

The Silk Route: A New Development Model?

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This article is about the significant development actually and visibly shown by the Popular Republic of China which, since several decades ago, has shown to the world, through its government and people, that orderly and well-planned work, with concrete goals and through several reforms along with a permanent strife against corruption, always looking towards future, has transformed China into a fully undeniable global power, an object of admiration in some cases, of concern in other cases and, always, an object of wondering... What has this millenary nation done to be regarded, in the 21st century, as the second (maybe the first, already) economy in the world?

Keywords: *Chinese dream, reforms, geo-strategy, new development model.*

It is a privilege for me to talk about the great development that China has had through the famous Project One Belt-One Road. I will work it summarily, even though I know that its relevance is capital. My exposition has the following structure:

- I) Tradition and Modernity of Present-Day China.
- II) One Belt-One Road Project.
- III) The Chinese Dream and the Socialist Market Economy.
- IV) Geostrategic Vision: Towards a New Development Model.
- V) Conclusions.

I. Tradition and Modernity in Present-Day China

In 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping gave his famous speech at the VII World Conference for Friendship of Chinese Overseas Associations, where he said: ‘Chinese civilization dates to more than five millennia, and it is the *powerful spiritual force of permanent self-enhancement and strengthening of the Chinese nation...*’ ‘Chinese culture is the common gene for all Chinese’ (Xi 2014a: 79). Why do I want to start with these ideas? ... Because they illustrate what I found as a fundamental motivation for Chinese people, regardless of where they live: their strong feeling of belonging and pride of their own culture and their own nation, impelling as an inner motor in their work, their values, their organization, their love for their country and their openness to other cultures. These features are a part of their own civilizing and cultural tradition.

This is shown by their history itself, where we discover a civilization that is full of contrasts, because the encounter with the marvelous vestiges of the great Chinese Empire is unavoidable, such as the Great Wall, Forbidden City of the Heaven Temple and, since October 1, 1949 (*cf.* Covi 2011), with the official foundation of the New China

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(PRC), the opening to modernity, whose symbols – at the physical level – can be the Tiananmen square, at Beijing's heart; the wonderful installations for 2001 Olympic Games, or the China Zun Tower, fully built at the town's financial center.

The Great Wall has been a silent witness of Chinese people's ancestral fights and victories, of their home defense and protection; its valleys, high mountains, lakes and seas have been utilized, explored and cultivated by those who have lived and still live in that huge country¹. In the fields of science and culture, their millenary inventions such as the paper, the compass, the powder, and a primitive printing press, are a legacy for humanity which, along with the ancestral and always actual wisdom of men as Confucius and Mencius, inserts by its own right into classic universal thought.

By this I mean that, in China, past and present intertwine, but always looking at future with discipline, robust work, creativity, generosity, friendly relationships and a powerful commerce in its travels on land and overseas. Is it not true that, more than 2100 years ago, Zhang Qian, of the Chinese Han dynasty, was sent twice to Central Asia as the leader of peace and friendship missions (...), and set in operation the Silk Route communicating East and West, Asia and Europe?' (Xi 2014f: 353)

With those trips, the ancient Chinese Empire *promoted*, from the third century BC to the seventeenth century AC, not only trade exchange and connection between countries and continents, but also friendship and cooperation relationships and – to some extent – the economic and cultural development of such places. The Silk Route, in its origin and development, connected countries such as Kazakhstan, Mongolia, India, Arabia, Turkey, Persia (currently Iran) (Oriental Express-Central Asia), Italy and the Mediterranean coast with Marco Polo's trips² (the thirteenth century AC) (Oldcivilizations's 2012) and, centuries afterwards (in the 16th – 17th Centuries AC), the New Spain (currently Mexico), with the arrival at its coasts of the legendary 'Nao de China' (China Vessel), coming from Taiwan and the Philippines (Notimex 2013). For all these reasons, the Silk Route³ may be regarded as a project with a great significance, and one of the events that are most significant of trade and cultural openness in world's history, even though its continuity is not linear but – in our time – geostrategic.

II. One Belt, One Road Project

Currently, this is the indubitable object of the New Chinese Silk Route, formally announced by President Xi Jinping in three important addresses in 2013: 1) September 7 at Nazarbayev University (Kazakhstan), where he proposes 'The economic belt of the Silk Route'; 2) October 3, at the Indonesian Parliament, where he talks about the '21st Century Maritime Silk Route'; and 3) October 24, addressing those responsible for diplomacy with neighboring countries, insisting upon the relevance of the double project.

¹ Currently, 1,380,996,000 inhabitants, with most diverse ethnic groups, in a land extension of 9,592 million of km². World countries classified by population in: <https://www.saberespractico.com/demografia/paises-por-poblacion/>. Accessed May 12, 2017.

² Oldcivilizations's (21 de Julio de 2012). Marco Polo y la Ruta de la Seda. (Oldcivilizations, Productor) Recuperado el 12 de Mayo de 2017, from Marco Polo y la Ruta de la Seda. Available at: <https://oldcivilizations.wordpress.com/2012/07/21/marco-polo-y-la-ruta-de-la-seda>.

³ Routes of caravans crossed Europe and Central Asia from China to the Mediterranean Coast (...). Caravans transported the prized silk from China, spices and precious stones from India and Arabia, silver goods from Iran, slaves from Turkey, ceramic from Afrasiab, and many other goods (Oriental Express-Central Asia).

I will briefly comment about these significant milestones.

In the first two addresses, he invites several Central Asiatic countries to ‘build an economic belt along the Silk Route’, colloquially referred to as ‘One Belt, One Road’, referring to the belt of integrating countries and the maritime routes that would be open with one common objective of political communication, economic and commercial cooperation, monetary circulation, pacific communication and well-being of peoples along its path (Xi 2014f). By 2017, this project has caught ‘like wildfire’ at a global level.

In his last speech, he stresses the need to ‘speed up connection of infrastructure between China and our neighboring countries, and establish a Silk Road Economic Belt and a Maritime Silk Road geared towards the demands of the 21st Century’ (Xi 2014b: 367), based on friendship, sincerity, reciprocal work and inclusion.

A first step about this visionary and ambitious project, in 2013, was the strengthening of regional cooperation and friendship links with the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC)⁴ and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)⁵, whose alliances dated back to 2000 and 2001, respectively. They bring together several Euro-Asiatic countries regarded as close neighbors and friends, with whom China wished to continue ‘peaceful development and independent foreign policies of peace’ (Xi 2014f: 355).

By the same token, President Xi stated: ‘We should expand regional cooperation with a more open mind and a broader vision, and achieve joint progress. Global economic integration is accelerating, and regional cooperation is booming’ (Xi 2014f: 356).

And in Indonesia, referring to the opening of the maritime Silk Route, he said:

China places foremost importance on Indonesia's standing and influence in ASEAN⁶. We wish to work with Indonesia and the other countries to ensure that China and ASEAN are good neighbors, good friends and good partners who share prosperity and security and stick together through thick and thin... (Xi 2014i: 320)

China is ready to open its door wider to the ASEAN countries based on equality and mutual benefit and enable the latter to gain more from China's development. China is prepared to upgrade the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area and increase two-way trade to one trillion dollar-worth by 2020 (Xi 2014i: 321).

⁴ The Member States are: Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The Agreement to create EurAsEC was signed on October 10, 2000 by the leaders of five of these countries. Uzbekistan joined EurAsEC in 2005. Moldavia, Ukraine and Armenia are Observers of EurAsEC. Cf. EurAsEC in: <https://mx.search.yahoo.com/search/?p=Euroasian+Economic+Community&fr=spigot-chrffmac&type=671737&iic=12&ei=UTF8>. Retrieved May 14, 2017.

⁵ The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an intergovernmental international organization composed of six countries: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, founded in Shanghai in 2001. Cf. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization in: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/shanghai-cooperation-organization>. Retrieved May 14, 2017.

⁶ The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), founded in 1967, grouping together Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia, signed a free trade agreement with China, in Phnom Penh (Cambodia), in 2002, which came into force in 2010. In: https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%81rea_de_Libre_Comercio_ANSA-China (Retrieved, May 14, 2017).

The regional block is devoted to accelerating economic growth, social progress and cultural development through cooperation programs. In: <http://co.china-embassy.org/esp/zt/zgrq/t226279.htm> (Retrieved, May 14, 2017).

Southeast Asia has, since ancient times, been an important hub along the ancient Maritime Silk Route (...) Joint efforts to build the 21st Century Maritime Silk Route (Xi 2014f: 361).

In his message, the concepts of *route, project, regional and global strategy* are neatly perceived as having as a goal the materialization of the Chinese Dream, including the proposal for a *new development model*, in a peaceful, collaborative, respectful, fair manner, based on a conviction about the value of reciprocal work.

III. The Chinese Dream and the Socialist Market Economy

What is the Chinese Dream?... Revitalizing the great Chinese nation with a program that should very well designed at a *strategic level* of adjustments and reforms of Chinese economy and internal policy, with a necessary *global impact and an impact on international relations*, as expressed by President Xi in another memorable address on November 17, 2012 at the CPC National Congress, where he outlined an integral plan to achieve various objectives at medium and long terms, including the ‘construction of a modestly well-off society, with an accelerated impulse to socialist modernization, and achieving new victories of Socialism with Chinese features’ (Xi 2014e: 6), which shows a decisive *turn* of Government regarding socio-economic policies prior to promulgation of the New China in 1949, policies that were linked, to a greater or lesser extent, to the orthodoxy of Soviet Communism.

With the foundation of the New China, gradual reforms were started, towards a development model with Chinese features, where prosperity for all – particularly for the poorest – was to be guaranteed, under the impulse of a philosophy that should integrate, include and consider the great Chinese population in its own identity, wherefrom the expression ‘Socialism with Chinese features’ is justified. The change of ‘Communist regime’ to ‘Socialism with Chinese features’ is *very symptomatic* of the new winds blowing in the country and of the change that had been looked for to achieve the revitalizing, strengthening and emerging of what currently is the Asian Giant. And all this carried out with patience, non-strident work towards the outside, and clearly defined and appraised development goals, willing to show the world that modern China was ready to open its doors to other nations in a peaceful, friendly way, with willingness for collaboration... How?...

Internal Policy

As to *internal policy*, working intensively, creatively and systematically in the great project of setting in the ‘New China’, including, since first steps, the permanent fight against poverty, backwardness, lack of education and underdevelopment, particularly in rural areas. This fight was started, in a systematic way, by the end of the 1970s (Li 2017), after a policy of reforms and openness was set up⁷. According to data from World Economic Forum, it has achieved a reduction of poverty index in over 800 million rural inhabitants (Ryder 2017), which is nowadays an extraordinary and exemplary advance in poverty abatement for any country.

⁷ During the first seven years of official Chinese ‘reform and openness’, started in 1978, it is estimated that about 110 million persons per year left poverty. During the next 15 years (1985 to 2000), the advance rate was considerable decelerated, with 26 million persons above poverty line per year. From 200 to 2015, the figure was a little more than 22 million persons a year. Current Government’s objective is taking out of poverty ten million persons per year’ (Ryder 2017).

This shows that the Chinese Government has clear criteria about a *scientifically planned*, constantly *appraised* development, ‘advancing day by day towards prosperity and strength, and opening to such revitalization the perspectives for an unprecedented splendor’ (Xi 2014c: 4), following its own millenary cultural tradition and civilization, and ‘Chinese people’s shared aspiration and elevated ideals’ (Xi 2014d: 61). But not only this, ...At the governance level and management of current day China, there has been *continuity* and *innovation* on historical contributions such as Mao Zedong (1893–1976), main founder of the Popular Republic of China; Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997), general architect of Chinese reform openness and modernization; Jiang Zemin (1926–), creator of the ‘triple representativeness’⁸ concept, an essential component of the theoretical system of Socialism with Chinese features; Hu Jintao (1942–), main creator of the scientific conception of China development, and now President Xi and other Chinese hierarchs, with their shared global vision, and their various contributions and initiatives for the fulfillment of the Chinese Dream – among these, outstandingly – the ‘Road and Belt Project’.

This way of proceeding shows a *route*, *continuity* in *central planning*, *strategy* and a *vision of future*⁹ of a nation willing to consolidate its projects and its international prestige in a sustainable way in our time, beginning with its own people, where one of its intentions – we have already said it – is the ‘construction of a modestly well-off society’, with a multi-ethnic population of over 1380 million Chinese, a goal that is not yet fully appreciated despite the efforts for decades, but which can be reached through the sustained and healthy development of economy, and clearly defined targets. For instance, at government management, ‘...for year 2020, at the economic level, the doubling of 2010 GNP and per-capita income for urban and rural inhabitants was planned (Xi 2014h: 70), and, in a permanent way, working for the strengthening of culture (soft power) (Jiang Chang 2014)¹⁰, and the daily and conscious practice of selected values for Chinese Socialism...Which are some of these values?...

Wu Xiandong, in his relevant article ‘*Why Does China Propose the Concept of “Socialist Core Values”*’, mention them: ‘...Promote prosperity, democracy, civility and harmony; promote freedom, equality, justice and the rule of law, and promote patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship’ (Wu 2014: 97). These values are the *axiological-*

⁸ It emphasizes in an outstanding way the role of the Chinese Communist Party in the strategic planning of the socialist model with Chinese features, the course of its development model and the interest and benefit of the Chinese people, which represents the Government’s fundamental interest, at the internal policy level.

⁹ It is interesting to observe this development strategy, proposed in 1987 at the XIII National Congress of China Communist Party, going down to details such as ‘solving the clothing and feeding problems’. The text is as follows: ‘(...). The first step goes up to the end of the 1980 decade, for materializing the doubling of GNP as compared to that of 1980, solving the clothing and feeding problem; the second step, extending to the end of the 20th Century, to double the GNP of the end of the 80s, with the life of people reaching the “modestly well-off” level; the third step, up to mid-21st Century, to get the GNP per capita reaching the level of moderately developed countries, so that people’s standard of life reaches a relative comfort and modernization gets basically materialized’ (Xi, Acting closely in maintaining and developing Socialism with Chinese features, 2014g: 25).

¹⁰ In 2013, we, in a relevant group of scholars from all over the world, led by Prof. Dr. Jiang Chang, signed the Wuhan Declaration of the First World Culture Development Forum, where the ‘Advanced Institute for Humanistic Studies’ was inaugurated at Hubei University to promote, all over the world, Culture Development. Among the signatories were Dai Maotang, Yu Wujin, Wu Xiandong, Hortensia Cuéllar, Corazón Toralba, Lidya Amir, Sun Weiping, A. L. Samian, Han Gang-Hyen, etc.

moral basis of the Chinese people, to which those values linked to China reforms and openness to the world are added, such as innovation, respect and comprehension for other people's values, shared work, collaboration and world peace.

Such values, selected for the strengthening of a nation's identity, *are or can be practiced* by many other human beings in the world, since they are universal values: they just must be discovered, appreciated and chosen. Would not our world be more human if we had in mind humanity's paradigms?¹¹

For this country's strategists, this is a vision of permanent disciplined work, rooted within the innermost desires of Chinese patriots who are clearly aware that – without forgetting the millenary inheritance they are proud of – in current times, it is only through reorganization and the required adjustments to economy, through constant work, love to homeland, education, attention and cultivation of science and new technological trends, and development of culture that a *real* raising of Chinese people's level of life can be achieved.

Socialist Market Economy

For this purpose, it is necessary to have precise objectives regarding the development model with Chinese features, which has shown *its own identity* to the world: it is not Neo-Liberalism¹²; it is not a German-style social market economy¹³; it is not a protectionist model¹⁴. It is rather an *ad-hoc* model known as '*Socialist market economy*', whose relevance was envisioned since at least 25 years ago. By this token, Xi Jinping tells us: 'In 1992, at the XIV National Congress of the Party, the objective was proposed of reforming the *Socialist market economy*¹⁵, so that the market plays its basic role in the assignment of resources under the State's regulation and macroeconomic control' (Xi 2014g: 93 – *italics are mine*).

This is a State centralism in the macroeconomic control, but with a tremendous trade freedom at the global level, which amazes everybody. Who are the beneficiaries? We

¹¹ I have developed these ideas in different texts: *El ser y la esencia de los valores. Una axiología para el siglo XXI* (Being and the Essence of Values. An axiology for the 21st Century) (2009); 'The Question about Dignity and the Value of Education' (Beijing 2015); 'The values of knowing how to coexist and get concerned about other persons'. A safe way in favor of human development and peace (São Paulo 2016).

¹² With the idea of not simplifying what is complex because of the vast number of variables to be considered, I mention some sources that can be consulted to perceive the difference regarding China's proposal. About Neo-Liberalism, *cf.* Boas & Gans Morse 2009; Nozick (1988); Argandoña (1990). In: www.iese.edu/research/pdfs/DI-0193.pdf. Consulted, May 25, 2017.

¹³ Regarding the German model, *cf.* AA.VV. (2011); Buscher (1993).

¹⁴ A current protectionist attitude is that of Donald Trump, whose campaign slogan 'America first' led him to his country presidency. It is paradoxical that a successful entrepreneur, with business all over the world, thinks that current trade practice at the international level damage his country's economy, thus becoming necessary making a turn towards domestic consumption and investment, and revising trade agreements such as NAFTA, the free trade agreement between the United States, Mexico and Canada which, in Trump's opinion, is unfair for USA workers and economy. This mentality led him to sign an official executive order (January 23, 2017) for the USA to leave the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). What other initiatives will he implement in this regard? *Cf.* Trump firma orden ejecutiva para abandonar el TPP, in: [www.http://noticieros.televisa.com/ultimas-noticias/eeuu/2017-01-23/donald-trump-retira-a-estados-uidos-del-acuerdo-transpacifico/](http://noticieros.televisa.com/ultimas-noticias/eeuu/2017-01-23/donald-trump-retira-a-estados-uidos-del-acuerdo-transpacifico/). Consulted on May 25, 2017.

should not forget that any economic, political and social system must be at the service of the human being. Is this so at the Asian Giant?

Twenty-five years later, *i.e.*, in our time, it has been seen that the Chinese market, with its huge production plays a *decisive* rather than just basic role (Xi 2014g: 95) for the fulfillment of targets in the real, sustained and sustainable development of that nation, as can be empirically observed through the macroeconomic achievements and the internal development accomplished, as well as the large openness and collaboration projects with many other nations in the world... What is the secret for this success?...

IV. Geostrategic Vision Towards a New Development Model

At the *external* level, ‘China needs to know better the world, and the world also needs to know better China’, which means that, *in external policy and at a geopolitical level*, openness is required, *i.e.* the reciprocal acquainting between China and the different countries in the Earth, carried out in a peaceful, friendly way, with economic, commercial, scientific and cultural collaboration with all nations with which alliances have been set up, with an attitude of open and collaborative market with a ‘win-win’ target. For this reason, upon protectionist attitudes such as that announced by President Donald Trump at the beginning of his term only six months ago, China's response was increasing its trade openness to the entire world, based on the experience that its development model, significantly supported by its internal production and global trade has taken out of poverty millions of people, as recently acknowledged by World Bank President Jim Yong Kim (Xinhuanet 2017).

The One Belt, One Road Project initiative, at the current time, is the original and visible response of the Asiatic Giant to the challenges of a very competitive Neo-Liberal international commerce with ‘big fish eating little fish’ and a very little impact on the Human Development Index of *most* nations in the world, despite UN's efforts by globally proposing the 17 Objectives for Sustainable Development for 2030 (UN 2016), for whose fulfillment a sustained growth in GNP of at least 7 per cent is required (UN 2017), a very remote goal for nations with a low economic growth, which are a majority in the world.

The Chinese project with its current features is unprecedented because it represents ‘a network of connectivity composed by maritime and land economic corridors between China, Eurasia, the Middle East, Europe, Africa’ (Ryder 2017) to which Latin America is expected to join in a brief time (La Jornada-Economía 2017: 23). Its aim is setting up a cooperation platform to activate world economy in a peaceful, inclusive and mutually beneficial way, as repeatedly expressed by Xi Jinping, to promote the *development* not only of neighboring countries or those located within the ancient Silk Route, but of all *countries* in the world. It is about the ‘new commercial face of China for the World’ and, reciprocally – it seems to me – ‘all roads lead to China’. Does not indeed this initiative represent a change in world order paradigm? I am convinced that it does.

China – world's great factory – has been constant in its objectives of internal strengthening of its economy and activation business and market at a global level, and it has known how to do this very well, since its products, simple or sophisticated, circulate all over the world and are at the reach of any buyer, within the freedom of markets at the international level, but with new features derived from the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Project, which is the search for the reciprocal benefit of those involved at a bilateral or multilateral level, and the prosperity for peoples, without forgetting that the center of any development

model is the human being (Xi 2014e: 24), on whom efforts of any time must be focused at an integral level. Good intentions or ideal projects will not suffice, but concrete achievements, responding to concrete goals at the service of common good. And this seems to be the case.

V. Conclusions

In China, there has been a steering turn in relation to former approaches: here the human being, human beings, have ‘a face and a name’: the people is composed of each of the inhabitants, for whom a ‘solution to clothing and food problem’ was looked for at the 80s. This goal has been achieved in a good proportion because, according to data from World Economic Forum – as we said before – poverty index has been reduced in over 800 million rural inhabitants, and GNP growth in 2016 was 6.7 per cent, which is reasonable, related to the 10.6 % growth in 2010. This shows readjustments in China's own economic, financial and social indicators. This is one of the keys to understand the ‘Socialist market economy’, and the new Chinese development model, which is open and inclusive... Will it become universal?...

As to keys to its success, I find them in pride about its own identity and its millenary roots; in the dedicated and continued study to overcome internal underdevelopment and corruption, with the required legal reforms; precise goals set to be achieved by Government regarding objectives of improving life standards and increasing economic, social and spiritual wellbeing of the great Chinese people; modernization, a vision of future and a scientifically programmed ‘development model with Chinese features’, which has proved its effectiveness. All this, linked to the commercial and cultural openness, alliances and pacific inclusiveness in infrastructure projects, as well as friendship with near-by and far-off nations, in the great geostrategic network representing the ‘One Belt, One Road Project’ initiative.

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