Special Report

The Silk Order:
A philosophical perspective

Peimin Ni (2018)
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The most significant phenomenon in the world around the turn of the new millennium is arguably the rise of China. Along with its fast and consistent economic growth, the global influence of this ancient ‘middle kingdom’ has increased dramatically.

Waves of Chinese tourists pour into luxury goods stores around the world, receiving VIP treatment as they spend tons of cash, and the current president of China is greeted with reception ceremonies of the highest level wherever he goes, be it in Paris or in Washington.

Although the Chinese government remains relatively low key and is cautious in claiming its leading position in international affairs, this is widely perceived as happening soon, if not already. If we say that China’s role in international organisations such as the association of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has already changed the international landscape, the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative that China has proposed presents the blueprint of a world order radically different from the current one.

The OBOR initiative is the abbreviation for the ‘Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road’ initiative. It is well-known that for over a thousand years before the modern era (i.e., before the industrial revolution’s global impact), there was a trading route linking the ancient capital of China, Xian, westward all the way to Europe, through which busy commercial and cultural exchanges took place. In addition to the land route travelled by camel, the ancient Chinese had also taken ocean voyages from the country’s east coast – mainly the port cities of Quanzhou, Ningbo, Yangzhou, and Guangzhou – to the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, and all the way to Africa, bringing Chinese artefacts and culture to these regions.
These were known as the Silk Roads. Now the Chinese government has announced its development strategy to revive these ancient routes. The official public announcements of the OBOR initiative were made by China’s President Xi Jinping in September and October 2013, during his visits to Central Asia and Southeast Asia. The Silk Road Economic Belt calls for the integration and cooperation of the countries on the original Silk Road through Central Asia, West Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, forming a cohesive belt through infrastructure, cultural exchange, and trade. The ‘21st Century Maritime Silk Road’ is a parallel plan to foster collaboration in Southeast Asia, Oceania, and North Africa through contiguous bodies of water.

Since 2013, China has taken numerous steps to implement the Initiative, including setting up a $40 billion Silk Road Fund, reviving the plan for a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP), and more importantly, the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB). With initial capital of US$100 billion, the bank opened in 2016 and is on course to rival the financial systems dominated by developed countries like the United States and Japan. Some projects along the OBOR had actually begun long before, indicating that the Initiative did not come out of the blue. The 7,000-mile (11,179 km, to be exact) Chongqing-Xinjiang-Europe railway from China’s Chongqing to Duisburg in Germany, for example, was established in 2011, cutting the 36-day container ship transport time to a 16-day – safer and less expensive – trip. By March 2017, the railway had already taken 1,000 freight trains from China to Europe.

There is no doubt of the vast scale of the One Belt One Road initiative: It will involve 26 countries and 4.4 billion people within its immediate vicinity, which accounts for 63% of the world’s population, and roughly one-third of the world’s economy.

There is also no question that the genie is already out of the bottle, and with huge momentum. Up to 13 May 2017, The AIIB plan has gained support from 77 regional and

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1 Although the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs refers to it as a ‘supplement’ rather than a ‘rival’, for reasons I will mention later.
non-regional members, including some of the closest allies of the US, such as Australia, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and even the United Kingdom—despite Washington’s pressure to dissuade them not to join.

This vast and unstoppable trend is not merely an economic phenomenon. Economic development is always accompanied by other changes. Some commentators say that the dominance of the US-led West is waning and a new world order is emerging. They call this emerging new global order the ‘Silk World Order’, or simply the Silk Order (Escobar, 2015; Nazemroaya, 2015).

What does this order look like? What are its implications? How likely is it to unfold as envisioned, and under what conditions and with what risks and costs would this be possible?

Because OBOR represents a field of research rather than a single topic, it demands cross-disciplinary study involving political science, economics, history, sociology, philosophy, religion, and more. As it is impossible to address all the aforementioned questions in one report, I would like to limit my emphasis to the importance of a broad philosophical framework or perspective within which we can look at the relevant issues.

A perspective determines what one is able to see, so it is of the utmost importance that the perspective we choose is able to provide us with a holistic picture of the subject and an awareness of its crucial dimensions. Existing literature on the subject is largely confined to economics and geopolitics, which, although no doubt central concerns of OBOR, cannot account for the saturation of the regions OBOR covers with religious and culturally diverse traditions, nor the impact OBOR will have on the wider world and human life more broadly. It is therefore more important than ever that OBOR’s economic and geopolitical plans be understood and evaluated accordingly.

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2 CNR news, ‘AIIB once again adds new members—Seven countries, including Chile and Romania are permitted to join 亚投行再添新成员 智利罗马尼亚等7国获批加 (https://baike.baidu.com/redirect/bd9cDVdazjcQFT4Qe10EjMusl4oEOV2bgYd3govO9l21zax5zzVuDUv86ANrHQBSp9w5yc8cOfczwfbPJ4SWIFcTi1U54JczGTnlakDhCrBB2A)

1 (https://baike.baidu.com/redirect/bd9cDVdazjcQFT4Qe10EjMusl4oEOV2bgYd3govO9l21zax5zzVuDUv86ANrHQBSp9w5yc8cOfczwfbPJ4SWIFcTi1U54JczGTnlakDhCrBB2A)
1. The One Belt One Road initiative and the New Silk Order

For those who are used to the antagonistic zero-sum game way of thinking, the rise of one side implies the decline of the other. Because of this, the rise of China is naturally seen as a challenge, or even a threat, to the US and to the entire Western world. After the Cold War, there was a period in which tensions rose between the US and China.

During his presidential campaign, George W. Bush criticised the Clinton administration for being too soft on China, and argued that China was a ‘strategic competitor’ rather than a ‘strategic partner’. Shortly after Bush took office, a series of occurrences caused the rise in tensions between the two countries to accelerate: Bush’s proclamation to do “whatever it took to help Taiwan defend herself” (Wallace, 2001); his criticism of China’s “intensifying attacks” on religious freedom (such as Falun Gong, which the Chinese government banned as a cult); and his meeting with the Dalai Lama.

The most dramatic moment was the Hainan Island incident. On 1 April 2001, a US reconnaissance plane was said to be on a routine mission near China’s coast when it had a mid-air collision with an intercepting Chinese air force jet, resulting in the death of the Chinese pilot. The US plane made an emergency landing on China’s Hainan Island and its crew was detained. After difficult diplomatic negotiations, the tension was defused when the US expressed their regrets for the death of the Chinese pilot and for landing on Chinese soil without prior verbal clearance. The Chinese chose to characterise this as an apology but the US viewed it as an expression of regret or sorrow.³

As Jacques deLisle (2011) summarises in an article titled ‘9/11 and US-China relations’,

³ The US Secretary of State Colin Powell said that the use of ‘sorry’ had nothing to do with the US taking the blame for the incident. Powell said, “To apologize would have suggested that we had done something wrong and were not accepting responsibility for having done something wrong; we did not do anything wrong, and therefore it was not possible to apologize” (The Free Library 2001).
Among foreign policy commentators and international relations analysts (and especially among conservative ones), the notion of a ‘China threat’ and the related view that China’s rise would inevitably (or likely) bring conflicts with the United States and peril for American interests had been gaining traction before 9/11.

But that was a time when China was still in its early stage of economic reform, and the Chinese government was following Deng Xiaoping’s strategy of taoguang yanghui, ‘hide one’s capacities and bide one’s time’.

If the US side was deliberately playing with the ambiguity of the word ‘sorry,’ the Chinese side deliberately accepted the ambiguity to let the tension calm down – a typical Taiji (aka Tai-chi) style strategy.

At the time, both US elites and the general public still saw China as “a problem to be managed, not an enemy to be defeated” (Pew Research Center, 2001). Just as nerves were rising about the tension between the US and China, 9/11 shifted US attention towards terrorism and weapons of massive destruction, giving China significant breathing room.

The OBOR initiative has arrived just as the US has woken up to the speed and magnitude of China’s rise. President Barack Obama said in his speech at the Department of Defense in January 2012 that the US “is at a moment of transition”, going on to speak of the need to meet challenges and to “preserve American global leadership” (Obama, 2012). An important part of this adjustment was the Obama Administration’s pivot to Asia, a strategic rebalancing of US interests from Europe and the Middle East towards East Asia. It consists of two chief aspects: military and economic.

Military moves involved shifting 2,500 marines to a base in northern Australia, and economic measures mainly amounted to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a trade agreement forming ties among numerous countries along the Pacific Rim as a check against growing Chinese power. The exclusion of China from TPP was an obvious statement: China was
being treated as a rival, not a partner. At the October 2015 Trans-Pacific Partnership meeting, Obama (2015) claimed unequivocally that:

When more than 95 percent of our potential customers live outside our borders, we can’t let countries like China write the rules of the global economy. We should write those rules, opening new markets to American products while setting high standards for protecting workers and preserving our environment.

As Obama (2015) frankly acknowledged in the same speech, TPP is an agreement that “puts American workers first and will help middle-class families get ahead”. The logic was not that ‘rules must promote the interests of both parties’, but rather that ‘rules must be beneficial to the United States first’!

These are the rules of the jungle – whoever has the power to make the rules will do so, putting their own interests first, even to others’ cost. Through such a lens, the OBOR initiative is naturally perceived as China’s move to compete with the West, presumably for resources and markets.

The OBOR initiative is of course motivated by China’s own interests and is not an act of charity or philanthropy. Over the years, China has accumulated extensive experience in infrastructure construction. Anyone who has travelled in China recently can testify to how impressive China’s rail and highway systems are. In 2014 alone, China built 4,630 miles of highway. China has also accumulated huge foreign exchange reserves (roughly US$3 trillion). By supporting Central Asia, West Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia by helping with infrastructure modernisation, China can maintain its own pace of economic development.

Given the imbalance between China’s more developed east coast and its relatively underdeveloped western territories, it is natural for China to shift its focus. Strategically speaking, it is also in China’s interest to connect inland routes with Pakistan’s Gwadar Port
so that it can reduce shipping costs relative to the Strait of Malacca route that leaves China at the mercy of long-term US ally, Singapore.

Although talk of a globalised world is common, the globe is not nearly as round as it seems. Since the beginning of the modern era, the centre of the world has been the West. Not only do news reports focus on stories about the West. History has even been written with the West as its main focus. The rest of the world is treated as peripheral, either mentioned with reference to the expansion of the West, or simply ignored.

Most OBOR-connected countries are underdeveloped, turbulent, and known for their rich natural resources. Is China reclaiming its ‘Middle Kingdom’ status through the OBOR initiative? Will there be another Cold War, as there was in the last century? The great mess in the Middle East today is largely the consequence of the competition between the US-led West and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

It is important to note that the principles behind the OBOR initiative, according to China, are very different from the zero-sum, competitive principles which have guided the formation of the existing world order.

According to Russian scholar Yuri Tavrovsky (2015), the new world order forecasted by the OBOR initiative is horizontal rather than vertical. Unlike the old model, structured around economic and military power with the most powerful at the top of the pyramid, the new world order is multilateral. It will be based on integration and cooperation, ideally to the benefit of all involved.

This principle is reflected most clearly in the two key phrases Chinese government leaders have used frequently in recent years: ‘community of shared destiny’ and ‘co-prosperity through collaboration’. If we are all within a community of shared destiny, then we have no

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4 During the first two years after Xi Jinping stepped into China’s top leadership position, he mentioned the phrase ‘community of shared destiny’ over 60 times in various contexts, including his visit to the US, urging the international community to abandon the zero-sum game mentality and to think in terms of a shared common
choice but to collaborate. There is no zero-sum game. If we fight against each other, the consequences will be that we all lose. Only through collaboration can we all win.

If such principles can be implemented smoothly, then the new global order will not represent a change of world ruler, from US dominance to a new world dominated by China; it will be a change from a vertical system to a horizontal system, leading to a new order in which, ideally, there may be leaders but no one dominant power; there may be competition but no excessive confrontation; there may be disagreements but no antagonisms.

Of course, the question is whether such an ideal is realistic, whether it is feasible in practice. If the old order was generated on the basis of the modern enlightenment and took several generations of modern philosophers to lay its philosophical foundations, then the new order, so radically different from the old one, requires a profound philosophical transformation to support it.

What is the new philosophy? Answering this question first requires philosophical analysis of the two key silk order phrases, exploring existing philosophical resources to understand the foundation of these ideas.

2. ‘Community of shared destiny’ as a way of thinking

When the notion of a ‘community of shared destiny’ is put under the philosophical microscope, the first thing to note is that it entails a holistic and relational way of thinking. In contrast to the analytical, atomistic, and deconstructive way of thinking, which takes an object out of its environment and isolates it from the relationship it has with its surroundings, the holistic and relational way of thinking entailed in the notion of community of shared destiny recognises each individual in relationship with everything else in the whole system.

This holistic way of thinking, in its basic form, takes nothing in isolation. It understands everything through its position within a system. For instance, a wheel is a wheel because it is a part of a vehicle. Only by putting a wheel in the context of a vehicle can one fully understand its function. An extreme form of this way of thinking takes the entire universe as a whole, in which everything is interrelated, such that there is no way of gaining a complete understanding of anything in isolation from the universe. The famous ‘butterfly effect’ illustrates this view well: A seemingly insignificant event (such as a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil) can lead to a large-scale event (such as a tornado in Texas) through a series of causal chain reactions.

In practice, of course, no one thinks this way all the time. If the flap of a butterfly’s wings can cause a tornado, how can I be sure that my eating an egg will not cause a war? But if I need to make sure my eating an egg would not cause a war before I eat it, then how can I ever eat anything? Obviously, in practice, we need to adjust the scope of our vision.

The basic and extreme forms of holism are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Some connections are so close that they are inseparable: One cannot survive without the other and a change for one will have an immediate effect on the other. Other connections are so remote and weak that they can, in most cases, be practically neglected as irrelevant.

Furthermore, the degree to which things are connected can be changed. Things that are not interconnected significantly and noticeably in the first place may, over time or through human
effort, become closely connected. For example, modernity has seen the world get smaller, so to speak. The often-referenced ‘global village’ expresses precisely the awareness that the whole world is becoming a community of shared destiny. This is especially true with regard to environmental issues. The image of the Earth from space makes us acutely aware that the planet on which we live is a small vessel with limited resources, like a tiny boat in a huge ocean. It cannot sustain the infinite growth of both the human population and humanity’s consumption. To contaminate the environment is to contaminating the living conditions of the entire global population.

Whereas the personal behaviour of individuals in the pre-modern era could not pose significant threat to the environment, advanced technology today means that is no longer the case. The ‘butterfly effect’ has turned from a myth-like tale to a real warning under the conditions of modern technological advances.

The holistic way of thinking also recognises that things can be related in different ways. Within a traditional Chinese family, for example, the roles and respective responsibilities of husband and wife, parents and children, elder brothers/sisters and younger brothers/sisters are all differentiated quite specifically, whereas in a modern Western family, there is more equality and less differentiation of roles. In a global context, the influence of small countries cannot be compared with the influence of great powers, and their respective responsibilities and obligations are therefore different. This consideration should clearly be woven into the way destinies are shared.

In a community of common destiny, constituent parties may either depend on each other, or compete and constrain one another, or both at the same time. There are different ways of sharing destinies within a community. A slave and his master may share destinies in that, as long as the master remains, the slave will remain his slave, but for the slave, it would be better not be in such a position. At other times, competing and constraining relationships between individuals may be good for both parties.
In sports, the presence of rivals is a precondition for the existence of games. In an ecological system, the balance of species also depends on mutual constraint. Once a species loses its natural predator, it may eventually become extinct because of overpopulation. A traditional Chinese saying says ‘Enemy stay, disasters away; enemy gone, faults around’. Although in the short term, an individual can benefit from the absence of rivals, in the long run, this will eventually lead to a rebound, causing harm.

Upon closer examination, we realise that communities of shared destiny can be formed through naturally, and they can also be established, strengthened, or disassembled through human effort. In other words, the concept of a community of shared destiny can be, on one hand, used to describe the objective existence of interdependence, and it can also be used as a directive. People can form a family (which is a small community of shared destiny) through marriage, but can also dissolve a family through divorce.

Similarly, in international relations, communities of shared destiny can be formed through diplomatic agreements, trade treaties, military alliances, and so on. Alternatively, as the recent UK referendum has done, countries can withdraw from a community of shared destiny. It is not always the case that the more we are connected, the better.

If the conditions or timing are not right, or the parties not well-suited to each other, a connection can be worse than having no connection. On the other hand, forceful detachment from a community does not mean that the destiny of both parties is no longer related; for example, when a child is taken away from a family, the link cannot thereby be severed.

This brief analysis of the community of shared destiny is not exhaustive, but it is adequate to provide a more sophisticated understanding. For example, we notice that when used by the Chinese government, the concept of a community of shared destiny is sometimes used to mean that, as a matter of fact, the world is becoming increasingly interconnected. In such a world, no country can simply mind its own business. No matter which country you live in, the religion you adhere to, like it or not, your destiny is connected with the destinies of others. It is, therefore, necessary to have a global vision.
Some expressions of the phrase by the Chinese government go further, to mean that we share a *common* destiny. When they say that we have only one planet Earth, they mean that if the Earth’s climate is out of control, we will all be hurt. Under this expression, the word ‘shared’ in ‘shared destiny’ has a clear connotation of being ‘common’ to all parties involved. This is obviously different from the ‘if you gain, others could get hurt’ kind of connection. In fact, according to this understanding, there is no zero-sum game within a community of shared destiny, because the destiny is shared in such a way that there is either win-win, or lose-lose. What this also entails is the presence of basic common values and common interests.

At other times, the Chinese government uses the phrase in a prescriptive way, meaning that we should actually build communities of shared destiny. The title of President Xi Jinping’s statement at the UN General Assembly on 28 September 2015 is ‘Working together to forge a new partnership of win-win cooperation and create a community of shared future for mankind.’ By this, he was not saying that, as a matter of fact, we share our destinies; he was rather saying that we should create a world as a community in which our destinies become shared.

This does not mean that Chinese leaders are using the phrase inconsistently. These three meanings can be put together coherently. Since the world is increasingly becoming a community of shared common destiny, we must build a system of global management accordingly, to cope with the reality in the most appropriate ways. The financial crisis in 2007-08 demonstrated that in a globalised context, a crisis in one country can quickly spread around the globe, affecting the whole world. The logic is simple: If our destinies are already commonly shared, and yet our human infrastructure is fragmented and pulling towards individual gains at the cost of others, then the result will be disastrous.

Of course, logically speaking, there is another possibility. That is, through *deglobalisation*, disconnecting commonly shared destinies. With fewer global connections, we would need fewer global organisations. This is the logic behind Brexit and Trump’s ‘make America great
again’ – through deglobalisation – strategy. If we do not want to be connected and share a common destiny, then why not cut our ties and let everyone mind their own business? But forceful detachment from a community does not mean that the destiny of the parties would no longer be related. Those who try to protect themselves by isolation will eventually eat the bitter fruit they plant.

According to the chief global strategist at Morgan Stanley Investment Management Ruchir Sharma (2016), ever since the beginning of the modern era, the industrial revolution has brought the world into a perpetual globalisation-deglobalisation cycle. The cycle rises and falls in decades-long waves:

The age of globalization generated great prosperity. As the flow of goods, money and people across borders surged, millions benefited. But the elite gained the most. And as inequalities rose, it stirred pockets of fierce resentment among those left behind. When the great shock came, the discontented turned to nationalist firebrands, who promised to impose controls on free trade, global banks and immigrants. Globalization stalled. A new age of deglobalization hit full stride. (Sharma, 2016)

That is, says Sharma, the great shock that came with the outbreak of World War One in 1914 which ended an extraordinary four-decade period of rising migration and trade, and initiated a three-decade-long retreat that weakened the world economy to the point of the Great Depression and fed the resentments that erupted into World War Two. That era provides clear parallels to the globalisation boom that gained momentum in the 1980s and stalled during the financial crisis of 2007-08. Now one could argue that history is repeating itself. The new age of deglobalisation is on. Sharma warns:

During and between the two world wars, the anti-global agenda reduced competition and worsened weak economic growth with rising inflation. Today, populists are again calling for protecting domestic industry and sharing wealth, which could have the same impact. (Sharma, 2016)
If this analysis is valid, then the really ‘logical’ solution should not be to go against the trend of globalisation, but instead to globalise the world in a different way. Instead of a fragmented (or lack of) order, we would be much better off with a new global order to cope with the already globalised reality. This order must be based on the realisation that we have a shared common destiny, a destiny that links everyone’s ultimate interests together, so that no one unit tries to ‘win’ to others’ detriment.

This also implies that destinies must be shared, whether with regard to risk, benefit, or responsibility. Instead of letting individual agents (nation-states, autocrats, business elites, etc.) reap the benefits of globalisation, we should have an order that allows for fair distribution of benefits.

Instead of letting selected parties bear disproportionate burdens (such as refugees), we should share pressures, or better still, help countries where pressures exist to deal with their own responsibilities. In other words, rather than seeing ourselves as individuals we should become responsible members of a community, and work together holistically, like a family, to achieve co-prosperity through cooperation.

3. ‘Co-prosperity through cooperation’ as a model of action

The concept of community of shared destiny naturally leads to the concept of co-prosperity through cooperation. If our destiny is closely related and interdependent, we must live in harmony and cooperate with each other. Any selfish conduct is not only morally wrong but short-sighted because eventually, it will come around to hurt oneself.

This is what Adam Smith predicted when he said that the moral and social needs of the community would be served even as people are motivated by their self-interest. However, the individualistic way of thinking (as opposed to the holistic way of thinking) limited people’s vision, preventing the perspective that caring for others is a way of caring for oneself; consequently gain motivated by self-interest has often ended up hurting others.
Mutually dependent relationships can vary in degree of closeness. When such relationships are distant and weak, people tend to ignore them in order to satisfy their immediate self-interest. Furthermore, within a community of shared destiny, different parties may occupy different positions, some stronger and some weaker; some in advantageous positions and some in disadvantageous positions. The former can often exploit this asymmetry. This is, of course, not a justification for short-sighted behaviour but rather an explanation of why people exhibit such short-sighted behaviour. The question this raises is not whether we need to adopt a model of collaboration; instead, it is how we can make everyone adopt a model of collaboration.

One answer, interestingly enough, is to form closer and stronger communities of shared destiny so that what could have been ignored due to remote insignificance becomes immediate and compelling. In other words, one could simply wait for the world to become smaller, so to speak, and expect people to come to an awareness of how closely they are interconnected, or one could proactively bind destinies together through the deliberate formation of communities of shared destiny to help people realise that such close connections make everyone better off.

Let us first take a closer look at the two models of behaviour. We can do so by examining the two different concepts of causation behind them. The prevailing notion of causation in the world since the beginning of the modern era is known as ‘efficient causation’. This takes

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5 The recent decision by the President of the United States Donald Trump to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement is a typical example of both short-sightedness (indeed, it was called by environmental activist Bill McKibben ‘an incredibly stupid decision’) and an attempt to exploit an asymmetric relationship: In the name of ‘making America great again’ Trump let the US, the world’s second-largest carbon polluter, join Syria and Nicaragua as the world’s only non-participants. This could easily trigger a ripple effect of other countries walking away from the agreement, exposing the entire planet to the danger of a devastating situation. Fortunately, conscientious world leaders as well as mayors of major cities in the US are prepared to maintain their commitment despite Trump’s decision. Here Trump’s short-sightedness is not so much that it will damage the global environment and eventually hurt the US environment (he did not gain much support, even domestically), but the act of pulling out of the accord damages the US when it loses the cutting-edge research to develop new green energy and when it loses its moral standing as a ‘world leader’. In this regard, China, which became the world’s biggest polluter because of its size and because of its fast development, has transitioned from a laggard to a leader in climate control. This, says an environment editor at the Guardian, “is not founded on lofty altruism but the hard-headed need to protect its vast population from the air pollution and looming water and food problems that stem from carbon emissions. Furthermore, China is coming to dominate the supply of renewable energy technology” (Carrington, 2017).
a cause to be the external force that directly leads to the effects and takes other factors responsible for the results as standing conditions.

For example, a billiard ball is hit by the impact of the strike and moves in a certain direction. The direction and speed of the movement is seen as the result of the impact from the strike and nothing else. Under normal circumstances, the psychological state of the player, the flatness of the pool table, the flow of the air, and so on, are ignored, although these are all conditions for the entire resulting event.

In daily life, seeing causation this way is convenient, necessary, and often adequate. When I want to pick up a cup, I grasp it from the outside and manipulate it the way I like. I don’t need to think much about anything else. As Heidegger (1977) put it,

For a long time, we have been accustomed to representing cause as that which brings something about. In this connection, to bring about means to obtain results, effects. The causa efficiens, but one among the four [Aristotelian] causes, sets the standard for all causality. This goes so far that we no longer even count the causa finalis, telic finality, as causality (p. 7).^6^ Heidegger noticed that there is a connection between people’s conception of causality and their mode of behaviour. While the modern concept of causation is the philosophical basis behind modern technological development, the concept of causation is itself based on a modern conception of nature. Modern physics views nature as something “identifiable through calculation and that it remains orderable as a system of information” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 23). The objects of causal influence are taken as lumps of matter, with no will, nor

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^6^ Heidegger points out that even the so-called ‘efficient cause’ in Aristotelian philosophy is not the making of something, but rather the agent who ‘is co-responsible’ with the other three as that from whence the product exists. The agent's contribution is that he “considers carefully and gathers together the three”. So the Aristotelian doctrine neither knows the cause that is named by this term nor uses a Greek word that would correspond to it. See Heidegger (1977, p. 8).
any intrinsic value. They are ‘standing-reserves’ simply awaiting human manipulation and use.

This ‘matter’ is the Cartesian body extended in a Hobbessian way to the entire universe, under which the whole world becomes a disenchanted mechanical aggregate of discrete entities. “[I]t is the theory about the nature of what one is working with”, states Carl Mitcham, “that is a primary determinate of how one works, the structure of the working itself, although not necessarily what one works to do” (Mitcham, 1979, p. 186). The praxis of efficient causation is very much structured by the notion of matter, which has no intrinsic meaning and has value only in so far as it is an object of our will.

With a worldview like this, the development of modern science and technology came to be seen as the ability to impose power on everything. For example, in the past, a carpenter would have had to pay attention to the direction of woodgrain and the dryness of the wood. He had to be patient and attend to the material, to be in dialogue with its particular nature and specific environment. With modern equipment such as power tools and kilns, however, materials are silenced and people are empowered to overlook individual characteristics.

In the past, a military commander would have to carefully study the terrain in which he would engage his enemy troops, but now due to modern weapons, he can make the complexity of the terrain irrelevant through powerful firearms. Workshop managers had to be perceptive to different worker personalities in the past, but in modern industry, standard assembly lines and protocols reduce employees to mere numbers.

Once this behaviour is generalised and becomes a common way of dealing with everything, the consequences can be serious. When it becomes the dominant and only way of dealing with nature, it creates catastrophic environmental crises, and when it expands into a way of conducting interpersonal and international relations, it results in constant conflicts and manipulative actions that drive the world into an increasingly unstable condition. Guided by this notion of causation, means to solve problems often turn into causes of deeper trouble.
The United States’ involvement in the Middle East is arguably a classic example. We expect a quick, immediate solution, but as Edward Tenner says, more and more problems turn out to be chronic – less alarming but no less threatening (Tenner, 1997, pp. xi, 22).

In fact, the concept of efficient causation not only frames our thinking towards seeing a single factor as the cause of an effect, it leads to a one-sided understanding of effects as well. We often say that someone has successfully completed a plan, but this success is actually only part of its consequences. When a doctor prescribes a drug for a patient, it may remove the symptom but cause more unbearable side effects. When parents impose pressure on their children, forcing them to study hard, the children’s academic performance may go up some, but the psychological twist may hurt the children more. When the first emperor of the Qin dynasty of China built the Great Wall at the cost of devastating the livelihood of the people, the dynasty lasted for only 27 years.

If what is said above makes sense, then what we need is a different conception of nature and a different concept of causation to supplement efficient causation. The modern conception of the world has framed our thinking so much that, as Heidegger says:

[All]l events, if they are to enter at all into representation as events of nature, must be defined beforehand as spatiotemporal magnitudes of motion… But mathematical research into nature is not exact because it calculates with precision; rather it must calculate in this way because its adherence to its object-sphere has the character of exactitude. The humanistic sciences, in contrast, indeed all the sciences concerned with life, must necessarily be inexact just in order to remain rigorous. A living thing can indeed also be grasped as a spatiotemporal magnitude of motion, but then it is no longer apprehended as living (Heidegger, 1997, pp. 119-20).

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7 I say ‘supplement’ because the concept of efficient causation is still useful for dealing with simple activities in life, such as in moving physical objects around. The point is not that the concept is totally wrong, but that it is inadequate and even harmful for dealing with more complicated relationships.
Corresponding to a more sophisticated notion of nature is an alternative concept of causation, which Joseph Needham refers to as ‘biogenerative’. Encompassed within traditional Chinese thought, this idea does not conceive of things causing each other in a singly catenarian and particular way; instead, they respond to and resonate with each other as interdependent nodes of a reticular and hierarchical cosmic order (Needham, 1956, pp. 281-91). A typical example of this kind of causation is a seed, in resonance with the soil, moisture, sunshine, and temperature, unfolding into a plant from within. Biogenerative causality regards all things as having their own nature.

This nature is close to what Aristotle would call telos (aim), but in Chinese thought, it is a natural tendency of everything and does not imply any purpose. Biogenerative causality further entails a vision that everything exists within a network of relationships such that what happens to an object is always the result of its interaction with other things. Any result is, therefore, the product of the intrinsic nature of a thing and its dynamic interaction with its external environment.

Biogenerative causality is consistent with the idea of a community of shared destiny. When used as a guiding principle, it advocates co-prosperity through cooperation. Since things have their own nature, we need to respect each other in our dealing with them and not disregard what they like or dislike.

In his book *Why Things Bite Back*, Edward Tenner discusses solutions for the problem of ‘revenge effects’, the unintended consequences of forms of progressive ingenuity. He says that one promising attitude for which he is unable to find a name is the substitution of cunning or finesse for the frontal attack. Through the following description, we can see a wonderful illustration of the biogenerative mode of praxis we are discussing here:

Finesse means abandoning frontal attacks for solutions that rely on the same kind of latent properties that led to revenge effects in the first place. Sometimes it means ceasing to

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8 Needham (1956, pp. 281-91). See also Cheng (1976, pp. 3-20), and Defoort (1997).
suppress a symptom. In medicine, finesse suggests closer attention to the evolutionary background of human health and illness, to the positive part that fever plays, for example, for fighting infection. At other times, finesse means living with and even domesticating a problem organism. … In the office finesse means producing more by taking more frequent breaks and conveying more information by, for example, limiting rather than multiplying colour schemes. In construction, finesse means allowing skyscrapers to sway slightly in the wind instead of bracing them to resist it. On the road finesse means a calmer approach to driving, improving the speed and economy of all drivers by slowing them down at times when impulse would prompt accelerating. (Tenner, 1997, p. 276)

4. The Silk Order principle and China’s cultural heritage

Having laid out the principles behind the Silk Order, we come to the difficult question of how likely its implementation really is. According to David Hume (1975, pp. 32-39), no one can predict the future with certainty, not even whether the sun will rise tomorrow; we can only investigate the plausibility of such a belief.

One way of doing this is to look at Chinese culture. While the Western world is still employing ‘Cold War thinking’, seeing China’s rise as an inevitable threat to rival powers, Chinese philosophy, which is undergoing a revival after a century of being humbled by the West, suggests otherwise. The ideas of a community of shared destiny and co-prosperity through collaboration are in fact deeply rooted in China’s main philosophical traditions: Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.

Confucianism is definitely the most influential philosophy of this ancient civilisation. Over the past two thousand years, from the early Han dynasty to the beginning of the last century when the West overwhelmed China with military power, Confucianism was the prevailing spiritual abode of the Chinese people. It is a system of thought as well as a way of life that everyone, from emperors to ordinary people, was all supposed to follow.
Confucianism’s central idea is ren 仁, variously translated as ‘love’, ‘benevolence’, ‘humanity’, or ‘human-heartedness’. This refers to the compassion Confucians believe differentiates humans from animals and inanimate objects. According to Confucius (551-479 BCE), the main ways of teaching and implementing ren are through rituals and music, which ideally lead to harmony: an aesthetic order in which people are not forced to conform, but coordinated to complement each other reciprocally, in accordance with their respective roles.

In Confucianism, political power is supposed to be based on virtue and not on force. The uses of military force and law enforcement are last resorts, as preference is given to the persuasive power of virtue and moral persuasion.

In fact, the term ‘Confucianism’ is a Western invention. In China, it is known as rujia 儒家, the school of ru, where ru refers not to Confucius, but to the tradition Confucius aligned himself with, originally meaning ‘soft’ or ‘gentle’. It came to be associated with a social class that performed various kinds of ritual ceremonies, and then to those who taught the relevant arts including rites, music, and writing, naturally extending to scholars familiar with the classic texts that existed prior to, but which were later edited by, Confucius.

One feature of Confucianism particularly relevant to the topic of this paper is its relational and holistic way of thinking. Ren is essentially a relational idea because compassion and love are by their very nature ‘other-regarding’. However, within Confucianism, this is not conceived as altruism because as Confucius said, learning is ‘for the self’ (Analects, section 14.24, 2017, p. 338).

For Confucius, one serves oneself well in caring for and loving others. There is no rigid dichotomy between genuine self-interest and serving the interest of one’s parents, friends, community, and all those under heaven. This is the case because first of all, if the distinctive feature of being human is compassion, then living compassionately only fulfils one’s own life.
Secondly, the happiness and deep satisfaction one derives from acts of ren can be proven by universal life experience and hence need no further justification. This allows one to go beyond doing good for the sake of moral duty.

Furthermore, as Mencius (372-289 BCE, whose prominence within the Confucian tradition is second only to Confucius himself) put it, only through the practice of ren and yi (appropriateness) can one truly benefit oneself. If one wants profit and yet does not practice ren and yi, this is no different to “looking for fish by climbing a tree”, or even worse, “If you look for fish by climbing a tree, though you will not find them, there is no danger resulting from this”, but if one looks for profit by actions against ren and yi, such as waging wars against others, “one is certain to reap disaster in the end” (Mencius, 1A:7, 2008, p. 13). It is from these foundations that the Confucians came up with their vision of an ideal society as one in which “a public and common spirit prevails all-under-heaven” (tianxia weigong 天下为公) over two thousand years ago (Li Ji, 1967, vol. 1, p. 364).

The whole point can be summarised by Mencius’ distinction between a king (i.e., a true leader) and a hegemon:

One who uses forces to feign benevolence is a hegemon. A hegemon must have a large state. One who uses virtue to put benevolence into effect is a King. A King does not depend on size… When people submit to force they do so not willingly but because they are not strong enough. When people submit to the transforming influence of morality, they do so sincerely, with admiration in their hearts (Mencius, 2A:3, 2008, p. 43).

Compared to Confucianism, Daoism is less visible on the surface of Chinese society but is more of an ever-present undercurrent. It affects Chinese mentality and life in subtler, but no less profound ways. Daoists are known for being more detached from noisy crowds and for favouring a free and easy-going lifestyle of solitude, but this does not imply that Daoism is selfish and individualistic. It is famous for its central notions, ziran 自然, ‘self-so-ing’ or
following one’s own natural tendencies, and *wuwei* 无为, non-action, which actually refers to an absence of arbitrary effort.

*Wuwei* is a state of either being content with what one has, and therefore not forcefully striving to achieve, or having reached a stage of perfection in doing things so that one needs not strive to do them well. For example, a master pianist can play the piano as if the music effortlessly flows out of her fingers. Both ideas strongly imply the biogenerative model of causation and are therefore in perfect alignment with the Silk Order principles.

Moreover, like Confucians, Daoists also talk about *tianxia* 天下, ‘all-under-heaven’, a Chinese expression for the all-inclusive world. The founder of Daoism, Laozi (1972), said in the *Dao De Jing* (*A Classic of the Way and Its Power/Virtue*, dated to the pre-Qin period, before 200 BCE), chapter 54, that,

*Cultivate Virtue in yourself,*  
*And Virtue will be real.*  
*Cultivate it in the family,*  
*And Virtue will abound.*  
*Cultivate it in the village,*  
*And Virtue will grow.*  
*Cultivate it in the nation,*  
*And Virtue will be abundant.*  
*Cultivate it in all-under-heaven,*  
*And Virtue will be everywhere.*  
*Therefore look at the body as body;*  
*Look at the family as family;*  
*Look at the village as village;*  
*Look at the nation as nation;*  
*Look at all-under-heaven as all-under-heaven.*

The first stanza speaks about the vision: The broader the range in which one cultivates virtue, the greater one’s virtue will be. Note that the term for ‘virtue’ in Chinese also means ‘power’, ‘ability’, or ‘virtuosity’. The second stanza speaks about the perspective one must have in order to cultivate one’s virtues. Seeming to be tautology, these statements convey plain truth that often escapes attention.
If a part of your body does not feel well, then this is a problem of your body so you must look at the body as a holistic system and not just isolate the part that exhibiting symptoms – this is a basic principle of traditional Chinese medicine. If you do not fit well with the rest of your family, then this is a family problem, so you must look at the problem from the perspective of the family, and not just the perspective of your individual self. If your party has conflict with other parties in your country, then it is a problem of the country, and you must look at the problem from the perspective of the country and not merely from the perspective of your party. If you want to address global problems, you must have the perspective of all-under-heaven, and not just your own country.

Laozi says, “The sage stays behind, thus he is ahead. He is detached, thus at one with all. Through selfless action, he attains self-fulfilment” (Laozi, 1972, chapter 7).

Buddhism was not a Chinese religion at its origin (it was introduced from ancient India to China around the first century CE), but the fact that it became a major part of Chinese spiritual life alongside Confucianism and Daoism shows their deep compatibility. The basic Buddhist teaching of anatman (no-self) appears more metaphysical than its Chinese counterparts, but resonates with the Confucian teaching of ‘overcoming the self’ – which is a way to practice ren – and the Daoist teaching of ‘letting go of self’ so that one can be ziran: self-so-ing, or following one’s nature spontaneously.

Interestingly, and not incidentally, the Buddhist teaching of anatman was expressed in China in the form of Mahayana (‘Great Vehicle’) Buddhism, where ‘no-self’ became universal compassion, personified through the images of the Bodhisattvas seeking complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. Through Bodhisattva worship, we see ren and a perspective of ‘all-under-heaven’ in Buddhist universal compassion.

Another crucial part of Buddhist philosophy is its teaching of ‘dependent rising’, a theory of causality saying that whatever exists is the result of previous conditions. Here we return again to the issue of ideas of causation. Buddhists ingeniously developed a hierarchical
system of causation with four levels, from the most basic and lower kind to higher ones: karma causation; causation by the ideation-store; causation by thusness; and Dharmadhatu causation (Takakusu, 1947).

The first one, karma causation or causation by action-influence, is where most people conduct their life. They act according to mutual dependence arising from actions and reactions, without much understanding or self-awareness. Those who move on to the level of causation by the ideation-store come to the understanding that all limitations and problems are rooted in our subjectivity, our ‘storehouse of consciousness’. Just as our behaviour is shaped by our notions of causation, the second level comes with the realisation that our conceptions and mental volitions are what are behind publicly observable phenomena.

The third level, causation by thusness, goes deeper still, into the very nature of the person. It is from the part of our nature which is beyond form or description (hence it is referred to as thusness or suchness)\(^9\) that transforming phenomena – including consciousness and deeds – arise. This tells us that we do not have to insist that since one’s nature is of a particular kind, one has no choice but to behave in a particular way. At the final level, Dharmadhatu causation, or ‘the universal causation of the realm of Dharmas (‘elements of existence’)’, the Buddhist idea of dependent arising is pushed to its logical extreme. Underlying this concept is the idea of the interpenetration and mutual identification of everything.

According to this theory, when one dharma rises, all dharmas rise with it, and vice versa. To use a classic analogy, it is like a hall of all mirrors: What is shown by one mirror is simultaneously shown by all the others. In that sense, all things are both the cause of

\(^9\) Every description is bound to be partial and limited. A dishwasher, for example, can also be described as a water-dirtier, a space-occupier, and a lump-of-junk-to-be (because it will eventually become a lump of junk). So the only way to accurately describe something is paradoxically not to describe it. The words ‘thusness’ or ‘suchness’ are basically just pointing to a thing without describing it. Human beings are also beyond description because we are inseparable from the context in which we live and are in constant change. This explains why one of the Buddha’s ‘titles’ is ‘Tathagata’: the Thus-come-one.
themselves and the cause of everything else simultaneously. Yet at the same time, it is also a state in which one will finally find *shishi wuai* 事事无碍 (‘no obstruction’). That is, to come back from ‘the ultimate’ to the world of ordinary objects and to find no obstruction in moving around.

At this level, one achieves the ability to be engaged in all activities without adhering to any notions of causation, be it the efficient, the biogenerative, or anything else, not even adhering to the concept of nothingness. This is a stage at which one’s causal activities become artistic, a level described variously as *youyu yi* 游于艺 (‘excursion in true artistic activities’) by Confucius and *xiaoyao you* 遐遨游 (‘free and easy wandering’) by the Daoist Zhuangzi.\(^\text{10}\)

Among the Chinese schools of Buddhism, Zen (or *Chan* in Chinese pronunciation) is the most well-known and widespread, because it has effectively translated the doctrine of *anatman* into a way of living an ordinary life, of being free from attachment while in the midst of, and encountering, everything. By following Zen, Chinese people find a convenient way of practising Buddhism without abandoning their secular life, and for this reason, it can be weaved seamlessly into a culture defined primarily by Confucians and Daoists.

These three major spiritual traditions have coexisted throughout the history of China. At times they have conflicted with one another and there have been numerous periods of religious suppression, sometimes targeted at Buddhism and sometimes religious Daoism, various kinds of cults, Christianity, and Islam too. Each period of suppression had complicated social-political roots – for example, religions and cults were sometimes used to launch organised political or social rebellion – and none were really initiated by conflict between religious belief systems.

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\(^{10}\) If we find causation by thusness and *Dharmadhatu* causation do not sound like what we would normally call ‘causal relations’, that is because we are used to lower level causation. This explains why the Confucians and the Daoists do not talk about causation much – they consider their teachings as arts, and not ordinary utilitarian cause-effect techniques.
Overall, the major Chinese spiritual traditions have coexisted peacefully, and the general population in China had never conceived of them as mutually exclusive. A Chinese intellectual could well be a Confucian when young, ambitious in pursuing a social-political career, and become a Daoist when on vacation or when hopelessly set back by obstacles, and then become a Buddhist when struck by tragedy or facing death. The three are perceived to be like three different medicines in a drug store, each with its usefulness for addressing different problems.

As contemporary Chinese political philosopher Zhao Tingyang points out, the term *tianxia* (all-under-heaven) shared by all three major Chinese spiritual and philosophical traditions represents an underlying philosophy that is totally different from the philosophy behind the idea of the nation-state. While the nation-state is based on a sharp distinction between what is mine and not-mine, *tianxia* provides a conceptual resource that allows us to see everything under heaven as interconnected, as one unit, rather than merely being ‘*inter*-national’ (Zhao, 2005).

A ‘three eras’ theory can be extracted from the Gongyang version of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋公羊传 to elaborate the concept of *tianxia* as a resource for China’s direction of globalisation. The theory says that there were three eras in remote antiquity: the era in which one’s own state was taken as internal and other states of the *Xia* (a collective name for the Chinese states at the time) as external; the era in which the states of *Xia* were taken as internal and the *Yis* and *Dis* (tribes to the east and north, respectively, of the *Xia* states at the time) as external; and the era in which all-under-heaven, near or far, large or small, were all taken as one. Whether the last era actually ever existed is irrelevant, because the three eras theory was seen as an ideal to be brought into reality.

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11 The *tianxia* that Zhao refers to is an idea in ancient Chinese culture. One should not take him to mean that there was actually such a *tianxia* political system in ancient China. One should also take Zhao’s interpretation of *tianxia*, to certain degree, a re-interpretation, as the term in historical context was often used to refer to the Chinese states known at the time, or a world that was centred around the Chinese states, not a world that was all-inclusive in which every part had equal status. But such re-interpretation is exactly the way traditional Chinese scholarship has developed over the last two thousand years. Through this process, ancient ideas are continuously carried on and at the same time gain new meanings and new life.
Although these traditional philosophical ideas have never been followed perfectly in China’s history, they have played a significant role in shaping the Chinese collective mind-set. Yes, China has had militant and tyrannical rulers, but their days were short. The first emperor of the Qin, who brought all the Chinese states under his unified control through military force, was able to establish a dynasty that lasted for only two decades, and his stories have been more often told in order to teach lessons rather than as glorious past to be bragged about.

Yes, China has had years of turbulent wars, but overall, Chinese civilisation is symbolised by the Great Wall, a mechanism for defence rather than offence. If one wonders why Chinese territory reaches far beyond the Great Wall, the answer is not because the Chinese conquered these regions; on the contrary, it was the result of China being invaded by forces from these regions – notably the Mongols and the Manchurians – which consequently brought these regions within the map of China.

In the early 15th Century, a huge fleet was led by China’s Admiral Zheng He, who took voyages across the oceans down to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, reaching as far as the east coast of Africa. The size of Zheng’s ships and the scale of the fleets were by far the most advanced in the world, which predated and dwarfed the voyages taken by Vasco da Gama and Christopher Columbus around at the turn of the 15th and 16th Centuries. Yet unlike these latter journeys, which marked the beginning of the colonial era, Admiral Zheng’s voyages did not result in the occupation of foreign lands or enslavement of other peoples. Even China’s most famous military strategy book, the Art of War by Sun Zi, teaches that the best way to defeat an opponent is to win without having to engage in actual combat.

Traditional Chinese culture has undergone vast change due to its encounters with Western culture in the wake of the modern age and endured sweeping attacks during the last century, from the New Culture Movement (1915-1923) to the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and was consequently weakened, but never wiped out completely. On the contrary, the fact it was able to survive and was revived shortly after these episodes testifies the strength of the tradition. The global context today shows its relevance and value more than ever.
5. The Silk Order principle and China’s ‘communist’ reality

In the early 1970s, when communist China first opened its doors to the West, foreign journalists felt the country was so mysterious that going there was comparable to landing on the moon. Very few mainland Chinese citizens travelled abroad in the 1970s but things are very different now. Every day, tens of thousands of foreigners visit China, and waves of Chinese tourists roam every corner of the globe.

Despite such changes, deep-rooted stereotypes and suspicions about China remain popular, and indeed, not without reason. China is still ruled by one political party, the Chinese Communist Party, which allows no challenge from any political rival within the country. Many people in the West take communism as well as traditional Chinese culture’s emphasis on seeing people as part of their communities as ‘collectivism’, repressive of individuality and personal freedom. In their mind, the rise of China conjures the image of an overwhelming crowd of machine-like people, all in the same uniform, marching in rigid formality on their way to swamp the entire world.

The communist movement has gone through a very tortuous path. Authoritarian dictators emerged within the movement who fostered grave disasters. This is very unfortunate, not only for the victims but also for the movement because the term ‘communism’ has been contaminated by images of inhumane cruelty.

Marx’s original vision was to emancipate people from exploitation and oppression. The principle announced in the Communist Manifesto can be summarised as “only in emancipating the world can the proletariat emancipate himself”.\(^{12}\) It explicitly declares that communism is “an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx & Engels, 1948, p. 31). If Marx were alive today, he would

\(^{12}\) This is a summary of the original statement in the Preface to the 1888 English edition of the Communist Manifesto, which says, “the exploited and oppressed class – the proletariat – cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class – the bourgeoisie – without at the same time, and once and for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinction, and class struggle” (Marx & Engels, 1948, p. 6).
point out that the communist ideal is in many ways similar to the Silk Order principle, namely, trying to make the world a community of shared destiny in which co-prosperity is achieved through collaboration.

If some communist leaders became narrow-minded nationalists, power-thirsty dictators, or corrupt bureaucrats, it only means these people have betrayed the true spirit of communism. The fact they did these things in the name of communism should not discredit communism itself; on the contrary, communism should be viewed as the first victim of this wrongdoing.

What I mean here is simply that communist ideology, *in its ideal form*, is consistent with the Silk Order principles, and because of this, it is possible for the communist party to justify the OBOR initiative through communism. This is not the same as saying that the Chinese Communist Party actually takes Marxism in this way. But a few facts will help us make our judgements without accepting popular opinions too hastily.

First of all, it was Marx’s original vision, rather than the later image of totalitarianism, that inspired millions of Chinese people to join the communist cause in the first place. Among them was a man named Xi Zhongxun, the father of current Chinese President Xi Jinping. The veterans of the Chinese revolution saw in the communist vision what the early Confucians called *datong* 大同, or Grand Union.

There is good reason to criticise the handing on of power to the *taizidang* 太子党 (the ‘Princelings’ or the Party’s Crown Princes, i.e., the descendants of prominent party officials). But there is one positive side to this: Although these people have the access to power that makes abuses of power possible, they also have more reason to inherit the original ideals and sense of mission of their forefathers and to carry on those ideals.

In his recent report at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (2017, October 18), Xi Jinping characterised the theme of the Congress as “Remaining true to our original aspiration and keeping our mission firmly in mind.” It was noteworthy that he did not mention class struggle or proletarian revolution. Instead, he said, ‘The original aspiration
and the mission of Chinese Communists is to seek happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation’ (Xi, 2017, p.1). This could be seen as an attempt to ‘rectify’ what has happened to communism.

China’s leaders since the Cultural Revolution have had to deal with the unfortunately widespread negative connotations of ‘communism’, themselves victims of Mao’s radical political campaigns which had pushed the economy to the verge of collapse. One such post-Revolution leader, Deng Xiaoping, reflected on the party’s past and emphasised that China was far from ready to implement communism and that in its current stage, referred to as socialism, the market economy and private ownership must be allowed and even encouraged in order to bring up China’s troubled economy.

At the same time, he chose to emphasise the national characteristics of the Chinese version of socialism. The ambiguity of the ‘Chinese characteristics’ term left the government enough room to cope with the particular socio-cultural realities the country faced. Meanwhile, it also allowed the country to re-appropriate its own cultural traditions and to reinterpret Marxism.

The government went from the more pragmatic philosophy of Deng Xiaoping – famous for his ‘two cats’ dictum: “it doesn’t matter if a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice” – to the ‘Three Represents’ theory of the Jiang Zemin period: That the party should represent the development needs of China’s advanced social productive forces, represent the onward movement of China’s advanced culture, and represent the fundamental interests of the Chinese people.

Jiang’s theory maintained Deng’s pragmatic approach on one hand, but at the same time demonstrated the party’s continued commitment to communism. President Hu Jintao then added his ‘scientific outlook on development’, which emphasised the importance of sustainability and social harmony, concepts clearly resonant with Confucianism. Hu was then succeeded by Xi Jinping, whose ‘China Dream’ consists of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the revival of traditional Chinese culture. Here one sees a gradual but
consistent process, moving towards a reconciliation of communist ideology and traditional Chinese culture, particularly Confucianism.

Over the forty years since the end of the Cultural Revolution, the frequency of use of the term ‘Confucianism’ has risen dramatically. Compared to the status of Confucianism during the Cultural Revolution, when it was criticised and held responsible for China’s backwardness, things could not be more different today. Confucianism’s revival first began in scholarly circles in the 1980s and gradually made its way to leadership and the general public.

Over the last two decades, the Chinese government has established more than 500 Confucian institutes and over 1,000 Confucius classrooms all over the world. Predominantly offering Chinese language programmes but bearing the name of Confucius, this has been a clear sign to the world that the current Chinese government recognises Confucius as a symbol of traditional Chinese culture and endorses its modern relevance and value. The last 20 years have also seen major Chinese universities establish ‘national studies’ departments or research institutes, which are devoted primarily to the study of Confucianism.

In the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, Confucianism featured prominently. In the presence of hundreds of global leaders and major media, the ceremony began with 2,008 performers beating drums and chanting lines from the *Analects* of Confucius. The statement could not have been louder.

This trend has been well-received by the public. Tired of ineffective and dogmatic Marxist propaganda, which is stood in marked contrast to the original spirit of Marxism, and disturbed by the moral decline accompanying economic reform, the Chinese public has been yearning for spiritual guidance.

In 2006, an eloquent professor of communication at Beijing Normal University featured on China Central Television with a lecture series based on her reading of Confucius’ *Analects*. She became a superstar almost overnight. The lectures were later transcribed into a book,
and ten million copies were sold in less than a year. Despite the fact that academically speaking, her reading of Confucianism was problematic, the public’s interest in the subject was testimony to the Chinese people’s receptiveness towards its own Confucian cultural heritage.

Over the last decade, thousands of educational institutions, public and private, with the traditional name for ‘college’ in Chinese, shuyuan 书院, have emerged, offering programmes for children, adult education, and cultural training tailored to entrepreneurial groups.

In October 2016, a conference in Beijing on the Ming dynasty Confucian, Wang Yangming, attracted over 1,000 participants. Despite the significant fee for the two-day conference, the organisers had to stop accepting applications a week before it commenced. Most attendees were middle class and came in order to enrich their spiritual and cultural life. A trend for Chinese entrepreneurs studying traditional Chinese culture for the sake of implementing what they learn into the running of their businesses has also been clear in recent years.

Concerns over the compatibility of OBOR with Chinese communism may be more focused on China’s political system than on ideology.

Internally, questions are asked of the system’s ability to generate co-prosperity through collaboration for the domestic population and whether it is stable enough to carry out the OBOR initiative after the current administration is replaced or possibly challenged by a ‘Jasmine Revolution’.

Externally, the OBOR initiative provokes questions as to the likelihood of China exporting its political system, thereby causing instability in other countries.

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14 Among them some have achieved great success. Fotile, a company that produces kitchen equipment, is one example. Its advert ‘Great, because of love’ is derived from its philosophy; What turns a big business into a great business is love. Another, Good-ark, an electronics manufacturing company, has developed its culture around the Confucian value of family and happiness.
With regard to domestic concerns, the biggest guarantee of stability is the current system’s continued success in protecting basic interests and in improving the lives of China’s population. In the Chinese cultural context, priority is always given to the so-called ‘second generation human rights’ – these include rights to employment, food, housing, healthcare, social security, and unemployment benefits – in comparison with the ‘first generation’ rights to liberty and participation in political life.

One thought-provoking contrast is that, while people in New York, Paris, or London enjoy more freedom of speech than people in Beijing or Shanghai, walking on the midnight streets of Beijing and Shanghai is much safer than doing the same in New York, Paris, or London. Certainly, it would be great to have both, but in terms of actual implementation, the fulfilment of the first generation rights is arguably less likely to lead to the fulfilment of second-generation rights than the other way round. As Henry Rosemont says,

> By focusing on the free, rational autonomous individual it becomes very difficult to leap the chasm that separates the right of free speech from the right of health care, and worse, continues to make possible a ‘blame the victim’ rationale for ignoring the plight of the less fortunate despite its absurdity …. (Rosemont 2015, p. 111)

Of course, personal freedom and individuality should be valued, and this is one area where China can learn from the West. Yet in terms of actual implementation, there is a high risk of chaos if first generation rights are prioritised as this could jeopardise more fundamental human rights such as the right to security.¹⁵

Records show that liberal democracy is not easily transferable from developed countries to developing countries. As Dani Rodrik says, although there has been a great increase in the

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¹⁵ This is not just an issue for China. The long-lasting controversy about gun control in the United States is brought to the centre of people’s attention again and again when mass shootings happen, as with the October 2017 incident in Las Vegas where 58 people were killed and over 500 injured, and in Texas the following month, where 26 lives were lost and 15-20 wounded. This is basically also an issue of what to prioritise when we cannot have both at the same time: People’s right to own guns or their right to be free from becoming victims of gun violence.
number of democracies worldwide in the last couple of decades, “the picture is hardly rosy for the world’s new democracies. Not too long into the ‘third wave’ of democratisation, observers began to notice that most countries with more or less free elections hardly operated along Western lines” (Rodrik, 2016, p. 51).

By saying this, I do not mean to claim there are no better alternatives to the path China has taken, nor do I mean to reject liberal democracy in favour of authoritarianism. Just as with any medicine, which no matter how good it is, must be used with consideration of a patient’s condition, forms of government must be judged according to the condition of a society, and not merely according to pre-established universal formulas. While there are serious reasons for concern over China’s current political system, there are also reasons to question whether Western liberal democracy in its current form would be better and more conducive to the Silk Order.

Socio-political philosopher Daniel A. Bell (2015) points out an elephant in the room: In United States, leaders are elected through a democratic procedure and are accountable to their voters. This seems reasonable until we turn to the fact the United States is, to a large extent, in control of the destiny of the world.

Who will guarantee that US voters represent the interests of the global population? A democratic system, of course, has many advantages, but the US government is able to make decisions in terms of the country’s own narrow interests at the cost of others’ interests.

There is little in the liberal democratic system that will motivate elected leaders to represent the broad interests of the global community, nor the long-term interests of its own people. Unless voters are exemplary people or Confucian thinkers who have ‘all-under-heaven’ on their mind, their elected leaders respond only to requests representing narrow and immediate interest (Bell, 2015). Decisions which would cost local taxpayers but reduce the remote threat of global climate change are unlikely to be popular.
In a liberal democratic context based on an individualistic philosophy, a grand plan like the OBOR initiative would probably never get approved, much less carried out effectively. The Silk Order implied by OBOR requires a more advanced global democracy in which participants collaborate on win-win results, and blatant claims of narrow national self-interest – like the words from Obama earlier in this report – are replaced by genuine dialogue.

There are indeed reasons for people to feel uneasy about the possibility of China exporting its political system. In the ‘old’ world order, the United States-led West has championed the exporting of its democratic system overseas, regardless of whether the local condition is mature enough to implement the system or not. People have also not forgotten what the Soviet Union did to its allies in Eastern Europe.

However, the Chinese government has not chosen to export a communist agenda alongside its growing global influence. Instead, it has worked with the concept of the Silk Road, which carries much more peaceful connotations.

Another important recollection from communism’s heyday is the disagreement between the Communist Party of China and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union over the Soviet Union’s military, political, and economic intervention in and control of Eastern Europe. Standing against the ‘big-nation chauvinism’ of the Soviet Union, China’s Premier Zhou Enlai and India’s Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru initiated the ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’ for international relations at the Bandung Conference in 1955. The five principles are:

1. Mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty.
2. Mutual non-aggression.
3. Mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs.
4. Equality and cooperation for mutual benefit.
5. Peaceful coexistence.

These principles have been reiterated by the Chinese government again and again, particularly in justifying its voting record at the United Nations Security Council and for its
disapproval of interventionist Western powers. The reiteration continues today despite the recent controversies around China’s territorial claims in the East and South China Seas. While people may question the consistency between the Chinese government’s words and actions, the mere fact that the Xi Jinping Administration still commits itself to these principles shows that it does not think actions in the East and South China Seas violate these principles. The nature of the controversy is whether China is defending territories it has a legitimate claim to, rather than committing an outright invasion of undisputed foreign territory, or indeed forcing its own political systems onto other countries.

Elsewhere, China’s handling of the return of Hong Kong through the ‘one country, two systems’ policy, and its no-strings aid to developing countries, show the government’s willingness to embrace plurality, although not without limit.

To the Chinese government’s credit, recent records show that despite the fact it is taking a leading role in the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and that it holds an overwhelming 30% of voting shares, it has offered to forgo veto power to ensure no single country dictates decision-making. This is in stark contrast to the long-standing practice at the World Bank and IMF, where the US retains veto power despite holding less than 30% of voting shares in each institution (16.75% at the IMF and 17.13% at the World Bank).

Indeed, China has been cautious in avoiding phrases like ‘the Chinese model’ or ‘the Beijing Consensus’, because of the impression these expressions could encourage, of China as a rival competing with the West, or presenting a model for the rest of the world to follow. China has consistently called OBOR an ‘initiative’ rather than a ‘strategy’, because of the connotations the word ‘strategy’ has in contradicting the principle of co-prosperity through collaboration. China has also avoided terms like ‘leadership’ and ‘alliance’, preferring words like ‘dialogue’, ‘partnership’, and ‘cooperation’.

If the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are more like the liberal idea of ‘negative freedom’, the freedom of no interference and respect for individual rights, China can be seen
gradually assuming more responsibility in proportion to its status as a regional and global power.

In harmony with China’s cultural heritage and its adherence to communist ideals, the Chinese government did what Confucius would have advised during the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis: Against its own immediate interest in keeping its export sectors competitive, it resisted the temptation to devalue the Renminbi. Instead, it extended financial support to its distressed neighbours. In contrast to China’s increasing commitment to control global warming, the Trump Administration is going in the opposite direction, as demonstrated by its withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement.

The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are consistent with the enlightenment ideals of liberal democracy and are probably learned from the West. They show how traditional Chinese ideas of tianxia and harmony can be smoothly weaved together with core Western values like justice, equality, democracy, and the rule of law, and with Marxist aspirations. It is ironic that China, a country tainted with a reputation of a democracy deficit is advocating global democracy, while a country proud of its democracy, the United States, is haunted by the image of being irresponsibly hegemonic and selfish in the global arena.

What this shows is at least that Marxism does not have to be Stalinism, and that the ideals of communism and the Confucian view of all-under-heaven can inspire practices of global democracy. If this conceptual basis can enable one country to have two systems or three systems, why can it not enable a global community of shared destiny to maintain political and cultural diversity? If a large number of countries are able to consistently implement these ideas, a world order with equal status for all members of the international community in which plurality is respected and even celebrated may be possible.

If every country is allowed to choose its own political system, to find its own path, and even to define what ‘prosperity’ means for itself, while at the same time enjoying mutual trust and cooperation from others, this really could be the best world order imaginable. Within an order
like this, different parties may still compete with one another, but at the same time, they can inspire each other.

In art, where a plurality of different styles does not negate a difference between beauty and ugliness, plurality in culture and politics does not negate a difference between good and bad. With the tianxia holistic vision and the ideal of co-prosperity through cooperation, diversity can become a source of vitality and creativity, rather than instability and destruction.

6. The prisoner’s dilemma and the Red Lantern effect

Guided by the principles a ‘community of shared destiny’ and ‘co-prosperity through collaboration’, the OBOR initiative is appealing, especially to countries which have been almost forgotten by global modernisation. OBOR’s feasibility, however, it is difficult to judge.

Assuming China, whether its government or any other Chinese agents involved in OBOR, is prepared to stand by its principles, what if others – whether out of selfishness, shortsightedness, ignorance, prejudice, or any other reason – do not? Should the biogenerative model of causation to be used communicate with others when they respond by way of the efficient model of causation to manipulate and control you? After all, compared to the biogenerative model of causation, efficient causation is more effective in generating immediate results.

History has ample examples to prove that more advanced civilisations do not necessarily prevail. For example, democratic Athens was conquered by the militant Sparta, and the culturally sophisticated Song China was overcome by the nomadic Mongols. In opening itself up to involvement in extremely complicated areas of the world through OBOR, China runs the risk of exposing itself to threats of religious fundamentalism, refugee crises, and loss of investment in politically unstable environments.
There is a famous problem in game theory called the prisoner's dilemma, an example that shows why two completely ‘rational’ individuals might not cooperate, even when it is in their best interests to do so. Two prisoners are kept in solitary confinement with no means of communicating with the other. They are given the choice to either confess their crime or remain silent. The offer is that if they both confess, each of them serves two years in prison; if one betrays the other, the former will be set free and the latter will serve three years in prison; if they both remain silent, both of them will only serve one year in prison.

Naturally each prisoner seeks the lightest punishment possible. As self-interested rational beings, both of them will think ‘If I confess, the worst is that I get two years, but if I remain silent, I could get three years in prison’. So the rational decision for each will be to confess, despite the fact they would be better off cooperating.

The dilemma explains why it is difficult to cooperate even when cooperation is beneficial to all involved. Although the example is an imaginary model, similar dilemmas are found everywhere. In environmental protection, every ‘self-interested rational being’ thinks if they pollute and others do not, they can save on pollution control costs, and if they do not pollute but others do, they will pay and still suffer pollution. Yet when everyone thinks and acts in this way, we all end up worse off.

In sports, athletes are tempted to use illegal drugs to boost their performance, and they worry that if they do not but others do, they would be at a disadvantage. But if they all use drugs the situation is clearly much worse than if they all stay away from drugs. Similar cases can be found in arms races, test cheating, and indeed in any area of human interaction. The point these examples demonstrate is not that it would be in everyone’s best interests to cooperate, but that in the real world, do-gooders usually end up being taken advantage of, and consequently, Gresham’s law – ‘bad money drives out good’ – prevails.
Obviously, the prisoner’s dilemma is a challenge OBOR must confront. If OBOR requires cooperation, then the possibility of cooperation is key to its feasibility. Are there solutions to the dilemma?

There are two possible solutions for the dilemma: One would be to change the rules of the game; the other would be to change the way the prisoners think, and consequently the way they act, too.

Suppose a Mafia godfather made it clear to the prisoners that if either ever turned against the other, he would die! This rule change would pretty much fix the problem by deterring them from betraying each other. In fact, any change of the rule or the institution that makes defection less attractive can ease the problem. On the other hand, if the rules or the institution remains unchanged, but the two prisoners are not ‘self-interested rational beings’, but beings with emotions or principles, the story can also end differently. Suppose the prisoners are brothers and they care about each other so much that one would rather die for the benefit of the other, or that they are both committed to a moral principle that ‘thou shall never defect’, then they would both choose to remain silent.

Now obviously it would be doubly good to have both. But when we do not, making use of the best balance of the two possible is the natural course of action. The godfather’s threat would be obsolete if the prisoners had strong emotional bonds or were men of principle. At the same time, we could also say that given the godfather’s threat, the prisoners’ choice to cooperate would not have to rely on their brotherly love or moral integrity.

This is in fact what was envisioned by the Confucians. Confucius hoped for a society in which there was no litigation and no need to appeal to administrative orders (Analects, sections 2.3, 12.13, 2017, pp. 95-6, 291). He expected that traditional rituals would give people a sense of proper order and help people to live together harmoniously. However, he
never meant for institutional rules to be abolished. In Confucius’ *Family Discourse* (*Kongzi jiayu*, 1990), one passage in particular summarises the point well:

Confucius says, ‘The sage’s way of governing and transforming inevitably engages both law and administration. The most supreme teach people with virtue and regulate them with ritual proprieties. The next best guides people with administrative orders and curbs them with penal laws without having to actually enforce the laws. Influenced but refusing to change, guided but refusing to follow, damaging what is right and corrupting the custom, only then penal punishments are employed’ (*Kongzi jiayu*, 1990, p. 79)

In the *Book of Rites*, there is a similar statement:

[Hence] ritual proprieties direct people’s aims aright; music gives harmony to their voices; administrative orders unify their conduct; and legal punishments guard against their tendencies to evil. The end to which ritual proprieties, music, administrative orders, and penal laws conduct is one; they are the instruments by which the minds of the people are integrated and good order in government is made to appear (*Li Ji*, 1967, Vol. 2, p. 93).

Both statements present a dynamic structure in which transformation by virtue and ritual propriety and music is considered superior, and protection and deterrence by administrative order and penal law are considered more basic.

No one would deny that it would be better if people’s moral integrity and emotional bonds were so strong that institutional assurance becomes unnecessary. Confucius tried to transform the culture of his day, but his efforts did not lead to success. Even after his teachings became official ideology, sanctioned by the imperial order during the Han dynasty, the emperors still had to appeal to legalism in practice.

One may find selected instances of ‘ideal’ communities in history, but they are exceptions rather than the norm. In Vienna, for example, the public transportation system is set in a way

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16 See Ni (2015) for detailed analysis.
that relies largely on its passengers’ moral integrity. There are no ticket-checking gates or agents who consistently check peoples’ tickets upon entering the trains. Passengers are expected to purchase tickets from vending machines on their own. This is certainly ideal because the money saved from hiring people and building ticket-checking facilities can be used to reduce the cost of the tickets, and therefore benefit all passengers. But the real world always falls short of being perfectly ideal.

Even in Vienna, occasional random ticket-checking patrols have to be conducted to deter free-riders taking advantage of the system. The frequency of random checking can be adjusted according to the rate of free-riders caught, and adjustments to penalties will influence people’s likelihood of free-riding as well. This institutional design shows how one can make use of a balance between moral obligation and legal threat. In a place like Vienna, where the likelihood of free-riding is relatively low, the frequency of random ticket-checking can be low, and the penalty for those who are caught can be sometimes no more than a polite warning. In places where the likelihood of free-riding is higher, one may have to begin with lower expectations for personal self-discipline.

Indeed, when one cannot be sure how much one can expect from others, one will prefer to rely on institutional protection than to rely on trusting in the moral integrity or compassion of strangers. In this regard, the West has accumulated experience for China to learn from.

But when existing institutional settings produce a prisoner’s dilemma, who is able to change it? Let me bring up another difficulty, which I would call the Red Lantern effect.

The name derives from the 1991 Chinese film *Raise the Red Lantern.*\(^{17}\) The story begins with a girl in 1920s China who was forced to marry an old rich landlord who already had three wives. In his house, a red lantern would be lit each night in front the quarters belonging to the wife the master chose to spend the night with. Since the lantern was a sign of the

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\(^{17}\) Directed by the famous Chinese director Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, the movie is in turn based on a novel titled ‘*Qiqie chengqun* 妻妾成群’ [a crowd of wives], by Su Tong 苏童.
master’s attention, carrying status and privilege, the wives competed over which lantern would be lit. Having had some exposure to modern education, the new arrival resented the game but found herself facing a dilemma: Either she refused to participate in the competition and became a victim of the game, or she joined in but then became an enforcer of the cruel absurdity.

While the movie is a fiction, the Red Lantern effect is real everywhere. During the Cultural Revolution, China’s Premier Zhou Enlai was believed to face such a dilemma. As a man of admirable integrity, he deeply resented Mao’s allowance of attacks on his colleagues, intellectuals, and other innocent people. If he were to go against Mao, he would not only become a victim himself but would also be unable to use his limited power to keep the country from collapsing. But by submitting himself to Mao’s whims, he then became a de facto supporter of Mao, despite his reluctance.

In today’s China, almost everyone complains about the ridiculous the amount of homework little children are forced to do. But the very parents and educators who complain about this enforce the practice because if they do not, their children and students will be less competitive in a society in which other children are trained in that way.

In today’s economy, although government bailouts only save financial institutions from crisis temporarily, and in the long run, this further entrenches the problems, it is still perceived as the only option. Even the Stockholm Syndrome, a paradoxical psychological phenomenon wherein hostages develop empathy and positive feelings towards their captors might be considered a case of the Red Lantern effect because hostages find their chances of survival depends on the leniency of their captors.

The difficulty in changing existing institutional settings is that the settings themselves are more powerful than most individuals within the system. In the Red Lantern case, the maker of the rule – the landlord – is the only one able to change the rules. For an opponent of the system to reach the status of the ‘landlord’ is almost like trying to lift oneself off the ground
by pulling up one’s own hair. Recognition within the system is gained by being a strong advocate of the game; the alternative is be eliminated long before one gets close to landlord status. In real life, existing systems are usually so strong that no one is the landlord. Even Chinese emperors were unable to change the basic structure of their dynasties because the very power available to them was given by the system itself.

7. China’s historic opportunity and responsibility

If the OBOR initiative is to bring the world from an old order into a radically new and different one, an almost gravitational force is going to be necessary to pull the world in a new direction. This power cannot be fully co-opted by the old order, as otherwise it would lack the ability to initiate a new order. If any country around the world comes close to a description like this, it would be today’s China. In recent decades, China’s accumulation of material power and strengthened political system seem to hold more promise for a project of global impact than any other powers.

Since the world entered the modern era, the human race has made great achievements in developing science, technology, and modern democracy, which all owe much to the ideas of Western Enlightenment philosophers. But the soundness of these ideas has been frequently questioned around the globe in recent decades, as people are increasingly aware that, although many modernising contributions are positive, crises including environmental deprivation, terrorist threats, widespread individualism, consumerism, psychological illnesses, and of course, the recurrence of global financial crises, also find their roots in the same enlightenment ideas.

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18 This reminds us that when Karl Marx was assessing the situation of his day, he realised how unlikely it was for capitalist society to transform itself. That was his reason for advocating proletarian revolution.
19 India is a country that has some proximity to China (i.e., in terms of the size of its population and its level of economic development several decades ago), but the record shows that it is far less efficient and currently has a long way to go to catch up with China. According to Zhu Yunhan (2017), part of the reason that it moves slower than China is precisely that it is much more democratic.
Along with the prevalence of these ideas, the natural world has come to be seen as a meaningless aggregate of matter for human manipulation; human development has come to be measured by material possession and consumption; individual rights have eclipsed obligations; competition is now the norm and collaboration has become the exception. The scale and depth of crises questions the very sustainability of the human race. Much damage is irreversible, and our solutions are like Band-Aids, at best only patching up the symptoms and at worst becoming part of the problem or even the cause of deeper problems.

Humanity’s level of intellectual maturity lags far behind the extent of its material power. In possession of highly advanced technologies and material wealth powerful enough to destroy the very planet on which we live, we have left our most powerful capabilities narrowly defined and expressed by the interests of individual nation-states, a situation comparable to a group of adolescents playing combat games with dangerous weapons.

People who used to put their hope in Western liberal democracy are now questioning their beliefs. Francis Fukuyama, who was so optimistic about Western liberal democracy that he predicted it could be the final form of human government, wrote at the time of Trump’s election victory that “America’s political rot is infecting the world order, and this could be as big as the Soviet collapse” (Fukuyama, 2017a).

To use Fukuyama’s words, the ‘democratic’ side of liberal democracy is leading to blowback on its ‘liberal’ side (Fukuyama, 2017a). A vicious cycle is apparently in operation: Democratic free trade leads to the globalisation of economies, which, due to their liberal, individualistic institutional structures, results in growing gaps between rich and poor and global competition over resources and markets, thus breeding resentment against globalisation and giving rise to populist nationalism. This in turn triggers conservative deglobalisation movements, which cause a downward turn for the economy, forcing the world to once again open up to free trade and globalisation.
The continued life of this ‘game’ is institutionalised, structured by the materialisation of the individualist way of thinking. This is not only inadequate for the provision of much needed cooperation but can even be a hindrance to the alleviation of injustice and inequality. As Henry Rosemont says, “99% of the time I can fully respect your first generation civil and political rights [the rights of speech, of religion, of a fair trial, etc.] simply by ignoring you. You certainly have a right to speak, but no right to make me listen” (Rosemont, 1998, p. 59).

Of course it is possible for a liberal-minded person to embrace a broad holistic vision and hold aspirations for global harmony. I have many friends who care as much for second generation human rights as they do for first generation human rights. These rights need not be mutually exclusive. However, before an institutionalised structure, individuals usually find themselves in a situation like the girl in Raise the Red Lantern. The more established the structure is, the more difficult it is to change it. It is worth reflecting on why the United States, the acclaimed global leader of liberal democracy, has not and could not have come up with principles like ‘community of shared destiny’ and ‘co-prosperity through cooperation’.

A fundamental shift has to be made. Humanity needs to mature in order to qualify itself for possession of its material and technological capabilities and to grow in the wisdom of working together as a community to control our common destiny. And this shift has to happen soon, for we do not have an infinite amount of time to take such action. Our naive and narrow-minded ways of dealing with regional conflicts, terrorism, environmental issues, and global financial crises are leading towards an acceleration of irreversible damage and universal catastrophe. The danger of a downward spiral increases alongside the growth of material and technological capacities.

Of course, whether China is in an adequate position to implement such globally significant changes is not a foregone conclusion, but of any actor, China is closest. It is a country the size of a continent, its population consists of one-fifth of the global total, and over the last 100 years or so, it has survived being torn apart both by external imperial powers and internal fractions, and endured many years of wars and revolution. In just three decades
after emerging from widespread turbulence, over 700 million Chinese have people moved out of poverty,\textsuperscript{20} and the country’s economy has become the second largest in the world.

China’s status in the global community has progressed from seeking to be treated as a respectable member of the global community to becoming a key player in international affairs. China part-insulation from the existing system is one reason it was able to develop so quickly, because once it had loosened itself from old ideological fetters – as the adoption of Deng Xiaoping’s ‘two cats’ philosophy shows – it had little institutional baggage to limit its imagination.

History has given China an opportunity to rejuvenate itself, and with it, the opportunity to transform the world – not all by itself, of course, but a kick-start should be possible. This opportunity is also a responsibility. To borrow a traditional Chinese expression, it is ‘a mandate of heaven’ that China must take up.

However, so far, we have only presented the possibility and the necessity of the change. China has to face enormous challenges alongside this opportunity: China must be genuinely committed to OBOR’s principles and must implement its principles successfully in reality. Neither is a simple task.

The commitment to OBOR principles requires that China as a whole, particularly its leaders, must embody the global vision we explained in sections II through V: the vision of \textit{tianxia}, all-under-heaven, with its corresponding mode of behaviour. China must not merely talk about these as slogans, or as expedient strategies, but in terms of a mission and values. In

\textsuperscript{20} According to the data on the website of World Bank, China had 755.8 million people in poverty (defined as people living on less than $1.90 a day) in 1990, and that number had been reduced to 1.9 million by 2015 (World Bank Poverty & Equity Databank, 2017). If at the early stage, more people moved out of poverty because of being freed to do so (which can be attributed to the adoption of the Western free market model), more recent success are the result of organised efforts: ‘targeted measures in poverty alleviation’ – measures that aim at precise targets, use precise programmes, offer precise funding, take precise steps, appoint precise agents, and set up precise goals (see Xi, 2017).
order to achieve success, China must take an appropriate level of responsibility for a country of its size and status, without assuming a dominant role.

Meanwhile, as China’s global influence rises, it should be careful not to develop a self-inflated arrogance. Such arrogance is not necessarily associated with bad intentions, but could lead to resentment and a lack of realism for China’s leadership. At the popular level, it is understandable that having been humiliated by foreign powers for over a century and half, the public exhibit a measure of nationalist attitude, but China’s leadership must provide careful guidance towards patriotism. Patriotism is a love of one’s own country, so it requires an overcoming of narrow-minded nationalism. Nationalism inflame antagonistic attitudes inconsistent with the principle of a community of shared destiny. China’s national rejuvenation must be done in the spirit of co-prosperity through cooperation.

Given China’s complexity and its recent history, Chinese leadership must arguably maintain a relatively high level of authority to override internal conflicts and opposition and act as one coherent agent, in order to prevent it being pulled into different fractions. China has just undergone huge economic reform, which involved a redistribution of power and resources, leaving chances for opportunists to reap personal profits.

When being a government official became an easy route to wealth and power, corruption was bred and networks of interest developed. In some places, corruption became so serious that, like the Red Lantern effect, one who remains clean has difficulty surviving within the system. Even if they get to the top of the ladder, it is hard to touch other interest networks without actions backfiring.

Considering the scope of the current leadership’s anti-corruption campaign, the political tension within the party is understandable. Without exercising highly concentrated power, the current leadership may not be able to stay on, much less accomplish what it aspires to

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21 One of China’s principal theorists in the central government, Wang Huning (2017) has published an article titled ‘China’s Anti-corruption Institutional Choice,’ which outlined the main causes of corruption in China and the anti-corruption measures taken by the government.
do. But a high concentration of power is a source of serious concern, as history has shown too many times how power can lead people to deviate from their original purpose.

If China’s ability to transform the world is in any way a hope for the world, this same ability could become a nightmare if China’s leadership falls into the wrong hands. The world can only hope that there will gradually be a more solid, institutionalised guarantee of confidence in China’s leadership.

Espousing great ideals and committing to good principles does not mean a government is able to implement them effectively. In this regard, China faces enormous challenges. After decades of reform and the adoption of a market economy, it has to deal with increasing inequality between rich and poor and consequential resentment. China has to maintain the speed of its development while controlling emission levels and preventing corruption; it has to anticipate a serious ageing crisis, and be able to supply a sufficiently large workforce with professional and cultural competence.

Externally, using a biogenerative model of causation is far more complicated than using an efficient model of causation. While the latter consists of straightforward processes of control and manipulation, the former requires reciprocal coordination with every relevant party. Given the extremely diverse and complicated cultural, ethnic, religious, and political situations of the various regions encompassed by the OBOR initiative, China must be sensitive towards local cultures and changing circumstances, and be ready for all kinds of risks.

The whole project must be conceived holistically so that all relevant factors are taken into consideration. For example, given the complicated political variables in these regions, China’s loans and investments may disappear along with the replacement of a regime. China’s loans to Venezuela, for example, face this potential problem (Balding, 2017). The solution lies within OBOR’s principles: to build communities of shared destiny.
Only by establishing mechanisms that allow risks as well as benefits to be distributed can OBOR be successful (Sun, 2017). This could be a crucial corrective to the maldistribution globalisation’s benefits and the globalisation-deglobalisation cycle.

The likelihood of success for the Silk Order also depends on how well China handles its relationship with the core powers of the old order, particularly the US and Russia, and with other rising powers like India. During the Cold War, smaller countries either took advantage of superpower competition or became victims of that same competition (Frankopan, 2017).

If China’s success is not to be built on ‘defeating’ America and taking over its spheres of influence, but is rather to be built on cooperating and achieving win-win situations, it has to work with other members of the global community towards alternative ways of operating. Instead of the way the former Soviet Union and the US interfered in regional affairs in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, global powers have to foster dialogue among civilisations.

Dialogue should aim not only to increase mutual understanding, respect, and foster consensus, but also to construct a global culture and system for managing disagreements and conflicts in the way that civilised and mature adults would behave in a family. China has to learn from the experience and lessons of the EU, and set the pace for coordination at an appropriate speed with solid steps.

Perhaps the most important lesson to learn from the EU is that a constructive form of global management is not unification, but rather cooperation that preserves plurality. A community of shared destiny should not be a system that makes everyone the same. Plurality protects of integrity for all and is a source of creativity and energy. A healthy community of shared destiny should have room for healthy tension and competition.

The likelihood of the Silk Order’s success is not merely dependent on governments. The agents involved in OBOR are largely businesses, non-governmental organisations, educational and research institutions, and, ultimately, individual people. The success of the project naturally depends on how all these agents perform. Educational programmes should
therefore be in a huge demand in order to help people improve their cultural sensitivity and ability for cross-cultural interaction.

Education programmes have to transcend the Western liberal arts educational tradition which merely aims to respect individual rights to unique value choices. They must enable participants to improve their abilities, which the Chinese call *gongfu* 功夫; aiming for cooperation as civilised, mature members of a community of shared destiny (Chen & Ni, 2016).

This is a difference that requires us to transform education as liberation to education as civilisation (Ford & Rowe, 2016).

As China’s economic success has enabled it to emerge as a global power, it has the opportunity – alongside the rest of the world – to transform the current world order according to the Silk Order principles; i.e., to create a global community of shared destiny and achieve co-prosperity through cooperation. If implemented well, this could be a blessing for China as well as for the world.

At a time when the West is being hit by deglobalisation, the OBOR initiative represents a positive effort to keep globalisation going, and at the same time, its underlying principles demonstrate a perspective that may bring the world out of the previous globalisation-deglobalisation cycle. This transformation should not be narrowly understood as an economic or geopolitical change, but as a chance for the world to renew its ancient civilisations and build a new global civilisation fit for the material power humanity possesses. The greatest contribution that China can offer to the world is not its cheap labour, or tea, or porcelain, but its rich traditional culture, a constructive resource more precious than anything else ‘made in China’.

Given the enormous challenges of such an initiative and given China’s current condition, it is reasonable for people to be somewhat sceptical of the Silk Order. In philosophy, scepticism is always used as a dose of sobering medicine, and this is appropriate in real life
too. But only when it is engaged appropriately. Philosophers have long argued that our beliefs are not simply representations of reality.

The tricky part, as the American pragmatist William James once pointed out, is that the opposite of believing is not saving oneself from the possibility of error, but cutting oneself off from the possibility of being right (James, 1919, p. 3). In a case like the OBOR initiative, the success of which is dependent on collective participation, missing the chance of being right may imply missing the chance of making it true. In other words, being overly sceptical is not merely a subjective attitude that affects oneself only, but an action that can make what you are sceptical about fail to become reality. For the same reason, a certain level of credulity is not only unavoidable; it can be an important condition for getting to the truth.

In a constantly changing world, possibilities like the OBOR initiative do not come around all the time. Indeed, OBOR’s potential could disappear if the rest of the world treats China’s rise with a Cold War mentality, as a threat, and attempts to contain China. This would prevent China from carrying out the plan, and at the same time, would represent a missed opportunity for a bright future for humanity.

Francis Fukuyama commented that Obama’s most unwise decision was trying to resist the AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank) (Fukuyama, 2017b). Obama perceived the AIIB as a challenge to America’s leading position in Asia, and consequently, he not only lost a great opportunity for the US to play an important and constructive role in the AIIB, but also isolated the US because its other close allies joined the AIIB and increased the likelihood of another Cold War.

Aristotle taught that the right attitude should be the mean between excess and deficiency. In this case, it is the mean between being overly credulous and overly sceptical. Confucianism has taught us that zhongyong (often translated as ‘the doctrine of the mean’) is like the art of archery: One should adjust one’s action in accordance with changing conditions like the wind and the motion of the target.
In this case one should not shoot too hastily, and yet the target may disappear if you hesitate for too long. There are conditions that determine the likelihood of the OBOR initiative, and our own art of archery is one of these conditions.

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