One Belt One Road: Will China succeed in convincing the world of its Peaceful Rise?

Abstract

The rapid development following the opening up of the economy in 1978 and the influence gained in the international politics, have made China to be identified as the rising power of the 21st century. China’s development in her own terms, in a world in which capitalism and democracy are accepted as the primary foundation for development, has made her rise to be viewed as a threat to the international peace. Despite Beijing’s campaigns to project herself as a “charming” sovereign through different slogans – “Chinese Dream”, “Peaceful Rise”, and “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” - she seems to have failed to convince the world of her peaceful rise. Consequently, the latest slogan “One Belt One Road” is viewed as another endeavor of its “charm offensive”. International debate on this new policy direction assumes that China is attempting to become a hegemony and a maritime power through this new proposal. However, China on the other hand, emphasizes it as an extension to her long-term peaceful development plan. In this context, this paper attempts to evaluate whether China will be able to convince the world of its “peaceful rise” through One Belt One Road proposal.

Key Words: One Belt, One Road, China’s Development, Peaceful Rise, China Threat

1 Introduction

Over the years, China have dramatically changed, so is the outside world’s perceptions on it. Since the People’s Republic of China was born, until the opening up of in the late 1970s, China faced many domestic challenges. The rulers followed a secluded policy refusing to open up to the international system due to the century of colonial experience. This left the Chinese people to suffer from hunger. When Deng Xiaoping came into power in 1978 it was unilaterally agreed that China should open itself if it wants to come out of hunger and become a developed nation. Since then every successive Chinese leadership focused on bringing economic development to its people and ensuring that they will overcome poverty. Thus China reformed its policies from a closed, centrally planned system to a more market-oriented economy. There is no argument to the fact that China did succeed in its effort. China became the world’s largest exporter in 2010. Its GDP showed
a more than tenfold increase within three decades. In 2015, China became the largest economy in the world in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP).

With the new found economic power, does came international recognition that emphasized China becoming the next world hegemony replacing the United States. The idea of a hegemonic war coupled with China’s different ideologies led for the development of “China threat” perception. As a result, the Chinese leaders are forced not only to ensure domestic development but, they are also pressured to work hard to ensure China as a major power, yet a non-threatening peaceful power. In order to realize this objective, Chinese leaders make policy initiatives that will continue speed economic development for its people while posing itself as a peacefully emerging nation. Thus, Beijing incorporates ideologies into their policy initiatives and introduces new terminologies to emphasize their commitment for a peaceful rise. Terms such as “Five Principle of Peaceful Co-existence”, “Peaceful Rise”, “harmonious world”, “common development”, and “mutual development” appear from time to convince the world that of China’s commitment to be a responsible, yet non-threatening player in the international system.

Despite Chinese leaders attempt to demonstrate itself as a benign power, the international community is yet to be convinced of China’s long term objective and that China would remain peaceful during its course for development. Thus, not every policy initiative of China is welcomed with warmth. It is due to this very reason that China’s latest policy initiative “One Belt, One Road” is viewed with mixed perceptions.

Delivering a speech at Nazargayey University in Astana, Kazakhstan in September 2013, President Xi unveiled a plan to review the ancient silk road for the first time. Proposing a “Silk Road Economic Belt” (now known as ‘Belt’) running across Central Asia towards Europe he proposed to “to forge closer ties, deepen cooperation and expand development in the Euro-Asia region, we should take an innovative approach and jointly build an ‘economic belt’ along the Silk Road. This will be a great undertaking benefitting the people of all countries along the route” (CCTV, 2013). The proposal was later reiterated at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), during which five points to strengthen relations between China, Central Asia and Europe were revealed (Szczudlik-Tatar, 2013). During the 16th ASEAN-China Summit held in Brunei, Premier Li Keqiang revealed Beijing’s Plan to revive ancient maritime Silk Road. Whilst both proposal had few aspects in common; commitment to promote relations with neighbours and calling for
collaboration in setting up policy communication, improving road connectivity, promoting unimpeded trade, enhancing monetary circulation, and increasing people-to-people relations, the international community became suddenly alert on the parallels drawn between the ancient Silk Road and the new Belt and Road.

While the Chinese leadership emphasized on realizing harmonious co-existence, mutual benefit and common development with countries involved through the OBOR initiative, and while they emphasized on realizing peaceful development while helping the others to develop, the world community is unconvinced of China’s agenda of reviving an ancient concept which reminds of the grandiose of the Middle Kingdom. China is being criticized for trying to use charm offensive to gain power and influence through introducing OBOR. China’s neighbours are suspicious of its intentions. They further notes that the charm offensive is absent when it comes to practice in certain issues during the recent years (Summer 2013). According to Indian strategist C. Raja Mohan, the Silk Road, and the Maritime Silk Road in particular, is an attempt of China to project itself as a maritime power (Mohan C. R., 2014). As per Ananth Krishnan, The Hindu correspondence in Beijing, maritime Silk Road is a proposal to counter the “string of pearls strategy” Beijing has been accused of pursuing. It is China’s response to address the growing regional anxieties about its fast-expanding naval presence (Krishnan, 2014).

According to Chinese journalists, the idea of reviving Silk Road is a way of “rebranding” Chinese ambitions and objectives with regard trade and cooperation (Yi 2014). There is no doubt to the fact that the Chinese leadership is moving forward and accepting China’s role as a great power in the international community. However, due to various factors, China is continuously looked upon as a threat to the world peace. Thus, in realizing its ambitions and objectives, China has to be cautious. As Joshua Copper Ramo puts it, “Chinas greatest strategic threat today is its national image” (Wang 2008). Thus, it is important for Beijing to make innovative moves to improve its image as less threatening, benign rising power. China’s Silk Road is viewed as its latest strategy to realize its ambitions and objectives whilst publicizing a peaceful image.

This paper therefore attempts to evaluate whether China can convince the world of its peaceful rise through its new and innovative One Belt, One Road strategy. The paper will look into China’s peaceful rise strategy as explained in its policy documents. It will then place OBOR amidst the implementation tools of peaceful rise strategy. Then it will evaluate how far China will be able to
convince the world that its rise and development is not threatening to the world peace. Both theoretical and practical facts will be used to evaluate this aspect. Finally, the paper will bring out the challenges facing China in convincing the world of its peaceful rise and what it should be doing in order to gain the trust of the concerned neighbours.

2 China’s Silk Road

The ancient Silk Road which is a 3000-years old trade route linking the two ends of Eurasia continent plays an important role in China’s history. The road which connected China, India, Persia, Arabia, Egypt and Rome signifies a period in which China was a powerful nation. The overland Silk Road which stretched over 10,000km from Xi’an (the old capital of Chang’an) to Rome, originated during the Han Dynasty around 200BC. Zhang Qian, a famous Chinese envoy made two diplomatic missions to China’s Far West (Xiyi) on behalf of Emperor Han Wudi. Starting from Chang’an he went up to DA Yuezhi and Roman Empire, crossing the Hexi Corridor, Tarim Basin and various other states and tribes in Central Asia. The earliest silk roads were originated as a result of the complicated relations between urban-agricultural China and pastoral people from the Eurasian steppe (Chaturvedy, 2014). Yuezhi-Kushan nomads who moved from east to west from the China’s northwest frontiers two centuries ago to the Indian subcontinent in present day
Afghanistan marks the first movement along the overland silk road. The historical narratives reveal China to be the center of the overland Silk Road emphasizing its trade hegemony during that time.

Maritime Silk Road which emerged in the middle of the first century started from China’s southeast coastal regions stretched across oceans and seas through South China Sea to India and West Asia. According to archeological evidences the maritime traders from the eastern end of the Mediterranean went eastward from Egypt to India by sea when their homelands were conquered by the Roman Empire. It is also revealed that trade via sea was enhanced as an alternative to Iranian silk trade monopoly that was happening over the land routes. Thus, the Romans bypassed the overland route to establish direct trade ties with the Middle Kingdom via sea.

During Son Dynasty (980-1280) the Maritime Silk Road played an important role in establishing the tributary relations with many countries. Admiral Zheng He (1405-1433) voyaged in his fleet and built trade relations with countries along the maritime Silk Road. The voyages are symbolic, according to Chinese leadership, of China’s peaceful venture, and lack of interest for invading other countries, but building friendship.

Similar to the overland silk road, Maritime Silk Road too symbolizes China being the center of sea trade. With a 18,000km of coastline, China had a good number of ports open all year and that countries from Southeast, South and West Asia, and Europe equally interested in establishing trade relations with Middle Kingdom. It again made China the center of world sea trade.

Due to the centrality given to China in the history, ancient silk road reflects more than a set of trade routes for China. Even though the traditional routes disappeared overtime, it left a lasting legacy for Beijing as once a powerful economy.

When China proposed reviving the ancient silk road, it was also read as reviving China’s ancient grandiose in the 21st century. The road map of the proposed new Silk road shows a lot of similarity towards the ancient silk road. The Silk Road Economic Belt will commence in Xi’an and will stretch through Lanzhou (Gansu Province), Urumqi (Xinjiang) and will reach Khorgas (Xinjiang) which is near Kazakhstan border. It will runs southwest from Central China to northern Iran and will reach west Iraq, Syria and Turkey. The Silk Road will connect Istanbul with Europe crossing the Bosporus Strait. In Europe it will connect Bulgaria Romania, the Czech Republic and Germany. From Duisburg in Germany, it spreads towards north to Rotterdam in the Netherlands and then to
Venice, Italy. From there the “belt” will meet the “maritime road”. The Maritime Silk Road (MSR) will begin in Quanzhou in Fujian Province and will run through Guangzhou (Guangdong province), Beihai (Guangxi), and Haikou (Hainan) and will reach Malacca Strait. From Kuala Lumpur, the MSR take route to Kolkata, India, Colombo in Sri Lanka then cross the rest of the Indian Ocean to Nairobi, Kenya. From Nairobi it goes north around the Horn of Africa, crossing the Red Sea into Mediterranean, and reach Venice through Athens.

Like the ancient silk road, the new Belt and Road will revive trade corridors from China spreading across Central Asia to Europe. It will link Central Asia, South Asia, Europe, Africa and the Middle East through regional energy markets, trade and transport, improved customs and borders, and connecting business and people. Moreover, this will also enhance China’s sphere of influence across three continents. The Belt will link China’s Yangtze River Delta, Pearl Delta and Bohai Sea economic to the European economy, and will connect the highly developed European economy with the fast-growing Asia-Pacific economy and less developed middle regions. It will boost great cooperation and will also make Central Asia an economic hub as it once was during the ancient Silk Road period.

3 China’s ‘Peaceful Rise’ and One Belt, One Road

Peaceful rise, in general is defined as peaceful competition. Cheng (2012) defines peaceful rise in the case of China as “competition according to the rules, although the rules many not be fair to China, and China may not hold any role in defining the rules”.

Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence first came into focus during negotiations between China and India on their relations in the Tibet region. During his meeting with the Indian Government Delegation in December 1953, Premier Zhou Enlai put forward the concept which set forth guiding principles for the relations between the India and China. The five principles read as; respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty (changed to mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity at the Asian-African Conference), mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit (changed to equality and mutual benefit in the Sino-Indian joint Statement and Sino-Burmese Joint Statement), and peaceful co-existence. Later on, the Asian-African Conference convened in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955 adopted Ten principles in conducting international relations, which is a continuation and development of China’s five principles of peaceful co-existence. According to the Foreign
Ministry of PRC, following this the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence have become China’s basic norm in conducting international relations with the rest of the world.

Ever since, the concept of five principle of Peaceful co-existence have come in China’s policy discussions. When Deng Xiaoping reformed China into a more opened economy the concept of peaceful development was underpinning in his agenda. In his transformation of main foreign policy tasks, Deng emphasized on searching for a peaceful environment for China’s modernization. In the mid-1980s, he proposed “peaceful development, not war and revolution” as the theme for international politics of the time (Buzan 2014, 386). Continuing this policy, former President Hu Jintao attested the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence when he spoke of China’s peaceful development during his tenure.

Later, the concept was developed to be associated with China’s rise and development. Zheng Bijian, one of China’s leading intellectuals who served as the Deputy to President Hu Jintao, originated the term of ‘peaceful rise’. In his speeches, he constantly campaigned for the idea of peaceful rise, initially as an attempt to answer Western proponents of the “China threat theory”. Later, the concept also included the aspect of facing internal challenges. Core idea of peaceful rise often emphasized on relying on own development; relying on the opening up of markets; relying on institutional innovations; relying on getting connected with economic globalization instead of being isolated from it; and relying on reciprocity and mutual benefit with other countries for the purpose of win-win relations (The Brookings Institution 2005). The White Paper on Peaceful Development issued in 2011 emphasizes and detail the ideas put forth by Zheng Bijiang.

There is no disagreement among Chinese leaders of the need of a peaceful environment for the development of its own people. This need partly comes from China’s strategic culture and its historical experiences. When China abandoned from alliance policy and moved towards an independent non-aligned foreign policy, and when it shift from revolutionist assumptions for itself and the world, and gave priority for its own economic development, Beijing agreed the need of a peaceful environment which will support its growth. It understood that while total state control of the economy could not be abandoned, it also should ensure space for the market to operate. It also agreed that China should economically engaged with its neighbours and the world and should become a part of the global system. Moreover, China was clear from the very beginning of reforms that it not only wants to increase prosperity, but also to expand its power (Buzan 2014, 388). In
one hand, China’s long term aspiration is to bring economic development to its people. On the other hand, it wants regain its lost great power status. China is opposing hegemony and wants a “multipolar world with more autonomous region” (Buzan 2014, 388). Partly, the need for peaceful development is embodied in the necessity to legitimize the CCP leadership. Economic growth and the nationalism are the much-needed source of legitimacy for the CCP to continue to be in power (Buzan 2014, Y.K. Wang 2006).

The development of the concept of “peaceful development or peaceful rise” tried to grasp the nuances of these needs. The white paper reads:

“All China's peaceful development has broken away from the traditional pattern where a rising power was bound to seek hegemony. In modern history, some rising powers established colonies, fought for spheres of influence, and conducted military expansion against other countries. This reached climax in the 20th century, when rivalry for hegemony and military confrontation plunged mankind into the abyss of two devastating world wars. With a keen appreciation of its historical and cultural tradition of several thousand years, the nature of economic globalization, changes in international relations and the international security landscape in the 21st century as well as the common interests and values of humanity, China has decided upon peaceful development and mutually beneficial cooperation as a fundamental way to realize its modernization, participate in international affairs and handle international relations. The experiences of the past several decades have proved that China is correct in embarking upon the path of peaceful development, and there is no reason whatsoever for China to deviate from this path. (Information Office of the State Council 2011)

White Paper on Peaceful Development emphasizes that China should develop itself through upholding peace and contributing to world peace through its own development. It further reiterates that carrying out reform and innovation and opening itself to the outside world and learning from other countries which will seek mutual and common development should be the trend for China’s economic development (Information Office of the State Council 2011). White Paper also introduces different types of development, namely, scientific development, independent
development, open development, cooperate development, common development and peaceful development.

Scientific Development, according to the White Paper, is to respect and follow the laws governing development of economy, society and nature, focusing on development and freeing and developing productive forces. It puts people first, promotes comprehensive, balanced and sustainable development and takes overall factors to consider making balanced plans. Independent Development explains that China has to rely on itself in pursuing development. It further explains that in focusing domestic development a priority, China should reform and carries innovations for economic and social development through its own efforts and that its problems and difficulties should not be put on other countries. In this sense, China will participate in international division of labour, and promote mutually beneficial cooperation with other countries (Information Office of the State Council 2011).

Open development refers to taking reform and opening-up as a basic policy, while carrying out domestic reforms and opening itself to the outside world. It further emphasizes in pursuing independent development whilst taking part in economic globalization. It further emphasizes in combining domestic markets with that of foreign markets and using of both domestic and foreign resources successfully. Peaceful Development explains that only prosperity, contentment and development can bring decent living, thereby, reducing poverty and other causes for war and conflict. Emphasizing on this factor, the White Paper explains that “the central goal of China’s diplomacy is to create a peaceful and stable international environment for its development”. The objective of China’s peaceful development, therefore, is to uphold regional and world peace and stability, and that not engage in aggression and expansion or not to seek hegemony.

Cooperative Development emphasizes on fair competition, finding opportunities for cooperation, expanding in the areas of cooperation and improving common interests. White Paper explains that "China uses cooperation as a way to pursue peace, promote development and settle disputes. It seeks to establish and develop cooperative relationships of different forms with other countries and effectively meet growing global challenges by constantly expanding mutually beneficial cooperation with their countries, and works with them to solve major
problems that effect world economic development and human survival” (Information Office of the State Council 2011)

Common Development emphasizes on the interdependency of countries. The White Paper explains that “only when common development of all countries is realized and more people share the fruit of development, can world peace and stability have a solid foundation and be effectively guaranteed, and can development be sustainable in all countries”.

In order to realize the Peaceful Development as suggested by the White Paper 2011, there are certain steps to be taken. Firstly, there should be an implementing strategy for the opening-up for mutual benefit. Hence, the favourable conditions created by economic globalization and regional economic cooperation in the course of opening up will be effectively used. The export oriented economy should be expanded to that of absorbing foreign investments and equally emphasizing on both imports and exports in which mutual trade benefits will be achieved between partner countries. Foreign investments should be improved and investment channels should be diversified and expanded. Greater importance should be placed upon overseas investments and international cooperation. Furthermore, the White Paper also suggests to open financial markets and financial sectors and to build financial systems. Moreover, the foreign trade should be speed up through continue participation in international labour division. The focus should be given to improve the quality of and efficiency of trade rather than the volume of trade.

Secondly, the White Paper suggests that a peaceful international environment and favourable external conditions should be created in order to uphold peaceful development. As such, friendly relations with other countries should be promoted. Relations should be built upon mutual trust, mutual cooperation. Issues should be handled and explored in a way that relationships among the countries are promoted for a long-term. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation, cooperation at different sectors and people-to-people partnership are the most effective ways of building such environment.

When President Xi Jinping came into power, he, like his predecessors, introduced new concepts to continue the path to peaceful development. He put forth the concept of “Chinese Dream” after the convening of the 18tg National Party Congress. He introduced the One Belt, One Road, which
is the largest programme of economic diplomacy since the US-led Marshall Plan for postwar reconstruction in Europe (Financial Times 2015). A closer look at the proposed OBOR strategy clearly demonstrates how China’s idea of peaceful rise is reflected in this new proposal.

Beijing issued official report realizing the importance of convincing the world of its peaceful development agenda through OBOR. The report emphasizes that “jointly building the Belt and Road is in the interests of the world community” and that it is a “new model of international cooperation and global governance” (National Development and Reform Commission 2015). It goes on to explain that the Silk Road initiative upholds Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and is open for cooperation.

“The Initiative is open for cooperation. It covers, but is not limited to, the area of the ancient Silk Road. It is open to all countries, and international and regional organizations for engagement, so that the results of the concerted efforts will benefit wider areas”.

In introducing China’s new Silk Road initiative, Information Office of the State Council reiterated that New Silk Road will uphold five principles of peaceful existence. A comparison between China’s Silk Road plan along with the characteristics of China’s Peaceful Development as explained through its White Paper in 2011 will help to understand where OBOR stands in realizing China’s Peaceful Development concept.

The five-point proposal presented at the 13th SCO Summit explaining the agenda for Silk Road Economic Belt and, 2+7 proposal presented at the 16th ASEAN+China Summit in Brunei explain common characteristics. The proposals are driven by China’s trade and economic objectives. The plan shows how China will realize the categories of peaceful development as explained in the 2011 White Paper.

The proposal for the 13th SCO Summit included; strengthen policy communication, which may help “switch on a green light” for joint economic cooperation; strengthen road connections, with the idea to establish a great transport corridor from the pacific to Baltic Sea, and from Central Asia to the Indian Ocean, then gradually build a network of transport connections between eastern, western and southern Asia; strengthen trade facilitation, with a focus on eliminating trade barriers and taking steps to reduce trade and investment expenses; strengthen monetary cooperation with
special attention to currency settlements that could decrease transaction costs and lessen financial
risk while increasing economic competitiveness; and strengthen people-to-people relations
(Szczudlik-Tatar, 2013). The Maritime Silk Road proposal on the other hand focused on two issues
and seven proposals to work together. The two issues are strategic trust as part of the good neighbor
principle and economic cooperation based on mutual benefits. Seven proposals include: signing
the China-ASEAN good neighbor treaty; more effective use of the China-ASEAN FTA and
intensive Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiation1; acceleration of
joint infrastructure projects; stronger regional financial and risk-prevention cooperation; closer
maritime cooperation; enhanced collaboration on security; and, more intensive people-to-people
contacts along with increased cultural, scientific and environmental protection cooperation
(Szczudlik-Tatar, 2013).

Today China is the world’s second largest trading nation behind the United States. In 2013, China
surpassed to become the world’s largest trading nation and that 40 percent of its total foreign trade
crosses the Indian Ocean (Khurana 2014). In 2010, China replaced the United States as the world’s
largest exporter. Its total export in 2013 stood at US$ 2.1 trillion (The World Factbook: China,
2014). As of statistics in 2013, China’s GDP of Purchasing Power Parity is US$ 13.30 trillion and
is ranked at third place in the world (The World Factbook: China, 2014). Its GDP per capita is
US$ 9,800 and is ranked at 121 in the world. China is predicted to surpass the United States to
become the world’s largest trading nation in the next couple of years.

Chinese leadership strongly believes that despite being the world’s second largest economy China
has a long way to go to make its people prosperous. Hence, China requires continuous economic
reforms and development policies to make this goal a reality. OBOR is born as part of China’s
reforms and innovations. Given the changing domestic and international environment, President
Xi highlighted the importance of reforms in every sector of the Chinese society, including
economy and foreign policy. He further stressed the importance of opening up – both domestically
and internationally. OBOR has been able to reshape China’s global posture in a bold and creative
way via upgrading and opening-up economic system and external cooperation (Chaturvedy 2014).
Thus, OBOR is a platform for China’s economic reforms where domestic economy was expected

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1 The FTA between ASEAN and China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand
to be enhanced through providing investment platform and boosting national infrastructure spending, urbanization, and trade (Lo 2015).

**Domestic Priorities**

The bottom line of China’s Silk Road initiative is a shift of the country’s economic development from the eastern coast to the inland area and the west. Compared to the well-developed east and, the Pearl River Delta and Yangtze River Delta areas, the western region is still struggling to develop into a well-off society. The uneven development in the West and the East is causing economic and political problems to the Central Government.

While China’s eastern coast opened up to the Pacific Ocean decades ago, western regions lagged behind in development. Chinese government’s attempt to open up the western region to Central Asia through Shanghai Cooperation Organization has been relatively successful, yet the development space is slow. This West region, known as Xinjiang Province is more than 3,100 kilometers away from Beijing and Keshagar, located in the Kazakhstan border was historically a major Silk Road trading hub. Despite occupying 17 percent of China’s total land mass, due to its physical environment – characterized by desert wetlands – it is difficult to develop the area even with modern agricultural and industrial technologies.

However, Xinjiang is not completely doomed by its geography. It is the only major overland route from China to Central Asia. Xinjiang has always been a part of ancient Silk Road and has contributed to Chinese economy being the access gateway to Eurasia. Hence it has always been an important place that facilitated the exchange of ideas and technologies between China and the rest of Eurasia. Xinjiang has the potential to play the same role under the proposed Silk Road Economic Belt for Beijing’s ambitious vision of trans-Eurasian road, rail and pipeline system will start from this province. Xinjiang also possesses the world’s largest untapped reserves of thermal coal. According to estimates the regions coal output will reach 750 million metric tons by 2020, which is an increase from 141 million metric tons in 2012 (Stratfor, China's Ambition in Xinjiang and Central Asia Part II, 2013).

Lately, there have been several incidents which demonstrated the popular discontent in the region. In the 1990s and early 2000s violence erupted due to ethnic tensions between local Uighur
Muslims population and Han Chinese immigrants to the region. Recently, several attacks have been reported from Keshgar in Xinjiang. Internal government statistics report of 248 cases of violence and terror in Xinjiang in 2013 (Leibold, 2014). Between 2008 and 2012 ten large attacks have been reported in the Keshgar border (Stratfor, China's Ambition in Xinjiang and Central Asia Part III, 2013). In June 2011 it was violence broke in Hotan and Keshgar, few weeks before opening up Keshgar-Hotan passenger railway service, killing 37 people (Stratfor, China's Ambition in Xinjiang and Central Asia Part III, 2013). According to critics such social unrest is a result of failed ethnic policy, worsening religious conflicts and discontent due to economic backwardness compared to other regions of China.

In order to address these issues, Government of China initiated a “Go West” strategy. This shift of economic resources showed successful outcome, that by 2010 these regions show a noticeable economic boom. Under the government’s “Go West” strategy the region’s fixed-asset investment grew by more than 33 percent in 2011 and 2012. Many national and provincial level investments reached the region. According to available sources there is more than 35 proposals for investment in the region awaiting Xinjiang regional government approval.

Progressing on the development plans, Chinese government expects to invest around US$ 196 billion on expanding power generation and ultra-high voltage transmissions lines linking the region’s coalfields with inland consumers. Another proposal is to invest US$392 billion on high-speed railway (Stratfor, China's Ambition in Xinjiang and Central Asia Part II, 2013).

The development of economy and containing the tension in Xinjiang is vital for the political leadership of China for it presents ample opportunities for the future of the country. Xinjiang can act as an energy transport corridor and resource base reducing China’s exposure to supply disruptions in the South and East China seas.

**Infrastructure to Diversify Supply/ Export Routes**

Silk Road initiative suggests port infrastructure construction, build smooth land-water transportation channels, and advance port cooperation; increase sea routes and the number of voyages, and enhance information technology cooperation in maritime logistics (National Development and Reform Commission 2015). It also proposes developing infrastructure including
railways, roads and energy pipelines connecting China with Central Asia, South and Southeast Asia, Europe and the Middle East. The objective is to improve transport and connectivity.

According to the current plans by the government, there will be five domestic development zones with infrastructure plans connecting each other with neighboring countries. Gangs, Pearl River-Xizang (Tibet), and Beau Gulf will be developed so as to facilitate connectivity with ASEAN region by building an international corridor linking the two geographies. International transport corridor connecting China and the neighboring countries will be constructed through Yunnan Province. Greater Mekong Sub-region is expected to be built as pivot opening-up to Southeast Asia.

China has been laying out foundation to diversify its energy sources and supply routes for years. In 2002, China adopted “Going Out” strategy to ensure constant supply of oil. As a result China reached far away oil production countries. State-owned energy production companies – the China National Petroleum Corporation, the China National Petrochemical Corporation, and the China National Offshore Oil Corporation – purchased equity shares in overseas exploration and production projects around the world. Further, China has built new pipelines, mostly through Siberia and Central Asia, to secure its oil supply (Zhang, 2010). Proposed oil and natural gas pipelines that will run from the coast of Myanmar to Yunnan province will provide an alternative route for China to get its oil avoiding the Malacca strait. The West-East Pipeline Project which will run from the Xinjiang-Kazakhstan border to cities in the Yangtze and Pearl River Delta will facilitate the transport of energy from Central Asia to mainland China.

Further road and rail networks has been built connecting China with the neigbouring countries. In July 2013, even before the Chinese leadership officially announced the plan to revive the silk road, Beijing inaugurated the construction of China-Europe rail way starting from Zhengzhou, Hanan Province to Hamburg, Germany (Stratfor, Analysis: China's Ambition in Xinjiang and Central Asia Part I, 2013). After completion the rail way expects to make six round trips, each one ferrying approximately US$ 1.5 million worth of electronic products to Europe. The project expects to shorten the time period of delivering goods from five weeks to 21 days. Transport by railway from China to Europe costs approximately 25 percent more than by sea despite the shorten delivery period. Yet, for technological companies such as HP and DHL who would prefer reaching
their new technologies to markets sooner than their competitors the benefits of speed outweigh the extra costs (Stratfor, Analysis: China’s Ambition in Xinjiang and Central Asia Part I, 2013).

If Chinese government succeed in connecting the China-Kazakhstan road, China’s trade with Europe expects to grow from 2,500 forty-foot units to 7.5 million by the end of the decade (Stratfor, Analysis: China’s Ambition in Xinjiang and Central Asia Part I, 2013). If this growth continues then overland trade between China and Europe could reach US$ 4.5 billion. Furthermore the proposed overland railway could also serve as a possible lifelines for arms, ammunition and energy at a time of crisis. Proposed China – Pakistan Economic Corridor is meant to give China access to ports close to Middle East (Johnson, 2014). The project includes building highways, railways, oil and gas pipelines, and communication fiber optic cables.

Development of routes provide optimum economic benefits from trade with other states. A regional integrated network can also ease access to member states increasing economic productivity, security and market size. Moreover, joint expansion of physical communication through transport also strengthen regional cooperation. Improving investment and trade facilitation, and removing investment and trade barriers will create sound environment for business thereby, for economic development. Economic development and prosperity will lead to establishment of peaceful environment, an environment which will help countries to develop peacefully.

**Strategic partnership**

In order to diversify its energy supply China has made several changes to its diplomatic policies. One is building strategic relations with its neighbours. Strategic partnership has been a primary foreign policy practice in China’s foreign policy since 1990s. According to Zhang Yunling, a scholar from the Chinese Social Sciences Academy China is using economic, political, security and cultural relations with its neighbours to move regional orders in a new direction. While proposing new ideas, China has also financed them to come into reality (Zhang, 2010). Accordingly China built strategic partnership with Russia and since 2004, this partnership is growing in both depth and scope. As Baohui Zhang says “China has been more active in using strategic alliances with other major powers to improve its position in the world; China’s deepening
strategic partnership with Russia are the best examples” (Zhang, 2010). The two countries have trade relations and have settled border disputes. Top leaders of the two countries executed several visits over the years. In 2005 China and Russia jointly held military exercises. In 2007 China, along with other members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization participated in a high profile military exercise in China to which President Hu Jintao made a personal appearance. This was President Hu’s first appearance at a war game in a foreign country. As a result of this newly strengthened strategic partnership China and Russia jointly adopted common positions on many international issues. Their position with regard to Iranian nuclear issue, planned US deployment of anti-missile capabilities in Europe, exercising veto against UN Resolution sanctioning Burma and Zimbabwe, and jointly proposing a treaty to ban weapons in outer space at UN Conference on Disarmament in February 2008 are few of the examples.

China is increasing its investments in Central Asia as a part of its Silk Road initiative. Investments in infrastructure and increased bilateral relations are expected to gain support for the ambitious economic belt. During the recent APEC meeting China signed agreements with Emomali Rahoman, President in Tajikistan to finance a new railway connecting Tajikistan’s north and the south, a new power plant, and local agricultural projects. Located in the border of Xinjiang province, Tajikistan is an important country for China’s border security. It will also be an important partner in China-Central Asia Gas Pipeline project. Moreover China is risking its relationship with the United States to protect countries with which it has energy deals. Developing close relations with so called “rouge states” such as Iran, Sudan and Venezuela despite the negative international opinion and the active participation at the UN Security Council to protect them explain how vulnerable China is when it comes to protecting its energy sources.

When MSR was proposed to ASEAN members, and when 2+7 cooperation was proposed, it was highlighted on the effective usage of China-ASEAN free trade area and intensive regional comprehensive economic partnership negotiations. Effective and enhanced usage of FTA will improve economic condition of ASEAN member states. It will mostly help the less developed ASEAN members to speed economic recovery. Taking the suggestions at a practical level, currently, China is negotiating with ASEAN to upgrade the existing FTA. There are also discussions to open more the markets and bring down the tariffs. Moreover, MSR encourages Chinese companies to shift their manufacturing hubs to the partner countries. As a result, China
will be participating in global labour markets creating employment in partner countries. China even suggests establishment of industrial parks, economic and trade cooperation zones in ASEAN countries (Bu 2015). China-Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park and Tianjin Eco-City projects are examples of China-ASEAN cooperation. By promoting port and other forms of infrastructure cooperation, MSR proposes to boost maritime connectivity, port and harbor cooperation, and maritime commerce. In the meantime, China also proposes China-ASEAN Port City Cooperation Network and China-ASEAN Port Public Logistics Information Platform as part of MSR initiatives in order to further enhance maritime connectivity (Bu 2015).

Proposed projects of high-speed railways between Jakarta and Bandung, and China-Laos, and China-Thailand railways will enhance connectivity in the region. The railroad of China-Laos will stretch 418km linking Mohan and Boten ports of China and Laos’ Capital of Vientiane. The proposed railroad between China and Thailand will connect Thailand’s Nong Khai province, Bangkok, the eastern Rayong province with China and will join Southern China railway connecting Laos. This will help ASEAN members to narrow the huge infrastructure development gap. It will also promote infrastructure construction, manufacturing and foreign commodity trade and service sectors. Whilst these outward investments will boost China’s domestic economy, there is no argument that this will help ASEAN countries to share the benefits. As of 2014, ASEAN was China’s third-largest trading partner. Annual bilateral trade accounted for US$ 443.6 billion. Since the establishment of relations about 24 years ago, trade volumes increased by 8.3 percent year-on-year. Had the connectivity and infrastructure is improved, there is no argument that bilateral trade will increase at a rapid level within a short period of time.

The New Silk Road could be identified as an extension of already initiated policy to build strategic partnership with neighbors. All these years China’s foreign policy agenda gave priority for Sino-American relations. As Yu Xuetong, Dean of the Institute of Modern International Relations at Tsinghua University says that the remarkable part of President Xi’s policy is the importance given to neighbouring countries. He says that the initial principle of China’s policy was to give priority to Sino-American relations. With this new initiative, according to Yu, “diplomacy with our neighbouring countries have become attached with significance. To be more specific, whenever improving our relations with neighbours is at conflict with our relations with the US, the former will be given higher priority”.
New Markets and Financial Integration

New Silk Road initiative will also provide China with access to new markets and boost trade with existing markets. Currently China’s primary export markets are in the US and Europe. After the global economic crisis China’s economic growth has slow down. China’s GDP growth continued to grow at double digits during the last decade but following the global economic crisis the GDP growth rate started to decline. Ever since 2009, China’s GDP did not reach two-digits and the current GDP marks the lowest growth rate since 1999. According to critics this is largely due to China’s export and FDI driven economic model (Szczudlik-Tatar, 2013). Against this backdrop it is natural for China to look into alternative export markets while preserving the existing ones.

Before the financial crisis China’s capital was mostly invested in US treasury bonds (Kemp, Opinion: China Flexes its Silk Road Muscle, 2014). With the new Silk Road initiative it seems that China is moving away from investing in treasury bonds and using the wealth more productively by building infrastructure with its major trading partners. Apart from getting an income this will also increase China’s economic and political influence. The project will boost trade with existing markets as well. China’s third biggest trade partner ASEAN will be an important partner in the Maritime Silk Road initiative. Currently the trade volume between China and ASEAN is US$ 433.6 billion. The new initiative expects to boost trade volume further.

Silk Road initiative will open avenues for China to invest its vast monetary reserves in new markets. China was able to reach consensus with six Southeast Asian countries during the APEC Summit to build China-Singapore Economic Corridor. The Corridor will start from Nanning and Kunming and will run through Indo-China Peninsula connecting Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. According to Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli the corridor will “facilitate the trans-regional and trans-national flow of various resources and factors of production” (Xinhua, 2014). The project expects to increase bilateral trade between China and these countries. It will also provide Chinese investors new markets. Currently more than 5,200 Chinese companies have financial interest in Singapore (Xinhua, 2014). The proposed project will help Chinese business to explore Southeast Asian market.
Financial integration through joint efforts to build Asian Infrastructure Bank is one of how China is trying to build mutual trust. Having experienced before with ASEAN countries, China new that any unilateral measure to establish a fund for infrastructure or any other development initiative will not succeed. Even though China established a Maritime Cooperation Fund for ASEAN countries in 2011, it was not used by any of the ASEAN members so far. However, by establishing AIIB, China will not only diversify investment sources but eradicated any thought of Chinese dominance and making ASEAN members feel obligated or bound to China’s demands. Establishment of AIIB will provide strong investment and financing platforms to achieve these objectives. According to analysts, “AIIB is Beijing’s brainchild to steer development along the proposed Silk Road” (Chaturvedy 2014). By inviting other countries to be a partner in the AIIB, China tried to reiterate that it genuinely means the MSR to be a joint initiative.

**People-to-People Partnership**

It was China’s people-to-people partnership and frequent trips by Chinese senior officials to ASEAN countries that helped China to win ASEAN in the past. Similarly, Beijing seems to be promoting cultural and academic exchanges, personal exchanges and cooperation, media cooperation, youth and youth and women exchanges and volunteer services, so as to win public support for deepening bilateral and multilateral cooperation. In 2015, two events – CAEXPO and CABIS – were held with the participation of Heads of State and other government officials from China and ASEAN member countries to promote MSR and upgrade friendly relations (China-ASEAN Secretariat 2015). China is already providing scholarships for more than 10,000 students from all over the world to which a larger proportion of students from ASEAN is participating. While having forums, seminars, art festivals and cultural activities China promotes its culture among these students. In the recent years, Silk Road has been a prominent theme in these activities.

It is clear from the above that China’s idea of peaceful development highlights on mutual benefit and win-win cooperation. According to Chinese scholars and officials OBOR will further facilitate to enhance China’s cooperation with the rest of the world. According to Song Junying, a researcher from China Institute of International Studies, OBOR proposal will bring new opportunities for regional cooperation through which the partners can gain momentum for development.
Common and Shared Development

China’s development policy over the years was to pursue peaceful development while pursuing cooperation and peace with other countries. As the White Paper on China’s Peaceful Development states “China’s overall goal of pursuing peaceful development is to promote development and harmony domestically and pursue cooperation and peace internationally” (China’s Peaceful Development, Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, 2011). In this regard China seeks to grow long-term friendly relations and mutually beneficial cooperation with other countries. Thus, according to an article in Xinhua the Silk Road “will bring new opportunities and new future to China and every country along the road that is seeking to develop” (Tiezzi, 2014).

The approach which proposes regional cooperation planning will built through communication and consultation with all partners involved will open new opportunities for common development and welfare for all the countries in the Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road. This will boost connectivity, cooperation and commerce. The prospective to strengthen economic and trade relations and investment in the countries along the silk road will encourage Chinese companies to shift their manufacturing hub to the partner countries in response to rising labour costs in China. This in turn will bring infrastructure development, technological knowledge and employment opportunities for the host countries. Building up infrastructure along the route will speed up the transport and will boost productivity and trade in each country.

The expected economic development of China will be shared with the countries. It is estimated that if China’s growth continues, its outbound investment will exceed US$ 1.25 trillion within the next 10 years and that Beijing will import more than US$ 10 trillion worth of goods. Moreover Chinese tourists abroad will exceed 500 million in the next five years, in turn it will contribute to the economic development of other countries (McDonald, n.d.).

If the Silk Road be seen in the same perspective as it was in the ancient time, this initiative will be more than about infrastructure development and speedy transportation. Like during the ancient time it will also be about cultural exchange and knowledge sharing. Enhanced cultural exchange and people-to-people partnership will provide ample opportunities for the countries to enhance mutual trust and understanding.
4 Can China Convince the World of its Peaceful Rise?

There are many arguments on implications of China’s New Silk Road. Even though China has been trying to emphasize that the New Silk Road is an extension of its peaceful rise the world seems not ready to accept it. Scholars argue that despite the positive aspects shown in the proposal, China’s recent record of successful multilateral approach and generous investments, there are underlying aspects that seem not supporting such gestures. Lin (2011) for instance argues that “conceptually, China’s New Silk Road is based on China’s resurging imperial role in the world”, and that helping Asian neighbors is merely a strategic frontier doctrine implemented by Beijing. Hence, some scholars argue that rephrasing MSR as extension of China’s Peaceful rise is merely a façade and that in reality it is China’s new strategy of gaining further influence and even its road to become a hegemony. There are both theoretical and historical reason that support this perceptions. There are many theories in the international relations that assumes it is impossible for China to rise peacefully.

Realist theory of international relations it is unlikely for any country to rise peacefully. As the primary goal of a state is survival, and the most practical way of survival is by becoming the most powerful state to which other countries are unable to challenge, it is natural for any country to seek to become hegemony. The historical records show that every power challenged the incumbent ones for the hegemonic status, and in the history, this was mostly achieved through war. France for instance, challenged Spain and Austro-Hungarian Empire and reached the top place in the international hierarchy. Germany, in the 19th century, aligned with Britain and challenged the British colonial rivals of France and Russia. In each cases, the rising power actively sought the wars as part of their strategy for rising and rapid acquisition of military strength was part of the strategy (Buzan and Cox 2013). Thus, according to realists, it is impossible for China to rise peacefully, thus its concept of peaceful development is merely a façade.

Offensive realism, introduced by Mearsheimer argues that states are concerned with accumulation of relative power as they will not be content with relative security from other states. Hence, the desire to reach for global hegemony is rather natural. Mearshimer argues that states will pursue any means to further their relative power. According to him, a state would extend its relative power
gap between themselves and their geographical neighbors to the point where military confrontation would be rationally inconceivable.

Looking at China’s OBOR strategy, someone might argue that this is the new way of how China is extending its relative power making military confrontation irrational or impossible for its neighbors. As OBOR proposes more connectivity and more interdependence, it is true that the project make China’s neighbors more dependent on China for its economy and connectivity.

Even historical narratives spread light to this argument that the New Silk Road is in reality China’s way of exerting influence. China is using General Zheng He’s voyages across the ocean and uses his image as symbolic of peace and friendship. However, Tensen Sen, Associate Professor at Baruch College, The City University of New York, argues that this is China’s attempt to push to spread a Sinocentric world order (Sen 2014). He takes the very same narrative of Chinese leaders and says that contrary to the utopian portrayal of the past, General Zheng He’s expeditions between 1405 and 1433 included military force in the preset-day Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and India to install friendly rulers and control strategic chokepoints. He even brought prisoners from Sri Lanka and Indonesia to Nanjing. Sen further records that Zheng He instituted a military regime in Sumatra in 1407, by abducting a local ethnic Chinese leader named Chen Zuyi, whom the Ming rulers considered as a pirate.

Beijing’s interest in enhancing its maritime capabilities supports the argument that MSR is one of China’s new strategy to be a maritime power. Since coming to power, President Xi Jinping emphasized on how China should strive to become a true maritime power. According to him, China should “strive to be a true maritime power” in the context of “China’s Peaceful rise” and “the pursuit of Chinese Dream” (Yoon 2015). According to Captain Yoon’s article,

“[…] China is trying to straddle the neo- and post-Mahanian worlds, and the complexity of this stance makes it increasingly likely that China will get involved in armed conflicts at sea….Xi Jinping has proposed for true maritime power a theoretical framework that appears to transcribe Mahanian theory directly into PLAN strengthens, apparently envisioning epic sea battles much like those fought in Mahan’s time by Western sea powers and also Japan” (Yoon 2015, 43)
Thus, China’s Maritime Silk Road is a proof of the fact of China’s rising maritime interest and its maritime expansion, similar to that of Song, Ming, and Yuan Dynasties (Yoon 2015, 41)

China’s recent assertive nature in handling international affairs make it less-convincing of its peaceful rise. Initiation of AIIB and push towards FTTAP with APEC members made the world to believe that OBOR is China’s way of ensuring its strong presence in Asia-Pacific in response to the US pivot to Asia-Pacific (Szczudlik-Tatar 2013). Thus the critics argue that the new Silk Road initiative is an attempt of China to displace the US from the region and gain leadership. Writing to Reuters, the journalist John Kemp says that “the Silk Road fund and Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank pose a direct challenge to the traditional primacy of U.S.-dominated financial and trade institutions in the region, including the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and Asian Development Bank” (Kemp, Opinion: China Flexes its Silk Road Muscle, 2014).

This support the popular realist argument that China’s rise causes inevitable conflict with the United States. In the eyes of Western powers, the rise of China poses a challenge and threat to the traditional Western-led international order. China which accounted for less than one percent of the world economy in 1978 became the world’s second largest economy in 2001, within a period of less than thirty years. According Randall Peerenboom, an American scholar, “China’s sustained success in moderation could well establish a concrete, alternative model of successful development, which may appeal to other countries with similar socio-economic and political conditions” (Zhang, 2010). In this backdrop, Beijing Consensus, characterized by socialist political system with a market economy is gaining popularity as an alternative to the Washington Consensus which promotes democracy and capitalism. According to Joseph Nye, the father of soft power diplomacy, “in parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America, the so-called ‘Beijing Consensus’ on authoritarian government plus a market economy has become more popular than the previously dominant ‘Washington Consensus’ of market economies with democratic government’ (Zhang, 2010). This ideological shift in the international arena is looked upon as the US losing its grip in international politics.

This arguments are further supported by some conflicts China has in its immediate neighbourhood. In Southeast Asia, China is engaged in several disputes over sovereignty of islands in South China Sea. China is in dispute with the Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia over the control of many
islands and reefs. The recent move of oil rigs in the disputed territory in the South China Sea raised concern of some countries in ASEAN and it further fuelled the “China Threat discourse” making it difficult to accept China as a benign and harmless power.

According to Martin Jaques, the writer of *When China Rules the World*, who predicts that China will surpass the US and will become dominant global leader, “the power of each new hegemonic nation or continent is invariably expressed in novel ways” (Anastee, n.d.). Taking examples from the history he argues that it was the maritime expansion and colonial empires that made the Europe the global leader, it was airborne superiority and colonial empires for the US (Anastee, n.d.). He further suggests that China will take similar innovative forms in gaining global superiority. In this sense, the New Silk Road Initiative of China can be viewed as the Chinese innovative measure of gaining supremacy in the world.

The proposed Silk Road initiative is viewed as the newest means of pursuing China’s grand strategy which can be elaborated as acquiring ‘comprehensive national power’ essential to achieving the status of a global great power that is second to none; gaining access to global natural resources, raw materials, and overseas markets to sustain China’s economic expansion; pursuing military build-up, multilateralism and multipolarity; and building a worldwide network of friends and allies through soft power diplomacy, trade and economic dependencies via free trade agreements, mutual security pacts, intelligence cooperation, and arms sales (Chaturvedy, 2014). Incidentally, the proposed initiative provide strategic access to regions different regions. Moreover, it seems that China is going out in search of natural resources and gaining access to them through developing transport network.

5 Conclusion

Misperception about China raise concern of its rise and increasing influence. The lack of understanding of the international society about China’s national conditions, and ideological estrangements, and China’s lack of attention to the outside response of its own image cause misunderstanding between the two parties. As a result, China’s New Silk Road initiative has been questioned by different groups and countries. Moreover, China’s disputes with neighbours with regard to sovereignty of islands in the South China Sea add fuel to these misperceptions.
According to a survey conducted among the strategic thinkers in Asia by Center for Strategic and International Studies, China is viewed as a potential threat to regional peace and stability. According to this survey 38 percent believes China to be a threat compared to 12.9 percent who believes the US to be a threat in Asia. In the meantime, 40 percent of respondents cite the US to be the greatest force for peace and stability in the future compared to 26 percent that picked China (Zhang, 2010).

China does not score acceptance in Asia itself. According to 2008 public opinion survey conducted by Chicago Council on Global Affairs and East Asia Institute strong majority in South Korea, Japan and the US and a plurality in Indonesia is concerned of China becoming a military threat in the future (Zhang, 2010). Majority outside East Asia too shares similar views according to Pew Research Center’s public opinion Survey in China. Accordingly, the majority in Spain, France, Germany, Poland, Jordan, Turkey, Japan, and a substantial population in the US, Australia, Brazil, South Korea, India and Lebanon, have unfavourable opinion on China (Zhang, 2010). Thus convincing the world on its peaceful rise and convincing its new policies are merely economic oriented will not be an easy task.

Thus China will have to work harder to address the trust deficit existing in the world if it wants to eliminate the “China Threat” perception. China will have to face the challenge of convincing Russia, the influential power in the Central Asia of its presence as less-threatening to Russian influence in the region. Attempts to build rail and road networks connecting Central Asia with Europe have been failed several times in the past due to opposition from Russia. Currently there are three artery railway lines running from Alma Mater and Tashkent northward and northwestward to Russia joined by the Siberian railway (First Continent Bridge) (Zhiping, 2014). Later it was proposed to link the Second Continent Bridge, which goes from Alataw Pass westward, linking the old Alma Mate-Petropavlvsk artery line near Astana with the First Continent Bridge. The project failed as Russia opposed replacing the First Continent Bridge of the Siberian railways. In 2004 a proposal made by Kazakhstan to build a Pan-Eurasia Rail Artery, which will start from Kazakhstan and then go to Caspian Sea, Turkmenistan, Iran and Turkey, finally integrating with European rail network was vehemently opposed by Russia.

The trans-Eurasia undersea rail tunnel which runs through Bosporus Strait and links the European and Asian parts of Istanbul theoretically enabled the possibility of travelling to Beijing from
London via Istanbul, according to Turkish Prime Minister, Erdogan. In order to make this a reality an undersea passageway should be opened in the Caspian Sea. Yet, this idea will remain unrealized for Russia will not accept opening of the Caspian Sea undersea tunnel (Zhiping, 2014).

According to critics, the reason for the failure of China-Kyrgyzstan railway line in 1999 again was the opposition from Russia. The railway line needed only 577 kilometers integrate in Xinjiang with TRACECA (Zhiping, 2014). In this context, connecting China with Europe via Central Asia through rail and road network would be a great challenge for China if Beijing fails to get Russian support. Furthermore, despite improved relations between the two powers, Russian elite still perceive that rising China could pose threat to its national security. Moreover, the fact that Russia and China not sharing the same goals and interests in global and regional affairs is also a concerning.

Moreover, there is long rooted distrust of China in Central Asia, both due to 60 years of Soviet dominion and ethnic and religious reasons. Thus Central Asia tends to look towards Russia for leadership and protection. China seems using a strategy centered on financial means in Central Asia through investing in oil and gas fields and increasing politico-military cooperation. This move is commented as China expanding its influence in Russia’s traditional backyard. In this context, gaining full support for China’s ambitious Silk Road Economic Belt would not be easy. China should note that financial means alone will not win the hearts of Central Asian countries. Hence, it is apparent to use non-energy, and resource related infrastructure investment to win the goodwill in the region. China will have to engage in more projects similar to recent repairing of a damaged pipeline in Kazakhstan which lack direct and tangible benefit for China.

China will inevitably has to face the US intervention in the Silk Road initiative. As the world’s hegemony, the US is under the opinion that its national interests exist across the world. While observing the changing status quo through China-advocated Silk Road initiative, the US will use its political, economic and cultural influence to intervene in its information as it does not want to lose its influence in the region to China.

China will have to make an extra effort in order to improve its image as a benign and peaceful power. Whilst using the Silk Road initiative to boost its economy, China can promote its culture
and knowledge through enhanced people-to-people partnership. Multilateral relations which will enhance through the Silk Road initiative can be used to eradicate distrust.

The New Silk Road initiative should not be viewed as a “zero sum game”. Whilst the project will bring massive economic benefit to China, it also facilitate development of other countries. For instance, new North-South transit and trade routes linking Central and South Asia can complement growing East-West connections across Eurasia. Global interconnectivity is a fundamental characteristic in globalization. Thus the Silk Road initiative should be looked as an attempt to further globalize the world.

6 References


