dine, and exchange riding livestock. Örtöös are located at around 30 miles apart taking into account natural formations, wells, and water sources. At that time Örtöös were called *zam* (road). The Great Khan khanate, the Golden Horde, the Chagatai and Ilkhanates were connected by roads throughout the empire. State and local rules of Örtöös were passed and implemented. The Örtöö administration was responsible for appointing 'zam' ('yam' - 'ямь-' in ancient Russian, ' ' in Chinese), monitoring escape, collecting tax, ensuring safety, supplying food and accommodation for messengers travelling through them.

were provided with gold, silver, bronze and wooden *gerege*¹⁴ signboards according to their rank. The Mongolian empire,¹⁵ represented more than a hundred million people in an area of 33 million square kilometres, covering 16% of the world territory.

The *Örtöö* courier system of the Mongols was much broader than the Silk Road. The continental Silk Road was a customary trade route that was often used for hauling goods, with fewer barriers, and for cattle, while *Örtöö* stations were designed for administrative purposes such as sending news, tax collection and registration within the territory of the empire.

The *Pax Mongolica*¹⁶ covered the whole empire, not just the Silk Road, with a framework of equal nations with the peaceful coexistence of one governing, non-racial, cultural, language and ethnic groups. It also created favourable conditions for new concepts and discovery of trade and economics. It is believed that traders' wealth and substantial capital was due to the absence of war, permitting the development of international trade and the advent of new forms of exchange, e.g.

14 *Gerege* is a Mongolian word for "Certifying Sign". *Gerege* had writing in their front and back. *Gereges* written in Mongol, Square [Dürvüljin], Khitan, hieroglyph scripts have been found. On one side it said "Under the Power of Eternal Sky and the blessing of Great Intelligence", on the other side it showed who issued it, whether Khans of Genghis Khan's descendant, or governor of hundredth, thousandth, or ten thousandth, and their ordinance. The weight of *Gerege* varied, it usually has rectangular shape, *gereges* issued for military purposes had a round shape.

15 *Mongol Empire*, ResCap Mongolia 101.2011.01.24 (Resource Investment Capital) http://mongoliagrowthgroup.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/ResCap_Mongolia101.pdf Accessed June 29, 2020.

16 *Pax Mongolica*: The concept that all states and countries coexist equally in peace, under one rule, with no discrimination against race, language, culture or nation. This system created favourable conditions for the development of new concepts of trade and economics. As they were exempt from tax, monasteries bloomed and had many servants. As a result of the co-existence of nations, literature, art, painting and crafts flourished, the different languages were enriched by foreign words and masterpieces were created. Bira, Shagdar, "The Mongol Empire in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: East-West Relations". *The Silk Roads: Highways of Culture and Commerce*, (Vadime Elisseeff. Paris: Berghahn, 2000).
Weatherford, Jack, *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World*. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004), 118–119.
Abu-Lughod, Janet, *Before European Hegemony: the world system AD 1250–1350*. (New York: OUP, 1989), 356–357.
Allsen, Thomas, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia*, (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 5.

land payment instruments began to use paper money¹⁷ instead of moving and storing heavy coins, with bills of exchange, promissory notes and even initial forms of banking.

The New Silk Road

The idea of building a New Silk Road was first put forward in 1994 by the then Prime Minister of the State Council of China, Li Peng¹⁸, during a visit to four former Soviet republics in Central Asia. He emphasized that “we should modernize the Silk Road together and expand Asia’s economic and cultural ties with Europe.”¹⁹

China began paying attention to relations with countries that declared their independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. In December of the same year, in order to study markets for trade with Central Asia, a Chinese delegation led by the Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation visited Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In 1992 the Premier of the PRC himself opened an international trade fair in Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, as well as a railway connecting Urumqi and Alma-Ata being in the same year.²⁰

During his 1994 visit Li Peng noted that the idea of historical Silk Road solution was the right approach to deepen China’s trade and economic links? with Central

17 Rules for printing paper currencies and the use of banknotes for local transactions in North China were approved by the order of Ögödei Khaan.

Delgerjargal, Purevsuren. Ed. “Trade policy of Great Mongol Empire”, In *History of Mongol Empire*, Volume I, (Ulaanbaatar: Steppe Publishing, 2019), 615.

The Book of Sir Marco Polo: The Venetian Concerning Kingdoms and Marvels of the East Volume 1, translated and edited by Colonel Sir Henry Yule (London: John Murray, 1903).
http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/figures/ser_xxiv.pdf Accessed June 29, 2020.

18 Li Peng (李鹏 1928–2019) Premier of P.R. China (1987–1998).

19 Liang Zhenpeng, Chinese diplomacy in Central Asia in the 1990s, *Social and political sciences*, 2017, No.1, 17-21.

Duo Guoli, Chang Kai, The emphasis needs to be emphasis on trade resource, Interview with Yao Pei, former Chinese Ambassador to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (Shijie Bolan, 2013(19), 38.)

20 Babak Vladimir, 2000. Astana in the triangle of Moscow-Washington-China: Kazakhstan-China relations, *Central Asia and The Caucasus* No.7 (13) (Lulea: CA&C Press AB, 2000)
<https://www.ca-c.org/journal/cac-07-2000/19.babak.shtml> Accessed August 28, 2020

Asia and cooperate with Central Asian countries in leveraging on their enormous mineral resources and raw materials.

In September 2013, President Xi Jinping made official visits to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan, and officially announced the construction of a “New Silk Road Economic Corridor”²¹. Addressing the Indonesian parliament on an official state visit on 3 October in the same year he said: “The region of Southeast Asia was an important node on the Silk Road by sea from early times, and China would like to strengthen its maritime cooperation with ASEAN countries. Let us use the China-ASEAN Sea Cooperation Fund of the China-ASEAN countries to develop a maritime partnership, and to develop the 21st Century “Maritime Silk Road”²² together.”

China realized that an international trade-route system is one feasible variant for achieving multiple objectives at the same time, such as maintaining its economic advancement, integrating into the global economy, opening up new markets and exploring new economic opportunities. The successful implementation of the “Belt and Road” policy would have several benefits for China. First, it could offer balanced stability in international relations through cooperation and mutual benefits with the countries integrating into the New Silk Road. Second, it could largely benefit from constructing mainland railways and gas pipelines as well as sea transport. The investment would support and somehow control the China’s current economic growth. Third, as part of this policy, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank was set up in 2015 to finance construction work and by 2018 it accounts as the half of the investment in the world’s leading economies. With the initiative by President Xi Jinping, they have also launched funding for the “Silk Road Foundation” and the “Belt and Road” projects. These are said to be the financial guarantees for the implementation of “Belt and Road Initiative” policy.

21 *ibid.*

22 An important speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Indonesian Parliament, <http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/xjpynghyj/index.htm> Accessed June 29, 2020.

Hard and Soft Factors of the Silk Road in the “Belt and Road Initiative”

Trade roads are historical phenomena with certain factors and regularities. It has been observed that different trade roads had emerged with their own unique features in different periods of history and have disappeared in time once they have played their roles. The fact that among number of trade routes, the Silk Road is specifically becoming a topic today as a modern version of it. It has been recorded that the Silk Road has been revived three times in world history²³. Some others suggest there were more than that.

What are the common traits and factors among these many trade roads? By revealing their features and identifying trade roads, we will be able to re-establish a similar trade road now and in the future. By finding out common and important factors we can re-plan it by leveraging on our social technological development and achievements.

Soft factors can be defined as set of human knowledge that in time was realized in solutions and systems. For example, thinking about the replacement of barter exchange one came up with the idea of money, as an abstract idea. In time, the use of money expanded into profit making, saving, accumulating wealth, and in ancient times, sea shells, coral, pearls, gold, silver, copper and brass functioned as money. Today forms of money further developed as paper currencies, cheques, payment cards and electronic money. In other words, soft factors were realized in physical objects.

Goods and merchandise: Archaeological evidence suggests that the pharaohs of Egypt bought precious gems from Khotans, transported through the earlier Silk Road. The gem mine of Badakhshan²⁴ mountain was long a site from where kings/emperors of Ancient Egypt, the Byzantine and Roman empires and ancient India obtained precious gems.

23 Silk Road / Trade route: Encyclopedia Britannica edited by Amy McKenna
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Silk-Road-trade-route>

24 Jeong Su-il, “Badakhshan”. In *The Silk Road Encyclopedia*, (Gyeongsangbuk-do: Korea Institute of Civilizational Exchanges, 2016), 87.

Transporting silk along the Silk Road, the Xiongnu imposed a silk duty on settled peoples in the south and to re-exported it to the west. Only after opening the border in the Western part (西域) during the Han Dynasty (汉朝), did China start trading its silk itself. Although silk was the main goods of trade transported along the Silk Road, other goods such as spices, perfumes, medicinal herbs, precious gems, textiles, carpets, colors, glass, porcelain, glazed ware, iron, copper, brass pots, deer musk etc. were transported by land road and by sea. At some point demand for resin increased so much that it became the main raw material for perfumes. Spices and seasoning travelled from India, Arabia and Central Asia to all around the world, with the Spice Road existing from the beginning of the millennium. According to the chronological list of foreign words in Chinese, the names of many spices became known to the Chinese by the start of the A.D. Chinese vocabulary was enriched by these words.²⁵

What goods were transported along trade roads in the Mongolian Empire times? At that time, a quota on certain goods was imposed in order to supply the needs of the Mongolian Empire. For example, paper and vermilion for palace use were duties imposed on Korea.²⁶ The quality and appearance of the goods improved: e.g. one important period of Chinese porcelain development, the era of blue and white porcelain,²⁷ occurred during the Yuan dynasty. The policy was to supply better raw material than the Jingdezhen porcelain. Kublai Khan controlled strategic goods such as salt, tea and alcohol²⁸ and made a significant profit from it. Merchants from many nations freely transported goods they needed, sold and purchased freely

25 Wang Li, *History of Chinese vocabulary*, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2013.), 163-165.

26 Chuluunbat S, "A letter from the king of the Goryeo to Kublai Khan of the Khökh empire in 1227", *Foreign Languages and Culture Studies* Vol. 430 (19) (2015), 228.
Sumiyabaatar B, *Mongolia Korea relations documents of XIII-XIV centuries*, 1st ed. Ulaanbaatar: Academia of Science Publishing, 1978)

27 Making blue and white porcelain began at the Jingdezhen kilns of Yuan, China (1271–1368), and rapidly advanced and spread to Korea, Vietnam, and Japan, developing differently according to each country's unique aesthetics.
Kang Dae-gyu, *In Blue and White: Porcelain of the Joseon Dynasty*, (Seoul: National Museum of Korea 2015), 11.

28 Delgerjargal, P. ed, "Tribute and taxes, Great Mongol as Great Yuan", *History of Mongol Empire*, Vol. I, (Ulaanbaatar: Steppe Publishing, 2019), 292.

and engaged in free trade. Historical sources frequently mention that merchants trusted by the khans and queens enjoyed special privileges.

Merchants: Merchants were always on the move, they had got to see and hear many things first hand, so they were distinguished as people with more information and knowledge of that time. Historical literature noted that the Khans and lords, encouraged merchants to obtain information for them, bought their goods and ensured their travel safety. Using this advantage, merchants quickly became wealthy and in turn they created links for gathering information. Some merchants became close counsellors of the khans and royals in foreign countries. They contributed to improving trade route conditions and management, and cultivated good relationships with local people. The most famous merchant of the Silk Road was Marco Polo, who became popular for his notes and records of his journey. There are also notes by the envoys Plano Carpini and W. Rubruck.²⁹

Roads and infrastructure: Routes and paths are created when people and livestock regularly find their ways around obstacles and geographic formations. These paths are the basis of today's infrastructure. Many modern roads are constructed along a path that people and livestock took for travel or carriage. Clearly, many modern roads based on science and technology are not built along historical roads. Roads are built for many purposes, including connecting cities and towns, connecting factories with sources of raw materials. Roads act as rivers that flow in both directions, whereas cities and towns are like lakes. Building roads that connect towns creates mobility, which clears and develops the towns in the same way as rivers replenish and clear lake water.

As camel caravans travelled on the historic Silk Road, roads usually went around high mountains and deep rivers and were fairly free of obstacles. As safety on the road was ensured, messengers, merchants were rarely held up, and were able to calculate in advance the distance and travel time depending on the Örtöö stations and road conditions. In the thirteenth century, the Örtöö stations' infrastructure

29 Hakluyt Richard. (MDCCCCIII). *The texts and versions of John de Plano Carpini and William de Rubruquis*. London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society. (Cambridge: Printed by J. and C.F. Clay at the University Press, 1903) <https://archive.org/stream/textsversionsofj00hakluoft?ref=ol#page/n13/mode/2up> Accessed August 28, 2020.

was well developed so that persons and horses and other livestock were able to rest, be fed, and take on food supplies. During Mönkh Khaan's (1209–1259) reign, an administrative organization³⁰ for managing the *Örtöö* stations was created.

Livestock for riding, carrying and hauling: Livestock for riding, carrying, and hauling vehicles on the Silk Roads are a reflection of the development of vehicles of the time. Many countries standardized the length between the wheels of a cart and the ground clearance. For instance, the Qin Dynasty (秦 BCE 221–207), determined that length between wheels of a cart as six *chi* (尺) or 138.6 centimeters.³¹ Mongolians also had a standardized size for height of a cartwheel, as was noted in *Secret History of Mongols*, in the section on the Mongolians' battle with the Tatars.³² Mongolians bred camels, cows and horses for centuries and used them for riding and as pack animals. Mongolians used to encamp in a *khüree*³³ or circle. Forming a *khüree* had strict rules. The Khan's *ger*³⁴ (yurt) was to be located at the centre of the circle and others were to encamp in circles around it. When they needed to move, everyone transported their *gers* and the entire city moved to a new location together. Livestock was well trained for riding and *ger* carts were pulled by cattle. The carts' harnesses were made of leather and hair, and transport issues were well arranged independently. The people who move an entire city or town created a system and logistic solutions to transport trade from the east coast of Asia to centralized trading cities in the west, a system that was perfected during the reign of Ögödei Khan.

30 Delgerjargal, Purevsuren. ed, "Trade policy, Yehe Mongol Ulus", In *History of the Mongol Empire*, Vol. II, (Ulaanbaatar: Steppe publishing, 2019), 616–618.

31 Road network and unification of cart axle width in Qin dynasty:
<https://chiculture.org.hk/sc/china-five-thousand-years/462>

32 MHT §154 (Secret History of Mongols)

33 *Khuree*: Medieval *ger* (please see the explanation of *ger*'-yurt below) camps were commonly arranged in a *khuree* (circle), with the leader's *ger* in the centre. *Khurees* were replaced by a neighbourhood arrangement in the 13th and 14th centuries during the Mongol Khanate.
https://infogalactic.com/info/Architecture_of_Mongolia. Accessed June 19, 2020.

34 *Ger*: Traditional Mongol dwelling designed to be light enough for Mongolian nomads to carry, flexible enough to fold-up, pack and assemble, sturdy enough for multiple dismantling and reassembly as well as easy for regulating temperatures inside.
<https://www.amicusmongolia.com/mongolia-ger-mongolia-yurt.html>

Monetary and financial systems: Money has taken many forms in history, changing as well as coexisting with of many other forms. Despite its many forms, its feature of exchangeability with merchandise will never change. Trade routes are associated with risks related to time and space, whereas money as a payment instrument is associated with maintaining and safeguarding it. Thus, many new initiatives, ideas and new forms of money have emerged over time. The emergence of money eased barter and made trade more flexible. However, for centuries money was in the form of heavy metal coins³⁵ that were not easy to carry and maintain. Some coins could not function as payment in other countries, i.e. were not convertible or exchangeable. At that time, Mongolians issued and distributed monetary bills under the name of the Great Khan,³⁶ which could be used anywhere on the territory of the empire. Later they created paper currencies, the significance of which was revolutionary in the history of payment instruments.

Road safety and the legal system: The Silk Road was at times safe, peaceful road across the vast Eurasian landmass, but in times of regional conflict it became risky to transport merchandise on it. Merchants therefore opted to send their goods by sea, and roads and paths on dry land faded and disappeared. During the second revival of the Silk Road, Mongolians ensured the safety of its travellers. They maintained the road, planted tall trees to provide shade and had security guards at the *Örtöö* stations to protect caravans,³⁷ so providing conditions for trade to thrive and for other people to travel freely at the time.

35 Helen Wang, "The Silk Road and Eastern Central Asia: Money on the Silk Road"; The Evidence from Eastern Central Asia to c. AD800, (London: British Museum Press, 2004), 46-47.

36 Delgerjargal, P. ed, "Monetary policy, Ulus of Zuchi", In *History of the Mongol Empire*, Vol. III, (Ulaanbaatar: Steppe Publishing, 2019), 238-250.
Mongols: An Empire of Cavalry Which Ruled the World (XII-XVII centuries), 1st edited by Bayarsaikhan D., (Ulaanbaatar: Monsudar, 2016), 181-183.

37 *The Book of Sir Marco Polo: The Venetian Concerning Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, Volume 1, translated and edited by Colonel Sir Henry Yule (London: John Murray, 1903).
http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/figures/ser_xxvi.pdf. Accessed June 29, 2020.

Although the Mongolian *Ikh Zasag*³⁸ (Great Law) has not come down to us in its original form, researchers noted the following provisions were about international trade, religion, stationery and taxes. For instance:

*The high priest and disciples of any religion are exempt from
ordinary duty and customs*

“Do not discredit the apostle”

“It is requisite to protect cross-border trade”

*“Be respectful of any religion. But no religion can claim
privileges”*

However, for the native Mongols, this law provided a legal provision by which the king/khan required a highly vigilant, internally militarized organization with a vertical administrative structure and strict discipline. The governing system known as the *Ikh Zasag* therefore served the Greater Mongolian Empire fairly and equally, while the law enforcement activities were supervised by the Mongols themselves, installing guards in each region.

Road logistics and management: In creating *Örtöö* stations, Mongolians used the experience of the passage of information and physical things used in the vast steppes. The Mongols provided messengers gold, silver, copper, brass and wood *Gereges* that certified they were messengers of the Khan, and also allowed them to receive service according to their rank along to road and at the *Örtöö* stations. The messenger used the *Gerege* issued by the Khan in order to stay at the *Örtöö* stations. Each *Örtöö* had horsemen who tended horses ready for a switch, and resident staff to prepare food and accommodation for the guests. The operating costs of such *Örtöö* stations was funded by the central and local administration in accordance with precise rules, and security guards, and military units were assigned for protection.

38 Sodbileg Ch, *History of Yehe Yuan Ulus founded by Mongols*, 1st ed. (Ulaanbaatar: “Bembi san” Publishing Co., 2010), 423.

Towns at the road junctions: Any branch of the Silk Road passes through a centralized commercial city or town. These included Samarkand, Bukhara, Constantinople, Rey, Tabriz, Sarai, Damascus, Merv, Almaliq, Yarkand, Karakorum, Khanbaliq, and Xanadu. Each had its unique customs and traditions, languages and culture depending on the ethnicity, and accordingly could supply unique goods as well as having a demand for merchandize. As a result of long-standing trade such practices had become customary. A similar trait in all the cities along the Silk Roads is that they all offered travellers accommodation and a system for preserving and protecting their goods.³⁹

Social and cultural bases: Morris Rossabi mentions four legacies⁴⁰ left by Genghis, noting that he supported Mongolia's great tolerance, literacy, world trade and crafts, and that he established the *Ikh Zasag* legal system.

Studying the remains of Sarai city,⁴¹ researchers discovered evidence of an interesting coexistence of multiple ethnic groups and found number of artefacts and literary heritage. Nomadic art and culture were enriched by the influence of settled people's culture. The Yuan theatre (元曲), a form of plays (元杂剧),⁴² which khans and aristocrats much enjoyed, developed in the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). That period was one of the golden eras in the Chinese literary history. As Mongolian aristocrats became wealthy, they affected the development of culture of porcelain, tapestry, weaving, embroidery and carving. Going into battle, Mongol khans wore *deels*⁴³ made of silk interwoven with golden threads, a technique Mongolians learnt

39 *The Book of Sir Marco Polo: The Venetian Concerning Kingdoms and Marvels of the East* Volume 1, Book Second, part 1, chapter XXII. translated and edited by Colonel Sir Henry Yule (London: John Murray, 1903), 2.
http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/figures/ser_xxii.pdf. Accessed June 29, 2020.

40 Chinggis khan's four great legacies, Key figures in Mongol history, The Mongols in World history.
http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/figures/figu_geng_legacy.htm Accessed June 29, 2020.

41 Delgerjargal, Purevsuren. ed., "Urban construction and Technology". In *Ulus of Zochi, History of Mongol Empire*, Vol. III, (Ulaanbaatar: Steppe Publishing, 2019), 277-284.

42 Cyril Birch, *Yuan Zaju*, An Encyclopaedia of Translation. (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1995), 172-182.

Crump, J.L. *Chinese Theater in the Days of Kublai Khan*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980).

43 An item of traditional clothing worn by Mongols for centuries.

from Persians. A *deel* made of such “cloth of gold”⁴⁴ (纳石失 جسن in Farsi) is cleaned by scorching it over a fire to melt dirt and oil, and was a luxury item, more durable than ordinary silk. Not many kings wore golden *deel* clothes. This is one example of the cultural influences of the Silk Road.

Trading activities under the BRI are coordinated by the Chinese Ministry of Commerce. In order to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), for many years China worked to resolve non-compliance issues and finally joined the WTO in 2001 as the 143rd member. From 1980, China started establishing free economic zones, further establishing the Shanghai free-trade zone, and in 2010 Chinese GDP reached \$6 trillion, making China the world’s second largest economy, a position it still holds.

China now considers the road, transport and logistics issue as the most important factor in the development of the New Silk Road, and in order to implement the trade process sustainably it has set the objective of establishing six economic corridors: (1) the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor, (2) the New Eurasian Land Bridge, (3) the China-Central Asia-Western Asia Corridor, the (4) the China-Indochina Peninsula, (5) the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and (6) the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Corridor.

It has become a foundation to develop cross-border trade, seek closer ties with countries along the New Silk Road and actively develop trade-route policy further. In December 2019, the Ministry of Commerce and other organizations researched over 20 cities near borders. Based on their findings they devised the “Manual and Rules of Conducting Border Trade”⁴⁵ to introduce innovation into trade near borders as well as to approve a list of goods which will not be tax-exempt in border trade. This is a step towards supporting urbanization. The rules apply

44 “Cloth of Gold” with Medallions, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/64101>. Accessed August 28, 2020.

Ethnic style: Mongolian knitted gold thread brocade: using gold as clothing reflects what kind of values? https://www.sohu.com/a/142820257_534763. Accessed August 28, 2020.

45 Head of Foreign Trade Department of the Ministry of Commerce delivers a speech on supporting the innovation-driven development of border trade <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/ae/sjjd/201912/20191202919140.shtml>. Accessed August 28, 2020.

to 20 ports in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, Xinjiang Autonomous Region, Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Yunnan and the Guangxizhuan Autonomous Region and include directives on the digitalization of trade, the introduction of financial and payment instruments and as well as the Chinese digital network in neighboring regions.

There are currently a number of international payment instruments. Chinese officials have understood that in order for the BRI to move forward, an enormous amount of financing will be needed for the infrastructure. They planned well in advance, announcing the establishment of the Silk Road Fund at the 2014 APEC forum in Beijing with assets of \$40 billion and also established the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank⁴⁶ (AIIB) in 2015. The majority of infrastructure projects along the BRI are financed by local Chinese banks and financial institutions such as the China EXIM Bank and the Development Bank of China rather than by the AIIB. The OECD Business and Finance Prospects report 2018⁴⁷ noted that the AIIB is handling a minor part of the investment. This shows that the Silk Road Fund and AIIB do not play big roles in financing the BRI, but China's own banks and financial institutions have greater influence and involvement.

Infrastructure projects of the New Silk Road are currently taking place as cooperative projects with Asian, European and African countries. They aim to test and develop transport and logistic structures during and after the completion of infrastructure development. Of the six economic corridors under the BRI, the China-Pakistan corridor is considered the most efficient; currently infrastructure and transport logistics development are taking place across Pakistan to reach Gwadar port. For other corridors China is trying to work on the basis of existing infrastructure, seeking to use ASEAN+1, the Eurasian Economic Union and the International Rail Network. However, China has not yet proposed cooperation for

46 Members and Prospective Members of the Bank, about AIIB.
<https://www.aiib.org/en/about-aiib/governance/members-of-bank/index.html>.
Accessed June 29, 2020.

47 China's Belt and Road initiative in the Global Trade, Investment and Landscape. OECD Business and Finance Outlook 2018, 18-21.
<https://www.oecd.org/finance/Chinas-Belt-and-Road-Initiative-in-the-global-trade-investment-and-finance-landscape.pdf>. Accessed August 28, 2020.

the larger economic circle of East Asia, which could probably mean that China has no interest in competing or sharing profit with developed economies. China has started discussion on BRI by reaching an agreement during state visits and high-level discussions. It offers infrastructure development and investment to less-developed countries with attractive locations. China is aiming to use the existing infrastructure of ASEAN, the EU and Middle East and connect to their integrated network. Robert Skidelsky emphasized: “the Belt and Road Initiative of China is derived from its inevitable need to devise new foreign policy of economy and politics in order for it to open up new markets to sustain the economic growth. The ideal model for this initiative would be reviving the *Pax Mongolica*.”⁴⁸

China is seeking to implement its political, economic and geopolitical policies through its cultural soft power by influencing social and humanitarian environment along the New Silk Road. As defined in the BRI policy document, the framework covers the countries of Asia, Europe and Africa. 67 countries in various economic status, comprising vast territories with huge reserves in the middle.⁴⁹

As of April 2018, China had submitted 173 cooperation documents with 125 countries and 29 international organisations regarding the BRI.⁵⁰ BRI information has been made available for the people of 125 countries, and for more than 60 countries where it is to take place the initiative would become indispensable to people’s daily lives. In other words, it would concern 63% of the world’s population.

48 Elena Holodny, “...Beijing is looking for new countries to which it can export its goods as Western demand slows and China transitions into a consumption-based economy. “China’s motive for reviving *Pax Mongolica* is clear,” writes Robert Skidelsky, professor emeritus of political economy at Warwick University, referring to the Mongol period of prosperity while controlling an expanse from Southeast Asia to Eastern Europe.” PAX MONGOLICA: *The underlying reason why China is going after Central Asia*, Business Insider, 21 June 2015.
<https://uk.finance.yahoo.com/news/pax-mongolica-real-reason-china-142958080.html>
<https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-russia-marriage-by-robert-skidelsky-2015-06?barrier=accessreg>. Accessed June 29, 2020.

49 Bayarkhuu Dashdorj, *Shanghai Cooperation Organization & «Belt and Road» China & Russia*, 1st ed. (Ulaanbaatar: Udam Soyol Publishing Co. 2018), 122.

50 China has signed 173 “Belt and Road” cooperation documents with 125 countries and 29 international organizations. 2019-04-18
http://www.xinhuanet.com/2019-04/18/c_1124385792.htm

“The people to people bond⁵¹ provides the public support for implementing the Initiative.” Chinese former and current presidents like Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping have stressed that in order to win public support for deepening bilateral and multilateral cooperation there is a need to build “a community of shared future (or a *community of common destiny*⁵²) for mankind.” It is also inherent in the policies initiated by the previous heads of state to achieve their goals of maintaining the pace of economic development inside the country, connecting with the world economy, opening new markets and discovering new economic opportunities.

The BRI policy document clearly stated that the “people to people bond”, strengthening “heart to heart connection between the people”, is the social foundation of the Belt and Road development. Li Ziguo, a researcher at the China Institute of International Studies, commented⁵³ that there are at least three phases of the “heart to heart connection”: 1) a phase of people getting to know each other; 2) a phase of mutual trust and friendship; and 3) a phase of unity of destiny. If we look at each of these in detail, the first refers to nations communicating diplomatically, the initiation of relationships between ordinary people, understanding each other’s lives and getting to understand the culture and customs of other nations. The second phase is of mutual trust and friendship, where the relationship will deepen and expand to cultural, economic and political relations. In this case, countries are assumed to establish diplomatic relations and communicate equally, in line with practice in international relations.

With the implementation of mega projects within the BRI, connecting continents by land and sea, participating countries are to be interrelated in all aspects, which is the complex union of destiny or the third phase of strengthening “heart to heart

51 Egshig Shagdarsuren, “Belt and Road” initiative and The Pillar of Mongolia-China humanitarian cooperation, the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Mongolia and China: Past, Present and the Future International conference paper’s collection, (Ulaanbaatar: Udam Soyol Publishing Co., 2019), 349-358.

52 Mardell, Jacob. *The ‘Community of Common destiny’ in Xi Jinping’s New Era*, The Diplomat, October 25, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/the-community-of-common-destiny-in-xi-jinpings-new-era/>. Accessed June 29, 2020.

53 Li Ziguo, 2016. “Belt and Road” The power of people to people bonds, «Xinjiang Normal University journal» 2016(3), http://www.ciis.org.cn/chinese/2016-06/12/content_8825507.htm. Accessed June 29, 2020.

connections”. From recent BRI developments, countries that have implemented mega projects in cooperation with China have incurred a debt burden and become connected with one another but not in a positive “heart to heart connection”. Failure to earn other nations’ trust in the process of developing the Belt and Road infrastructure may negatively affect their trust in its mutual benefit and degree of equal coexistence.

Conclusion

The Silk Road is one form of trade route, and many trade roads in history have been named after the main merchandise they carried. The concept of the trade road is not limited only to the route, but many other factors play a role in realizing it. It has been argued if it is accurate to call all trade routes as the Silk Road.

This paper examines the factors that influence sustainable trade along trade routes by taking the Silk Road as a model for all trade routes, and compare the historical Silk Road with the current situation of the New Silk Road, the Belt and Road Initiative initiated by the People’s Republic of China. In doing so, I considered the factors in two types, hard and soft. As the historical Silk Road is a classic system that existed sustainably for relatively long period, I tried to identify the features of factors of that road and used them to analyze the New Silk Road. Regarding hard factors, it can be realized only if all the planned infrastructure of the Belt and Road are complete. However, for soft factors, although policy documents have outlined them correctly, the implementation process is likely to face number of challenges.

Although the planning was done by China initially, factors including mistakes made during the implementation process, China prioritizing profit, and differences of culture and tradition of nations along the road will create difficulties in implementing the project. Among the soft factors, monetary and financial ones have been very well satisfied by China. However, it is likely to face number of challenges relating to security, the legal system, and the social and cultural base. The reason the author took the historical Silk Road as a model is because of the abundance of information on it, making it easier to establish the main factors and the availability of research on which to base comparisons.

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