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Chapter III

THE NEW SILK ROAD OR THE RISE OF CHINA GEOPOLITICAL POWER

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THE NEW SILK ROAD OR THE RISE OF CHINA GEOPOLITICAL POWER

A. Introduction

Since the early 1980's, in the framework of its first major Reform and Opening, Deng Xiaoping warned us that China would continue, as an economic strategy, an *experiment* that was not on the books. The Western voices that attempt a reasonable interpretation of the Asian phenomenon have lived relentlessly trying to decipher and keep in step with a China that for four decades has known no rest. Since then, apprentice of the global process, and now, converted into the leader of globalization, it imposes its vision and its rhythm on a Western and peripheral world that is not able to realize what is next.

The new initiative One Belt One Road (OBOR), or Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), One Integration, One Path in Spanish, The New Silk Road, etc.,[33] constitutes, in fact, the second great opening of China. While in 1978 its way out was to the Pacific, for being a natural evolution towards its geographic strength and of the use of the infrastructure that had survived the economic collapse of its communist phase; the BRI , or its opening towards its opposite axis, namely, towards Central Asia, Asia Minor, North Africa and the countries of its western border (more than 70 countries), represents a bold measure of innumerable interpretations that the West has not fully understood, nor has it constructed an adequate interpretation, or even worse, tried to elaborate a response of the BRI's magnitude.

[33] The author will preferentially use throughout this essay the acronym BRI, within the framework of a torrent of expressions on the subject.

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The rescue of a millennial project? A new alternative to continental commerce? A new integration or regional association? The construction of a new geopolitical scheme? A new player of the multilateral commerce order? A different way of doing business? Contemporary adherents of the established global order? The first scaffolding of a new global order from the Asian continent? Unpublished chapters of the China-United States clash? A further escalation of the clash of civilizations? A Chinese positioning towards the confirmation of its global leadership by 2049?

It is not an exaggeration to assume that China's new BRI strategy, barely sketched in the speech delivered by Xi Jinping in the month of September 2013 in Kazakhstan, which he later ratified in Jakarta, Indonesia in October of the same year, involves, in a tacit or explicit way, the different categorizations enunciated in the previous paragraph which seek to be just a small sample of what the world begins to interpret regarding the BRI issue, which is discovered little by little like a snowball that in its passing breaks schemes, theories and paradigms that in just the first decade of the century were taken as immutable; or even worse, as is the case of Central Asia, where previously *inconsequential* economic issues, hidden by the sand of the millennia, now, because of China, are assumed to be strategic.

With the BRI proposal or the new Silk Road, with its relaunch, China communicates to the world without any reservation its clear desire to be the global leader of the 21st century in 2049, 100 years after the triumph of its revolution. Along with this, China makes public its new strategy to achieve it, reporting each of the three structural changes implemented for this purpose, as of the rise of Xi Jinping to power in 2012.

The first of these consists of the Reform of its political power, which was operated in March 2018 in the face of the promulgation of its Fifth Constitutional Reform (1987, 1993, 1997, 2004 and 2018). The second one consists of the Reform of its Economic Strategy, in the face of the implementation of its Made in

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China Plan 2025, 2035 and 2045. And the third strategy that refers to its Geopolitical Reform, in the face of the announcement of the new Silk Road or the global partnership initiative known as BRI in 2013.

China, at the end of the second decade of the 21st century, cannot be seen in the light of only one of these three structural changes, however important each one may be; nor does the traditional analysis of its first economic and political opening work. It is necessary to attempt an integral reflection that seeks the construction of a new narrative that describes each one of these three great actions; in a special way, from its connection and synergy with respect to the ultimate goal sought by China, which is to occupy the hegemonic leadership of the 21st century.

Certainly, this completely new project cannot be isolated from its referential framework. First, the one that corresponds to the implementation of a thousand-year-old idea that gives substance to the BRI, that refers to an emblematic and epic figure of the past —which is the Silk Road— and second, along with the removal of these historical and commercial dunes, that had been hidden for centuries, one cannot avoid, even in a referential way, analyzing the BRI in the midst of the rising debate between a legendary East (East Asia) and a declining.

In line with these concerns, the sections that follow will attempt to be a first approach to the description and relevance of what the BRI, or the New Silk Road, is, and what it could represent in this first half of the century.

B. BRI or a Return to the Origin

For China, the oldest existing civilization in the world, the BRI, or the New Silk Road, has meant the re-launching of a geopolitical strategy that was inaugurated in the year 138 B.C., when, in the framework of its second dynasty, the Han, Emperor Wu Di commissioned Ambassador Zhang Quian to venture into its eastern

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periphery in search of information, expansion, and trade, which gave rise to the millennial silk caravan.

At that time, China was boasting the founding of the first modern State, in 221 B.C., in the face of the submission of the *Seven Warring States* on the part of the first emperor Shi Huangdi, at the same time, it inaugurated the first works of the now Chinese Wall, as a defense against the *barbarians* from the north.

By means of Ambassador Zhang, China tried to learn more about an unknown and complicated region located between huge mountains and deserts. The first antecedent of the Silk Road lasted 13 years, full of uncertainties, risks, and dangers. However, Ambassador Zhang made a second trip that set a precedent of interest and a possibility that would be repeated with varying imagination and interest for around two millennia.

The Silk Road, in its origin, is a first encounter between the West and East through presumptions, merchandise, and spices. At the beginning of the Road the Western counterpart of the second Chinese Empire was the Roman Empire, which knew since Alexander the Great, who came to the banks of the Indus, that beyond Antioch (Syria) and Persia (Iran), existed great kingdoms that he never wanted to explore because he did not want to expose the stability of the empire. China did the same, despite having launched and protected a silk caravan that opened trade with distant and unknown peoples; and although it is stated that since Tiberius (370 AD) the silk clothing was known and that China knew of Rome (the legendary Daqin), the truth is that the ancient empires of the West and East did not know each other;[34] that the Romans believed that silk grew on trees and it wasn't until 652 A.D. that Nestorian monks introduced to Europe silkworm cocoons hidden inside a bamboo cane (Marco Polo, 2014).

China was satisfied with knowing about Central Asia, and Rome did not want to see beyond Antioch in a first East-West

34 Seneca said "These silk outfits are acquired at an enormous price from people who are not known for their trade: just so that our women make themselves as visible in public as they are to adulterers in the bedroom" (Höllmann, 2015).

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meeting where the other was known but there was no political will for expansion. Within these intuitions, the silk caravan worked as a witness of the other which was evidenced by its merchandise, which in the case of China was led by silk and multiplied by porcelain, precious woods, precious metals, gems, spices, animals, etc.

Naturally, the Chinese Soft Power made itself present since then, as a strategic weapon of doing business:

“The Chinese words were always soft, their contents always weak. With its soft words and weak contents, it is said, the Chinese attract people who live far away…” (Old Turkish inscription, Mongolia, Höllmann, 2015).

But also the Silk Route was an open artery between the East’s and West’s civilizations, through which religions, insurgent movements, invasions, slaves, gold, silver, war, etc., traveled. Similarly, a civilizing route was opened where the culture of the other was percolated, which had an intermittence determined by the geopolitical cycle of the moment, of great flowering, for example, in the Han era, but dominated by the Kushans in the 3rd century A.D., re-launched with the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.), defended during the Pax Mongolica (14th century), and collapsed along with the Mongol Empire. The emergence of the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922) summoned again its operation and motivated the opening of a Silk Maritime Route that arises along with the innovation of Chinese ships and instruments of the 14th and 15th centuries, and that departed from Nan King (China), passed through the southwest of India (Calcutta), and arrived at Ormuz (Arabian Sea), and to Malindi, in what is now Kenya. It’s most audacious expression was in 1405 when it was able to charter more than 300 ships of which there were 72 for the transport of goods; however, for reasons still controversial, the Chinese Ming emperors decided to cancel the sea route, leaving only short stretches. This caused the breakdown of its fleet at a time when the world was debating its geopolitical future in the seas. In the 19th century the Silk Road (Central Asia) was defined by Russian

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influence. And also in the 19th and 20th centuries, there is the decline of the Chinese Empire, which loses protection capacity with respect to its travelers and merchants. The Western renaissance and the fatigue of China motivate the beginning of the oblivion of a millenarian figure that paradoxically is recognized historically and is baptized as *the Silk Road* by the geographer Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen in 1877.

It is now, in the 21st century, that China decides, under the protection of its own hegemonic resurrection, to once again tap into an alternative of millennial origin, that gives it history, meaning and direction to its new commercial and geopolitical objectives with close to 70 countries (49 countries throughout Asia) because, to some extent, they all share in memory a long history of belonging and direction. China, as Thomas Friedman, believes that the Earth is flat and it allied with Asian countries that the global world did not remember and invites them to a great economic project. Through the BRI, China rescues the zone of oblivion and puts it back on the geopolitical map as a strategic hub for infrastructure, raw materials, gas, and oil.

However, the task will not be easy. When Alexander came to Punjab in India, his tired armies forced him to return to the West.[35] Now China, facing the new complexity of Asia, in its economic-political position, will have to deal with the internal problems of Iraq, the revolutionary movements of Kyrgyzstan (2005-2010), the civil-religious problems of Pakistan and Afghanistan, the civil war in Syria, the presence of ISIS in much of Asia, the violence in Tajikistan, the Kurdish conflict, these will be just some of the challenges that, like Alexander's generals, will challenge China to bring the bold BRI initiative to fruition.

"The skill of following in the footsteps of the past", stated King Wu-Ling in 307 B.C., "does not guarantee improving the world today" (Frankopan, 2015). The millennial China of the 21st century will have the challenge, in this re-launching of the Silk Road, to take these words into account.

35 Without reaching the West, he dies in the year of 323 B.C. in Babylon.

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C. BRI, ¿Clash of Civilizations?

In the 19th century, a first encounter of civilizations was lived before the belligerent arrival of Great Britain to China (1839) and the United States to Japan (1854). This first debate, shock, encounter, fusion, etc., far from being concluded, has lasted in time and now, as a half of the century advances, between China and the United States becomes increasingly visible. The measured acceptance of the nineties and even the denial of this hypothesis, little by little has been giving way to the analyses that try to comment on this clash in more realistic terms. The debate now continues regarding the level and adjectivization of it. Whether it is just a commercial clash or whether it is about discussing the hegemony of the 21st century. Whether this is confined to the two nations, or it involves the entire West against East Asia. Or, as the configuration of the BRI seeks now, the inclusion of 49 nations from all over Asia, adding Central Asia and Asia Minor.

Beyond denials and demands of absolutes that confuse the analysis, the BRI sends us forcefully to a beginning of East-West confrontation, which in addition to the different schools of thought that addressed it since the 18th century, today connects directly with the discourse and contemporary strategy of the different political actors on the side of both parts.

The debate between East and West is not a new issue. However, the resurgence of China and East Asia, together with Western conflict and decline, place it back on the agenda of a global table where stories and leaderships reappear. The West, in light of its renaissance and illustration, forgot very early about its medieval past and decreed that the world started and ended in the West from the 16th century and from that triumphalism it built an omnipresent interpretation and a manifest destiny that it interpreted in the 20th century as an end of history where the West would reign forever in the world. From the Judeo-Greek-Latin root, the Western power took an irresponsible leap of more than 10 centuries and installed itself as the start of everything in the

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middle of the second millennium, within the framework of a pre-industrial era that endowed it with the necessary tools to its geopolitical military advance, having as its destination the rich Asian civilizations.

In its haste, the West forgot that during 90% of the modern time India and China led the world's economic wealth within the framework of their ancient civilizations and vast demographics.

The debate of the East-West pre-eminence, which was born mainly together with its maritime encounters in the 15th and 16th centuries and the discovery of China by the religious groups that frequented it in the 17th and 18th centuries, shows up with all its historical weight in currents of thought that are now rescued, that begin to sharpen arguments in the re-composition of a dormant debate, not forgotten, of the sympathizers of both sides. The Westerners, sheathed in the still supremacist discourse of the last quarter of the millennium, and the Orientalists, rescuing from the memory chest the old blazons and current cultures that gave them meaning.

The Western side, where a contempt for the Oriental has prevailed since the Academy, still considers that it is important to underline that the West has been the most developed region of the world during fourteen of the last fifteen millennia of the history of mankind. That the West has been the technological leader of the world for a million and a half years. That in cultivated plants, fortifications, proto-writing, large towns, domestication of animals, comprehensive agriculture, cities, large buildings, ceramic elaboration, the West was always ahead of Asia with an average of 1700 million years (Morris, 2014, pp. 45, 46, 71, 168 and 169). Under this idea, Jaspers also states that, "The fact that only the European evolution has led to the Technical Age —which has given the whole planet a European appearance— and that the rational way of thinking has spread to everywhere seems to demonstrate this primacy". With a hint of justice, he adds, "True it is that also the Chinese and Indians —as well as Europeans— have felt like real men and have asserted their primacy as evi-

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dent". "But it does not seem to be the same as when all cultures believe that they are the center of the world, because only Europe seems to have retained its pre-eminence by virtue of their achievements" (Jaspers, 2017, p. 106).

The claim of supremacy in the midst of the unawareness of the other. In spite of being both millenarian cultures, in general terms, it can be said that until the maritime encounters since the 15th century, East and West knew each other only by intuitions, by sayings, by some merchandise and scarce trade. That the distance and the difficulty of their geography kept them distant. Both successful and often unsuccessful in their historical cycle. The arrival of Portuguese navigators to different parts of Africa since 1430,[36] the arrival of Columbus to America (1492), that of Vasco da Gama to India (1498), that of Giovanni Caboto to Terranova (1497), that of Christopher Columbus's cousin, Rafael Perestello to China, that of Magellan to Asia Pacific (1480), etc., together constitute a military maritime invasion that gradually dominated the Asian continent and especially, their most successful civilizations.

Paradoxically, the shock of the conquest also forced both latitudes to venture into the knowledge of the other. The West from the pride of the triumph, and the East from the grudge of the defeat. Therefore, the comprehension of one with respect to the other is still a pending issue, of which the East, from the recourse of the vindication, seeks to generate a new platform of takeoff.

The history of the East, beyond the European borders, is carried out primarily by catechization priests such as Juan de Plano Carpini (1245-1247) in the Karakórum region, just as Guillermo de Roubrouck (1253-1255), Juan of Montecorvino in Beijing (1271-1238); as well as Odorico de Pordenone (1314-1330); or the Jesuits who arrived in China since 1582 and that were the

[36] Of which, Morris says, it was one of the decisive moments in the history of the world, in which the domination of the West over the East became possible (Morris, 2014, p. 480). For Crespo, this moment refers to the discovery of America (Crespo, 2012, p. 25).

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source of the closest interpretation of the reality of China, headed by Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci, who developed the first draft of the Chinese translation dictionary. Of course, there were merchants like Marco Polo (1271-1295) and adventurers or researchers like Sven Hedin of Sweden (1895-1899); Aurel Stein of Great Britain (1900-1906-1913); Paul Pelliot of France (1906), among others. (Höllman, 2015).

Characterized by the late knowledge, the trend that defines most of the narratives of the different cultures of the East is the analysis that is made from the Western superiority, where Morris classifies them through the "School of the Ancient Destiny" (1750-1950) that explains the West's leadership as a process that had been brewing since immemorial time (Marx, Landes, Diamond, etc.) and the *School of Modern Randomness*, as of 1800, which argues that this superiority is somewhat random and the result of the modern juncture (Morris, pp. 21-37). Both schools have different approaches, but they have the same matrix of justification on the advantages of Western civilization.

By fortune, determinism, environmental issues, biological issues, climatic issues, etc., the West never stopped to build with greater or lesser modesty, a narrative of the Oriental from the logic of the white man, and the watchtower of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, which provided sufficient inputs to minimize the other, and disqualify it from competing in the military and in technology.

It is true that the theme of the Oriental in Europe also had a broad group of sympathies such as Leibnitz, Voltaire, Jones, Said, and many others. However, in the first quarter of the 21st century and before the obvious rise of China, as Osterhammel comments, the world is returning to the moments of the 19th century where it did not have any restraint in publicizing its dominance not only over the East but with respect to the four continents, which led it to deploy its more arrogant and condescending attitude with respect to other civilizations (Osterhammel, 2018, p. 3).

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On the Western side, within this current of the discourse of conquest that, in general, prevailed regarding the Orient, there is a breaking point that started in 1978 with the appearance of the book "Orientalism" by the Palestinian-American author Edward W. Said,[37] who through his book substantiated a scientific claim of the Asian nations, as well as the denunciation of the autistic and incapable discourse for dialoguing objectively with those cultures.

Said places the East as a fundamental part of Europe;[38] it highlights the neighborhood of its old Greek colonies, the richness of its ideas; of its permanent contact and exchange with the West as an integral part of European civilization. As an intellectual reference of its discourse and justification of its institutions, of its vocabulary, of its doctrine, etc., He also defines it through the development of the main characteristics that explain it. Of the ideas and academic institutions that speak of the Oriental and treat it through its main doctrines. In this group, he includes books, writers, poets, scholars, who accept the idea of an East-West through the study of their ontological and epistemological differences. He supports it in the same way through his texts, bibliography, history; of its discussion, teaching, forms of power; of its politics, sociology, ideology, militarism, despotism, of an intellectual realism without prejudices, etc. (Said, 2001).

37 Said's work has not been exempt from a broad debate and criticism, both from the East and from the West, among others: that he adopts a Foucaultian determinism that limits the work; that he does not give the due credit to his predecessors like Anouar Abdel-Malek and Abdul Latif Tibawi, among others; that he falls into the same totalitarian fallacies that he criticizes; that he lacks a historiographical method; that he falls into epistemological contradictions; that he fails to take into account important Orientalist texts; that his work has anti-Semitic features, etc. (Hallaq, 2018, p. 7). Relevant issues that seem essential in the analysis of a cultural production that encompasses the vastest civilizations of the world.

38 The idea of Asia as a continent is only from the 20th century. But its name is attributed to Herodotus, he named it after a nymph, daughter of Ocean and Thetis, among other interpretations.

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Said's work, due to the quality of its content and transcendence, has been the spearhead of a large school of critic and reflection on the subject, which starts from the need to recognize the depth of the subject without the prejudices of the conquest. Of inviting to debates in the academic or ideological field about Orientalism and the Oriental; regarding the origin and depth of each of the categories; in the framework of an inexhaustible universality of the multiple Oriental civilizations (Hallaq, 2018).

The East-West debate, initiated right with the takeover of the main Asian states by the West, tempered by the surprise of the 18th century and radicalized by the triumphalism of the 19th and 20th centuries, in light of the new China-United States encounter in the 21st century, resurges with great push on both sides, in a line of resistance so as not to lose what has been won by the West and to recover what the East believes was lost in these 200 years.

The most radical voices come from the Eastern countries on the rise, who, beyond commodities, trade and economic numbers, are building day after day a new discourse of return, where the search for the economic hegemony does not just appear, as in the case of China, but also that of a dusted civilization that claims a place in the construction of a new global order. Clearly, it is already announced that "The 21st century will witness the confrontation between the Atlantic impetus and the Pacific impetus..." and "That the 21st century will be characterized by the fact that East Asia will rise as the world center of power..." "That it would be risky both for Europe and for all mankind if pundits were incapable of liberating themselves from Eurocentric conceptions of the world —that—like the other parts of the world that enjoyed a splendor at other times, Europe is exhausted"[39]

[39] On the subject, Mahbubani recently provided the idea of "A great convergence", through which he explains the massive change that is being experienced globally. That since the beginning of mankind history, man has lived in different communities and tribes and in different cultures and civilizations. Now, the forces motivated by globalization are creating a new global civilization. That until recently, the North-South-Developed-Not-Developed themes were

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(Mahbubani, 2002). Huntington, for his part, thinks that: "The era that began with Western intrusions in 1840 and 1850 is coming to an end. China is taking back its place as a regional hegemonic power and the East is taking a stand of its own" (Huntington, 2001).

Some of the contemporary Asian intellectuals recommend, as part of the solution to the East-West problem, dismantling the conceptual and intellectual architecture of Western winning history, which has prevailed dangerously in its history and has shaped Anglo-Saxon thought (books, reports, newspapers, TV, etc.). Along with this, they propose that the West withdraw, as the religion of universal progress, the *Western Model* (democracy, capitalism, free market, etc.), as well as the recipes that they impose on the entire world (Mishra, 2017, p. 37). Osterhammel, from the Western point of view, also comments that when one remembers the 18th-century Eurasian equilibrium, it is not surprising that China understands its new geopolitical rise as a return to a historical normality and not as an economic miracle. That to recognize Asia as a partner on equal terms should not cause any problem in Europe, although it should be more difficult for the United States. After all, Europe has done it before (Osterhammel, 2018, p. 33).

The BRI, within this current framework of misconceived supremacies, cannot be interpreted as a commercial association scheme anymore. Its composition, today still informal, with the virtual participation of the 49 countries that are part of the largest continent on Earth, which occupies 30% of its living space and contains 60% of the world population in 45 million km², does not look anything like the commercial agreements of the 20th century and its objectives go beyond a simple trade exchange.

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the terms used. That now these terms seem irrelevant. That the convergence of income growth should be the story of our time. That in the 19th and 20th centuries, the story was the divergent incomes. That at that time the income of the West had a large edge over the rest of mankind. That now this is changing rapidly. That this is inevitable and desirable. That the West is not losing power. That it is only sharing it (Mahbubani, 2013, pp. 1-11).

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The announced change of Era from the Atlantic to the Pacific, along with the Asian inevitability (Oropeza, 2017), that set the global *litis*, first, between China and the United States, escalating later to the West (the European Union and the USA) and East Asia (16 countries), before the bold call of China to all its continental neighbors through the millennial figure of the Silk Road, forces the Western pundits to update their reflections from the integral rethinking of history between East and West, based on a still unresolved historical dispute, that together with the commercial, economic and political strategies of both parts, will be playing a preponderant role in this encounter, debate or clash of civilizations, where the ghosts of yesterday resurface demanding a new order of things.

It is evident that the Western discourse on the Orient that sets off from arrogance has been exhausted. That the West cannot continue to ignore the relevance of other cultures and civilizations that from their roots are reconstructing the integration of their political power and their new economic strategies. Given the weight of the figures and projects that are now announced as BRI, to continue to ignore their ethnicities and natures would be a big mistake. Similarly, in the face of the large challenges that all mankind will face, including that of its survival, it would also be desirable for the East to pass from the *useful* resource of resentment to the comprehensive proposal of a multicultural world.

For the purposes of this essay, it is enough to draw attention to the fact that the BRI issue, due to its size and the number of Asian countries convened, is already part of this debate of civilizations of the first half of the 21st century and that, with this, it reconfigures the vision of an area that is still seen today with ignorance and suspicion.

D. BRI and the Second Reform and China's Opening

The first reform and opening headed by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 was preceded by hunger, fear and the failure of a Maoist period

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that failed to solve the great social needs of the Chinese people. In the context of the death of President Mao in 1976, and of the second political actor of importance in the same year, Zhou Enlai, the return of the figure of Deng Xiaoping under a fortunate political juncture, installed him at the head of a weak power, with doubts, for whom it was urgent to ratify himself and to give concrete answers to an enormous population of more than 900 million people who required the basic necessities of their houses, their clothing, and their livelihoods.

Although the decision of the first reform and opening of the Chinese State was first and foremost an act of courage, after two millennia of closed doors, the internal options had been exhausted and the global economy under construction was presented as the irrevocable solution for a nation that in economic matters still had not entered the 20th century. The results of this decision are already history and will remain as an example of economic success in the history of mankind: the second nation according to its economic value, the first exporting nation, the first in manufacturing, the first in contributing to global economic growth, the second nation in terms of importations, are some of the economic results obtained in four decades, which have not been achieved before by any other country.

Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2012, as the fifth replacement of a political generation that began in 1949, in the face of the triumph of the Chinese Revolution, took place in a framework of circumstances totally different from the arrival of Deng, determined by economic success, political stability, and an important social rise of the Chinese people. Under these conditions, it would seem natural that the government of Xi, like those of Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin that preceded him, will continue with the winning formula of opening towards the Pacific in line with the unfolding of an Asian model of development with Chinese characteristics, to maintain the success of a widely recognized economic strategy. However, to the general astonishment, President Xi, son of a revolutionary hero (Xi Zhongxun), member of the political

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elite and declared follower of Deng's reformist line, having been appointed member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Party (11-15-2012), in a speech delivered at a labor inspection in Guangdong (12-7-2012), advanced that "...the guide of Comrade Deng Xiaoping, was wise and correct, and he is worthy to be considered the general designer of the reform and the opening of China and the emperor of the Socialist path with Chinese peculiarities". "From now on, we have to follow this successful path, because it is the way that strengthens the country and makes the people prosper—However, he warned; in addition to following it in an unalterable way, we have to adopt new needs and reach a new level" (Xi Jinping, 2014).

Days before this declaration, on November 29, 2012, shortly after the closing of the XVIII National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the newly elected General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Party, went to the National Museum to visit the exhibition "The Revitalization Path", and at the end of the visit, he incorporated, for the first time, into the Chinese political dogma the idea of building a *Chinese Dream*, which he ratified in his inaugural speech as president of the country when he deepened in the search of a dream that leads to the revitalization of the Chinese nation: "The greatest dream harbored by this nation since the beginning of modern times" (Xi Jinping, The Chinese Dream, 2014).

Xi pays homage and recognizes the leader of the first opening, Deng Xiaoping. However, through the political proposal of the construction of a Chinese Dream, he sets the mood for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the National People's Congress (NPC), and for all of China, the idea that the 1978-2012 phase was exhausted and required a *revitalization* for the fulfillment of its goals.

> The world is changing —Xi recognized— and China too. Hence, the development of Socialism with Chinese peculiarities must move forward following changes in the situation and conditions.

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> Only when China advances steadily along with the times will it be full of vigor. We are willing to take as a reference all the achievements of human civilization —although he clarified— but we will not copy the development modality of any country —to finally maintain— China's reform implies self-improvement and the development of a Socialist system with Chinese particularities (Xi Jinping. The Chinese Dream, 2014, p. 36).

As part of this concern, since he came to power in 2012-2013 and within the formulation of a new strategy and vision of Chinese development (Second Reform and Opening), during 2013 President Xi Jinping made state visits to the cities of Ashgabat (Turkmenistan), Tashkent (Uzbekistan), Dushanbe (Tajikistan), Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) and Astana in Kazakhstan, where, at the University of Nazarbayev, on September 7 of the same year, he launched, in the center of Asia, the call to build the new scheme of Association BRI or new Silk Road proposal that he extended in October of that year, in the Indonesian Parliament, with the maritime strategy of the same project.

On May 8, 2015, the launch of the BRI was followed by the economic program called "Made in China 2025", announced by the State Council, as a tool to consolidate China on the path of high industrialization. And in the months of October 2017 and March 2018, the CCP and NPC, respectively, operate a profound reform of the organization of the power in China, through a Constitutional Reform that consolidates Xi Jinping as the Chinese *Grand Emperor* indefinitely and without any limitation.

The new China, the China of the third decade of the 21st century, as it has already been said, cannot be analyzed under the parameters of the First Great Reform and Opening of 1978 operated by Deng Xiaoping. With all the successes, but also with all the challenges and risks of the great changes operated by Xi Jinping since 2013, the People's Republic of China forces us today to explore it, to understand where it is heading for in 2050, at least through the three new structural changes operated by Xi

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as of 2013, namely: BRI or the Geopolitical Reform, Made in China or the Economic Reform, and the Reform of Power or the Constitutional Reform.

E. BRI or Geopolitical Reform

From the Deng Era to the Xi Era

Deng Xiaoping advised his team in the eighties, facing the start of the Pacific opening, not to boast about their capabilities; that they wait for their time, and that they never show themselves as leaders in the face of the global competition. His dictum was respected and the Chinese economic re-launch and rise followed for almost four decades through a diplomacy of discretion and an apparent adaptation to institutions and to the established Western global order.[40]

However, the Chinese economic miracle and the geopolitical decline of the United States, in particular, and of the West, in general, among other reasons, influenced China's reservations and those of Xi. So, they considered that the time of modesty had ended and that the moment had come to show another attitude and to take the leadership flag of the future and to propose to the world the construction of a Chinese Dream; to show a people gifted with an exceptional creativity, creator of the great Chinese civilization, with the ability to continue expanding and strengthening their development path, advancing boldly and without hesitation (Xi Jinping, The Chinese Dream, 2014, p. 35). Within China's new attitude before the world, of debatable consequences within and outside the Asian country, is where the first consideration of

40 "To observe and analyze calmly, to secure our position, to deal with issues with confidence, to hide our capabilities and wait for the right moment, to be good at keeping a low profile, never lead a claim, to carry out operations of modest nature". The strategy of the 28 characters to deal with the changes, articulated by Deng Xiaoping in the early 1990s shortly after Tiananmen. In Cardenal, Araújo, 2011.

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the BRI began, which is created as a mega geopolitical strategy of multiple objectives, which as a whole must fertilize the consolidation of China as the global hegemon of the 21st century.

To this day, the BRI is an infinite multiplicity of topics, countries, projects, investments, challenges, oppositions, cultures, regions, civilizations, regional powers, trade, infrastructure, energy, demography, markets, and many more issues than during its gestation phase, which presents itself as a huge challenge to the rational interpretation of what it is today and of what it may become in the next three or four decades during which the completion of its installation is forecast. Notwithstanding, this lack of clarity from both the creators of the BRI and the users, and the bystanders who are interested in the subject, has not been an obstacle for the world to show itself restless and amazed given the uncertainty of a megatrend that is torn between the great transformation of the global world of today, or the failure of a political group that launched China with great audacity to the takeover of the global leadership in 2050.

The BRI numbers are impressive. At the start, nearly 70 countries from Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa participated, involving 70% of the world's population, which also make up 55% of the world's economic output and, in a relevant manner, 75% of the planet's hydrocarbon reserves.

In the times of Xi, the BRI, the Second Opening towards the West, no longer refers to a selective and timid opening like the one of 1978, in which the search for productive investments was privileged in exchange for an extremely cheap and abundant labor force. Nor does it refer to that gradual process of assimilation to a global institutionalization in which, to date, China takes part in nearly 400 international treaties. It is no longer the strategy of a country that tries to learn from the uses and customs from abroad to assimilate itself with its own characteristics. The apprentice of the global order, the one who spoke with suspicion from its backwardness, is gone. Given its global economic significance, where China is the first or second trading partner of more

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than 120 countries, or its contribution to world economic growth (32%), which is higher than the sum of the developed countries (ECLAC, 2017), China, through the BRI and its complementary strategies, paints in time a hegemony for the middle of the century; at the same time that it tries, given the Brettonian decline, to reconstruct the global order from the platform of Chinese Orientalism.

In this sense, the BRI, despite the discourses and contradictory definitions, tries to be the basis of a new time inaugurated from the vision of the *other*, of that Oriental being that was lost before the subjugation of the Western conquest from the 16th until the 20th centuries. Under this new time and vision of Xi, little by little emerges, among the official discourses, the opinion of a new generation that no longer sees China as the West's star pupil, but as a power with the capacity, strengthened in the last 100 years, that today allows it to become a leader of the international community destined to promote the process of a globalization that will build a new, safer and more prosperous world. (Lei, Liqiang, 2017, p. 19).

Some official media in China join this interpretation, noting that under the presidency of President Xi Jinping, the country is moving forward. That Xi is more ambitious and innovative in international politics than his predecessors and is convinced that China must develop a diplomatic policy that allows it to benefit from its role as a great power (People's Daily, October 1, 2014). Meanwhile, some academics also point out that China is using its rising influence to redesign the global economic governance (Lee Jong-Wha in Hong, p. 15, 2016). David Arase holds that China is using its great power in Asia to launch with the BRI a geo-economic and geopolitical agenda that generates a "community with a *common destiny*" "that maintains an asymmetric dependence with China". For Yong Deng, "The new Silk Road clearly reflects China's ambition to create through a Sinocentrism, a new Asian order" (David Arase and Yong Deng in Hong, 2016 p. 16,).

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China's proposal, on the other hand, is defined as an *initiative* and not as a *strategy*, with the idea that it can be built by all its adherents. As an open and inclusive initiative that contributes to the economic development of all its participants. A proposal which, as Xi points out, does not keep anybody out, nor is against anyone. That makes it a path for peace, for prosperity, for innovation and advancement of the civilization (Shicheng, 2018). A proposal that still today is presented in confused and nebulous terms. That as of its discursive launch in Kazakhstan, has gradually been taking shape and structure. First, through the formation of a work team and a Web page in 2015, two years after its launch. In the same year, with the publication of a core document that is presented as the mandatory reference to explain what is the BRI, entitled Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which was prepared by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), in coordination with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Furthermore, in 2015, the first Working Protocol was signed by China in Kazakhstan, called the Production and Investment Agreement, which included a total of 52 projects in various areas such as mining, energy, manufacturing, chemical industry, infrastructure, transportation, etc. Along with the previous documents, there is also the Investment Work Program signed by China and Pakistan, which, because of its advances in design and operation, is considered as the flagship program to guide the work and negotiations of the rest of the countries that are negotiating an agreement with the Chinese government.

Already in 2012, Xi Jinping announced a new thought for a new era. Five years ahead, the launch of the mega BRI strategy and the advances achieved to date already marks a before and an after in the strategy that China has been attempting since 1949.

Strengthened in the economic success of the last decades, Xi breaks with the idea of a prudent China and moves towards an intelligent discourse of global leadership with 70% of the world's population and half of the global economic GDP. With this posi-

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tion, in its rhetoric, it surpasses the United States by offering to the world a new alternative for economic development, for which it offers investment, credits, and technology, which China does not condition in exchange for reforms to the political or economic systems of the BRI countries.

China's new offer unfolds the terms of the first opening to its western side. By doing so, the BRI bifurcates China's development towards the problematic autonomous zones of Tibet, Xinjiang, and Mongolia; directing the road of infrastructure to the difficult mountain and desert areas of Central Asia (CA); to the regions of the three forces, or *demons*, of separatism, terrorism and extremism; to the long distances of a geographical area that before the BRI still seemed hidden from the eyes of the world. An initiative that because of its atypical nature and audacity, five years after its launch and implementation, still lacks a geopolitical response from the United States and the main Western countries such as Germany, France, Italy or England, who in the face of the untimely nature of the initiative, the most they have done is to adhere, as founding partners, to the financial scheme of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2014 and 2015 (AIIB).

The BRI finds its first explanation in the impulse of a new Chinese leader, who vis-à-vis his time, did not consider that the comfortable inertia of success was enough. A leader who risks his heritage and political future, and invites the world in general to join a great call for the development and prosperity of the world economy, for the construction of a more just and reasonable global governance system, that helps to build a new future for mankind; objectives that as Li Xixia points out, go beyond a new world trading system and settle in a new proposal of cooperation and global order. (Li Xixia, 2018). For that reason, the essence, the first interpretation of the BRI is geopolitical. In it, the first efforts to define it and understand it must be redoubled.

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The BRI and its global circumstance

China, as George Soros points out, has become the winning nation of the global process, but along with it, the Asian country also stands out for its ability to sense and influence the formation of the new global processes and systems.

In 1978, its intuition led it to implement a selective and gradual opening that protected it from any shock mechanism that the West tried to impose; as in the case of Russia, which at its opening in 1991, orchestrated mainly by American specialists (J. Sachs), generated a cost of 4.5 times its GDP the first years, a larger amount than what it lost in the Second World War. Unlike the eighties, the opening that China is attempting today towards the West is a bold proposal in geopolitical and geo-economic terms, putting on the table of all Asian countries an infinite range of economic options that are difficult to reject. In this regard, China extends the wings of a new regional, continental and global leadership on the Asian continent, which tries to replace the hegemony that the United States has exercised over the area since the end of the Second World War, at the same time that it places the first stones for the restoration of the Middle Kingdom (Zhongguo), the millenarian Sinocentric scheme that operated in East Asia until the 19th century.

The United States

The complexity of the BRI proposal in this respect breaks the pre-existing regional molds, just as it boldly faces the complex geopolitics of an area of ancestral roots that today coexist in a belligerent tone. In a special way, it challenges the historical presence of the United States in the Asian region.

The Pax Americana that has governed East Asia since 1950 to date has been eroding, among other reasons, before the increase of the economic strength of China, which has recorded an annual average economic growth of 10% in recent decades.

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Along with this, the multilateral control agencies that the United States designed for the area have not worked according to the established objectives. For example, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC), launched with Australia and Japan in 1989, has become bureaucratic and China has now stormed into it. On the other hand, the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) that it proposed as a Free-Trade Agreement to seven Asian nations and signed in 2016 was cancelled by Trump on the first day of his mandate in 2017.

In a fundamental way, there is also the fact of the *commercial complicity of the West with China*, as well as the region of East Asia as a whole, through which they have been together participating in a simulated economic model since the seventies, where the West contributes with financing, technology, and relocation of processes, in exchange for the precarization of cheap Asian labor. As of the 1970's, this confusion and the shared economic interests have led to a kind of simulated geo-economic stability, which now blows up, in light of its contradictions, with the US-China trade war. Beyond what arises from this dispute, the result is that the United States lost power and control in East Asia, which was taken by China to become the economic model to follow in the region and the most important trading partner of most of the countries in the area (approximately 40% on average).

In Central Asia (CA), and Asia Minor (AM), for example, the natural influence zone of Russia, the United States has ventured with little fortune given the setbacks in Iraq, Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, etc. Nevertheless, aware of its strategic importance, in 2011 through Hillary Clinton, it launched, from Kabul, the idea of an economic corridor toward the main CA countries, which was called the American Silk Road. Not only the United States, but the West in general, during the last two centuries, has tried to keep hegemonic control over the region because of its strategic relevance. In particular, the United States has tried to carry this task since the second half of the 20^{th} century (Frankopan, 2015). Despite this, its recent failures in Central Asia and Asia Minor

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and the new successful role of China in the area have eroded the armor of an American hegemony of which today there are many doubts, despite the fact that some specialists, such as Zeping, affirm that, "The US will use its hegemonic system, established since the Second World War in trade, finance, currency, and the army, to stop the rise of China" (Bloomberg Businessweek, p. 38, August 23, 2018).

Russia

It is not exaggerated to point out that along with the challenge that the BRI has in settling itself in Asia as a strategic geopolitical project of China and confronting American dominance, there appears at a similar level the figure of a Russia with which the Chinese country shares 4250 km of border, which since the 17th century has been the cause of conflicts and invasions between the two nations, the last as recent as 1969.

To the foregoing, we must add that the BRI project core, as it was 2000 years ago for the old Silk Road, is represented by five CA nations (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) that represent the heavy door through which all kinds of connections and dealings will have to pass between East Asia (China) and Asia Minor and Europe.

The transit in this region of complicated geography has never been easy. Along with its orographic difficulty (Karakorum, Himalaya, etc.), there has always been a political and social instability that is difficult to face. To this, it is necessary to add that as of 1922 the former Soviet Union has been incorporating little by little into the five Asian nations, which it controlled until 1991, the date of its dissolution. However, Russia continues to exercise de-facto domination in the area, with a military presence, which it plans to expand and maintain until the middle of the century, so it has not been easy for Russia to accept the leading role of China, even before the launch of BRI in 2013.

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The conjunctural geopolitical Russia-China understanding is a theme of wide reflection that cannot be provided given the limits of this work, but thanks to this understanding, to Chinese diplomacy and to Russian pragmatic behavior, the BRI , far from stopping in the geopolitical limits of Russia, directly crosses the country and the area through major Chinese investments that in Russia, for example, up to 2016, has about 73 strategic projects for an approximate amount of 40 billion dollars; and in the Central Asian region, where from 2005 to 2017 the Chinese foreign investment (IED) reached 920 billion dollars, while the Russian participation in the area during this period was only 29 billion dollars (Heritage Foundation, 2017).

The relationship of Russia with China can never be normal and stable. Every day the damaged pride and the fear of giving space and political control to a China that has presented itself to the five CA countries as their only opportunity for development will be debated. Their Alliance, at the beginning of the third decade of the century, will be strengthened by the joint challenge of facing the United States that is a declining hegemony. Russia, within the framework of these meetings and the disagreements with China, is betting on selling an image of shared power, even though the Russian economy is currently one-tenth of China.

Russian pragmatism, which has allowed the growth of the BRI through the main gate of Central Asia, is also supported on a two-pronged discourse. The first one, which points out that the BRI is a joint Russian-Chinese strategy where the two countries, "Are not only partners but their relationships are the backbone to build a new global economic and political system" (Mikhail Fradkov in Gutiérrez, 2018). And the second, which explains that based on the platform of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), convened by Russia in 2010 and expanded in 2015, with the participation of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia, is that the BRI is generating the economic conditions of this new integration. "From the economic point of view —some pundits point out— there is no contradiction between these two

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systems, on the contrary; the two complement each other" (Mahdi Munadi, 2018).

In the end, there are two interpretations that prevail, by way of synthesis, over the idea that Russia has about the new role of China in CA. The first, which corresponds to the feelings of alarm about the large difference that has opened in the area with respect to the new power of China and the fear that this will continue to expand in the future not only in Central Asia but throughout Asia. And the second, to believe and to disseminate that Russia has military control of the project and that China is a co-leader with an economic role.

India

The position of India is contrary to the Russian position regarding the BRI. It departs from Soviet pragmatism and re-enacts the armed conflict India had with China in 1962, regarding border limits, which India does not yet consider resolved. India has not yet accepted its formal participation in the BRI; through President Modi, it declared in 2014 its frank opposition. To this, it should be added that since 2015 India has joined a dialogue team made up of the USA, Japan, and Australia, through which they try to stop some of the Chinese initiatives in this matter, and even to launch other proposals similar to the Silk Road like the one India has proposed from the port of Chabahar, on the Iran coast, which would give it access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Central Asia is for Russia what the South Asia (SA) and the Indian Ocean regions are for India, which considers them its natural areas of influence and where it has built regional association ties through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). However, India's largest concern regarding the BRI, is in Chinese politics with Pakistan, because of the frankly conflicting positions that the two countries maintain since their independence and separation in 1947. Another hot topic for In-

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dia is the maritime BRI, which considers it a threat to its historical zone of influence of the Indian Ocean, where China is building a maritime platform that is known as the *String of Pearls*, through which it is investing strategically in the Indian Ocean ports.

China, on the other hand, invited India to participate in the economic corridor BRI, China-Bangladesh-India-Myanmar. China accepted, in principle, its inclusion, but based on its geopolitical differences it suspended the talks in 2015 for security reasons. Similarly, India has made clear its displeasure for considering, that in the Economic Corridor of Pakistan, it was treated with little respect when planning its construction in geographic zones that India considers to be in litigation since 1962.

India is not part of the BRI, but it is the second founding partner of the AIIB, from which emerges the internal debate between an India that resists the growth of Chinese hegemony in the area, sponsored by the United States,[41] and another internal current that advises it not to be left out of BRI , as it would be to stay out of the future of Asia. In this regard, Deepak concludes that, "The BRI puts China at the center of the geopolitics and the global geo-economics, but it is still unclear what the strategic role is that India is expected to exercise" (Deepak, B.R in Hong, 2016).

Japan

Japan's opposition to the BRI is more evident, given the role played by the Asian country in the region during the second half of the 20th century; especially, regarding the period that covers the sixties to the nineties, when Japan played a preponderant role

41 In October 2018, India signed an agreement to purchase arms (anti-aircraft systems S-400) with Russia for the amount of 5 billion dollars, despite the ban established by the United States, following the steps that China had taken in the same vein weeks before, testing the tolerance and its strategic relationship with the USA.

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in the area derived from its economic success and partnership with the United States.

The geopolitical rivalry between Japan and China is millenary and it was translated for many centuries into the tributary role that the former had with respect to China, like many other countries in East Asia. This relationship broke down when, in the 19th century, in the framework of the Western advance in the area, China was confronted by a large number of Western nations during the period of the decline of its imperialism, while Japan took refuge in the West, *fled* towards the West to transform its economy and its institutions. The decisions taken by the two empires in the late 19th century resulted in the first Japanese invasion of China in 1894, where China was defeated and displaced from the control of the East Asia region; and then in 1931 Japan repeated the action and invaded China in the framework of the Second World War, based on its new military and economic power. In the end, Japan leaves China in 1945, but the wounds of these events have not been able to close for both sides.

To date, Japan is reluctant to recognize the new economic power of China, although paradoxically the two countries, in terms of manufacturing, share the leadership of the world factory, that is East Asia, where China is its second export partner with 120 billion dollars, and Japan, in turn, is the third client of China with 148 billion dollars (OEC, 2016). However, Japan continues to privilege its strategic relationship with the United States, despite the fact that, as already indicated, the multilateral scaffolding built by the two countries in East Asia, such as the APEC, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), that since 1966 was launched by Japan and the United States as a financial instrument for Asian development, today, pales against financial institutions and actors that accredit the BRI.

Japan is also trying its Silk Road in Asia, as a way to defend its role in the area and thus, in 2015, promoted with 110 billion dollars the corridor Bangladesh-Bhutan, India-Nepal, with a similar line to what the BRI proposed in those countries.

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International Economic Cooperation Corridors

Beginning with its strategic alliance with Russia, its invitation to the BRI and the offer of credits to India, and the geopolitical distance with Japan, main geopolitical references in the area, China constructs the new geopolitical and geo-economic architecture of an entire continent for the first half of the 21st century. Derived from this geopolitical scaffolding that will have to be observed in detail, China has six strategic vectors (International Economic Cooperation Corridors) that to date form the backbone of the BRI project:

> At least three of these International Economic Cooperation Corridors emerge from its alliance with Russia. The first, which refers to what China identifies as the New Eurasian Bridge, tries to connect, via high-speed rail, the East of China to the European continent via Rotterdam, Holland, crossing 30 countries with a distance of almost 11,000 km. This project was one of the first challenges of the BRI since it constitutes a new alternative that competes with the Russian Trans-Siberian train, and of course, it was the subject of major negotiations. To join "The two Silk Roads", the Russian and the Chinese, Alexander Gabuev, academician of the Carnegie Center of Moscow, commented that "The agreement had been the result of painful internal decisions on the Russian side" (Hong, 2016, p. 26).

The second corridor called China-Mongolia-Russia also compromises directly the China-Russia axis, because it implies a Chinese interference in a country like Mongolia, which through time has functioned as a buffer between the two countries. Actually, its value is more strategic for China, since Mongolia borders with two of its two most sensitive autonomous regions, which are Xinjiang and the Mongol Autonomous Region. In 2015, within the framework of the installation of this corridor, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed and, in 2016, the BRI Multilateral Protocol, where the three countries committed

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themselves with 32 projects in 10 relevant areas of the industry, energy cooperation, customs facilitation, environmental protection, technology, science, education, among others; and in a special way, with the stretch of Mongolia from the new Eurasian train route, whose design will reduce transportation costs, delivery days and procedures, as part of the new regional transport project.

Six economic corridors covering Asia,
Europe and Africa

Source: Global Infrastructure Connectivity Alliance, 2019.

In this corridor, the suspicion is of one country against all with regard to the multilateralism experiment developed by China. However, despite starting the project with great dynamism, progress was slowed due to the weakest link: Mongolia, who has used *prudential* measures and real acts of confrontation with China, for example, inviting the Dalai Lama in 2016, despite warn-

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ings that the visit would be frowned upon, which was followed by a strong Chinese reprisal that resulted in increased export costs, so the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia had to apologize to China and declare that they will *not* invite the Dalai Lama *ever again* (Minwang, 2018).

If the two international cooperation corridors of the China-Russia strategic relationship mentioned above have not been easy, the implementation of the third of them, known as China-Central Asia-Asia Minor, has not been easy either. This corridor involves the five CA countries plus Iran, Iraq and Turkey and in its BRI Protocol on Production and Investment, signed in 2015, 52 projects were included in various topics such as mining, energy, manufacturing, chemical industry, materials, infrastructure, transportation, biotechnology, etc.

In addition to the Russian-Chinese geopolitical problems mentioned above, Central Asia, always forgotten by the global geography, as a region has one of the highest indexes of insecurity, political instability, lack of rule of law, high levels of corruption, low index of human development, etc., that increase proportionately from Kazakhstan, with the best risk index in the area (21), to the highest in Tajikistan (66), which also leads the region to present the lowest levels of financial reliability and savings (Ghiasy Richard and Zhou Jiayi, 2017).

Despite the fear of the Chinese power, the CA countries see its arrival in the region with optimism and as a hope to get out of underdevelopment. China, in turn, tackles the area, first, as an inevitable step towards the rest of Asia with the idea of rebuilding a new Silk Road. And second, as a highly strategic area for its high demand for gas and oil, as a strategic complement to the agreements that China has signed with Russia along the same lines. In the case of Kazakhstan, for example, in addition to signing contracts for the construction of infrastructure worth 44 billion dollars, the China Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) controls 25% of the country's oil production and has scheduled an investment of 477 million dollars to convert Khorgas into a free

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trade zone. With Uzbekistan, in 2013, it signed agreements for 15.5 billion dollars, which included the construction of a fourth pipeline and a railway line. With Tajikistan, in 2014, agreements were signed for 6 billion dollars for infrastructure and aluminum smelting. With Turkmenistan, which covers half of China's gas imports, in 2013, agreements were signed for 7.6 billion dollars, which includes the construction of a gas pipeline. In this country, the Chinese company CNPC is the only one that owns the exploitation rights over the gas fields in the Bagty-yarlyk field and also participates with the development of Galkynysh, the second largest natural-gas field in the world. Finally, with Kyrgyzstan, eight agreements for 5 billion dollars were signed in 2013, which include the construction of a gas pipeline to China (Vanguardia, Dossier, No. 60, 2016).

The fourth International Economic Corridor is known as China-Indochina Peninsula and starts in the provinces of Guangxy and Hunan in China and goes to Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, and Malaysia, ending in Singapore, and this is the route that has had the least geopolitical cost for China, since it is developed in its historical tributary zone and is now organized under the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), although, in some of these nations, the Indian civilization has never ceased to be present, especially in the south.

Because of geographical and historical reasons, the Eastern countries that are included in this economic corridor are part of the first globalization of China; therefore, China has a larger economic deal with them and even a Free-Trade Agreement (FTA) that was signed with the ASEAN in 2010. As an example of the above, the intra-regional trade of the ASEAN countries is close to 25%, but when China, Japan, and South Korea are added, the integration scales up to 50%, surpassing the rest of the integration schemes with the exception of the European Union (65%). This shows the high degree of cohesion that the zone has in the production of manufactured goods, in which although China represents 21% of intra-regional exports, it absorbs 44% of the

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intra-zone imports, which marks the cohesion and importance of the region with China for decades (Oropeza, 2016, p. 201). Consequently, since before the BRI , China has put its largest investment in this economic corridor and has now reinforced it with 12 new roads, 11 new freight routes, new China-Vietnam, and China-Laos train lines and an advance of 80% of the China-Myanmar railway, etc. However, despite the great economic importance of China in the *Indochina Peninsula*, some of its member countries still bear not very fond memories of its belligerent presence, such as Vietnam, which still remembers its war with China in 1979; and recently, not only Vietnam, but also Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, who view with fear and suspicion the dual role of China as a partner and new regional hegemon, with respect to its maritime borders in the South China Sea.

The fifth International Economic Cooperation Corridor corresponds to China-Pakistan (CPEC), which is the only corridor that contemplates the relationship of just one BRI country with China. At first sight, it is significant that China has chosen to give Pakistan this important role, as well as the fact that it has not directly included its close neighbor, Afghanistan. To date, the CPEC, for the geopolitical and economic commitment that China makes, is the most important BRI corridor, to such an extent that it is considered as the flagship corridor, the model corridor that can guide the tasks of the other corridors, at the same time that it can signal the successful or problematic progress of BRI.

Regarding the CPEC, it is important to reiterate that its outline was made in the face of the opposition and annoyance of India, as a regional hegemon, because its original outline crosses territories still in debate with Pakistan and China (Gilgit-Baltistan), or only with China (Kashmir), in a *carelessness* that has generated the indignant opposition of India to the BRI. Moreover, the CPEC omits the declared participation of Afghanistan. This speaks to the fact that although China is taking high levels of risk in its investment strategies, for which it has been criticized, in the

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case of Afghanistan, for its political instability, for its pro-American vocation (American Silk Road), China avoided mentioning it in the CPEC. The above does not mean that Afghanistan has not been invited to the BRI and that it cannot participate in its different projects.

Pakistan presents itself before China as a country of special importance for diverse reasons. One of them, because its border is near to its autonomous region of Xinjiang, where the largest Muslim population in China lives, known as the Uighurs (hui su), so, for China, it is of the utmost importance to have a good relationship with a country of 190 million Muslims like Pakistan to avoid contamination with extremist groups in the region such as Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, the Turkish Islamist Party, etc. in the Uyghur zone. Similarly, China's economic growth and political stability have been at constant risk as it is a major importer of oil with almost 12 million barrels a day in 2017, which is largely supplied through the strategic zone of the Indian Ocean and its multiple straits, such as the Strait of Malacca, of Singapore, etc. In this context, the construction of a deep-sea port on the Pakistan coast in Gwadar is for China a strategic alternative to USA and India, as well as an outlet to the sea for its exports from central and western China. To the Chinese investments in the Gwadar Port resources were added for the integration of special economic zones, industrial corridors, a railroad that connects the port with all China and Central Asia, 3000 km of roads, electricity lines, etc., reflecting a large investment and a very important work to achieve a visible economic improvement in the country, which would give greater stability for all economic and political purposes. In this regard, the CPEC has become an example of the geopolitical support that China can provide through the BRI to the rest of the associated countries. Therefore, as Ghiasy and Zhou point out, if CPEC remains successful and sustainable, it will become a clear message to other countries with investment and development problems, to become closer partners with China (Ghiasy, Zhou, 2017).

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The sixth and last corridor is the China-Bangladesh-India-Myanmar corridor, which, as already mentioned, is mainly hampered by the withdrawal of India's participation since 2015, as well as by Myanmar's political instability. However, this corridor is also relevant because it includes the Maritime Silk Road project of the 21st century, which begins in Southeast China and intends to continue along the sea route to Europe.[42]

In the 15th century, as noted, during the Ming Dynasty, China decided to renounce its geopolitics by sea, although in the year 1405 during the dynasty of Yongle Emperor, a fleet of 62 powerful ships was integrated under the command of Zheng He, among which stood out the four largest ships in the world, 120 meters long and 50 meters wide. In the 21st century, within the framework of the BRI, China intends to re-launch a maritime strategy of positioning along the Indian Ocean, a strategy that in 2004 was qualified by the United States, in research by Booz Allen Hamilton, and C. J. Pehrson, as a *String of Pearls*. In these studies the marine, terrestrial and aerial facilities are defined as the string of pearls that China has been building since the beginning of the century in order to create a geopolitical power structure in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, as the starting point of a new global maritime force to accompany the Chinese interests in the area against firstly The United States and India. The String of Pearls includes the port of Gwadar in Pakistan; Chittagong in Bangladesh; Sittwe in Myanmar; Sihanoukville in Cambodia; Merguy, Thilawa, Kyanksyu, in Thailand; to which we could now add Hambantota and Colombo in Sri Lanka,

42 In this regard, in 2010 Geoffrey Kemp commented on the uncertainty of China's role in the important region of Central Asia and Asia Minor that China had to solve the enormous geographical distance from the area given its great hydrocarbon wealth. That if China expanded its seaway through the Indian Ocean and developed new terrestrial communication routes that transited through CA and Pakistan, it could become a strategic player in Asia Minor and the Persian Gulf (Kemp, 2010, pp. 1-6). It appears that China has followed the recommendation as can be seen from the BRI strategy.

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Lamu in Kenya, Port Sudan in Sudan and Piraeus in Greece, where China currently holds 70% of the operation (Vanguardia, Dossier, No. 60, 2016).

BRI or the economic resources of the integration

In financial matters, the BRI project is also an anti-paradigmatic initiative for the global order, both because of its size and because of the wide range of projects and institutions it comprises.

While today the BRI does not integrate a new formal paradigm of partnership, the inclusion of new topics in the trade of goods such as energy, science, technology, infrastructure; the broad levels of funding and the cultural or social issues with which it is complemented, provide a broader vision of the regional development efforts of the 21st century.

Despite the diversity of sources, which provide contrasting data, to date, BRI financing has offered large quantities to the countries with which it has initiated operations, through a very wide battery of institutions and financial bodies, which, as was already mentioned, involve the AIIB, Silk Road Fund, The new China Development Bank, which were created expressly for the BRI. At the same time, the China-ASEAN Inter-Bank, China Investment Corporation (CIC), the Development Bank of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), as well as all the Chinese state banks. Up to 2016, in financial matters, the BRI providers that contributed the most were the four major Chinese State Commercial Banks (SOEs) with 51%. The second source of funds includes the China Development Bank with 38% and the Export-Import Bank with 8%. Given its recent appearance as of 2015, the Silk Road Fund and the AIIB registered 1%, respectively (Deloitte, 2018).

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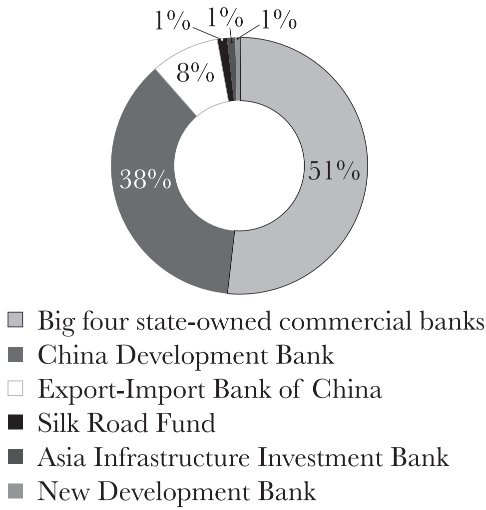
Funding for BRI by Source: Outstanding Loans or Equity Investment at the End of 2016 ($ billion)



Source: Deloitte, 2018.

Also, according to the Ministry of Commerce, the FDI that flows to the BRI averaged 14 billion dollars annually during 2015, 2016 and 2017, prioritizing the China-Indochina Peninsula corridor where only the SOEs invested 53% (2016); to the Bangladesh-China India-Myanmar corridor 47%; to Central Asia, Russia, Mongolia 34%; and to Eastern Europe 34% and Africa and East Asia 25%.

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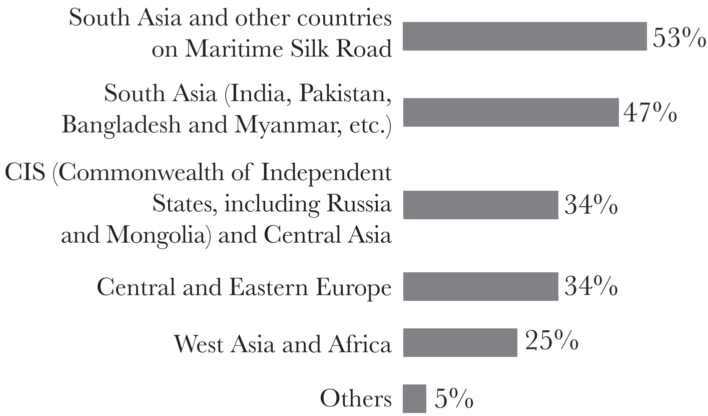
BRI INVESTMENT DESTINATIONS FOR SOES



SOURCE: Deloitte, 2018.

The BRI and its results

The BRI is a geopolitical earthquake of great dimensions that as of its launch, whatever its result, will change the standards conceived, at least in the Asian continent.

Like all the great transformations of China, the BRI presents itself as a global intuition of great encouragement, that in order to imagine it, first feeds on its own antecedents, and then along the way, it continues assembling its structure under a pragmatism with traditional Chinese characteristics.

Deng called first opening of China an *experiment.* The BRICS were officially launched in 2009 after eight years of being an exogenous idea of Jim O'Neill. Something similar happens in the case of the New Silk Road. From an ancient idea that was always present as part of a historical archive, it was reinforced with parallel ideas that were already being discussed in the geopolitical agenda of Asia, such as the Japan's Silk Road Diplomacy proposal in 2004, which already included the five countries of Central Asia; The Turkish Silk Road in 2008, which joins in 2016 with

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the BRI. Even a Chinese *Marshall Plan* that in 2009 launched the State Administration of Taxation, which as of 2013 has been repeatedly denied as part of the philosophy of the BRI. The Russian Silk Road that was already commented upon, and in 2011 the American Silk Road that the United States proposed from Afghanistan.

In this respect, the BRI begins from these influences, but in its global launch, it was born from a political intuition when Xi Jinping came to power. Since then, it has been building, day by day, the progress that it has reached to date. For this reason, after five years, the versions, explanations and figures of the BRI change and differ with respect to each of the sources consulted, although this has not been an obstacle to recognizing the dimension of its size, the infinite number of its objectives and the enormous potential of its geopolitical and geo-economic repercussions on China, Asia and the world in general. For China, the BRI also seems to be the possibility of reediting, under the conditions of the 21st century, a new role inspired in the hegemonic role that it maintained under different conditions until 1839, when the arrival of the Western maritime powers, initiated by the invasion of Great Britain in the so-called Opium War, ended its millenary regional tributation and the central role it played in the area.

Given the multi-diversity of the BRI proposal, currently, its objectives are multiplied and confused with respect to the source from which the information was taken. As was anticipated, China talks about an initiative rather than a strategy, in order to *build it together*, *enjoy it together* and *get to know each other*, managing an open position that moves away from the idea of an imposition. Similarly, the proposal is presented as international cooperation, as more reasonable and just global governance; as the construction of a community where the future of humanity is shared, which is an open invitation to a new geopolitical order (Munadi, 2018). Meanwhile, President Xi points out that the BRI is an open and inclusive *development brand*, as well as a global public good fostered by all parties. During his speech at the BRI Forum in May 2017,

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Xi explains the BRI as a path to peace, to prosperity, as a path to openness, to innovation and civilization.

For the Second Forum held in April 2019, in front of 150 countries and international organizations signing the Belt and Road Cooperation initiative, President Xi before the BRI simile as a leafy tree with strong roots, confirmed that this new integration scheme responds to the global call for a new governance system, where people find a place to live better. Xu Shicheng summarizes the BRI as a facilitator for the opening of markets and the increase of trade and investment; as a "New thinking and a new project to perfect the global governance" (Shicheng, 2018).

The BRI breaks with the characterization of the regional integration of the 20th century and its consequent foundation of Article 24 of the World Trade Organization (WTO), inviting the Asian community, but also the rest of the world, to a new partnership scheme, pragmatic, with Chinese characteristics, that breaks with the limitations of Article 24 itself and unfolds its wings in an uncertain flight, but suggestive, where national and regional assets can be added no longer just through the exchange of goods and services, but also of all other economic activities; imagining new scenarios and possible developments.

And this is, perhaps, the greatest contribution that the BRI has made to the West, beyond the results it can achieve, of a neoliberal dogma where the economic growth was only imagined through foreign trade based mostly on free trade agreements, with asymmetries and dominance of origin, which have limited the development and exchange of the countries towards new and better scenarios, more in line with a 21st century where the vision of the GATT of 1947 and even of the WTO of 1994 have been surpassed.

The Chinese intuition on this point breaks the paradigm, although it barely draws, through the main lines of BRI, the new structure that China offers to replace it.

In principle, it clearly states that, "The BRI goes beyond the global trading system in the implementation of objectives of the me-

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chanisms and principles, at the same time; it is an *exploration* of a new model of global cooperation and governance, which not only seeks the development and prosperity of the world economy but also proposes a more just and reasonable system of global governance" (Xixia, 2018). Based on this clarification, in its operation, then, the BRI accepts a line of Hard Law or binding International Law, to which it does not resign within the framework of an inclusive pragmatism; at the same time that opens the door to commercial figures of Soft Law, or non-binding, as a possible tool in the new geopolitical BRI system.

Under this broad formal framework of possibilities appear Memorandums of Understanding (MOU), Production and Investment Agreements (Kazakhstan, 2015), Multilateral Agreements (China, Mongolia, Russia, 2016), 50 Cooperation Agreements, 56 Special Economic Zones or Brokers in more than 20 countries, up to the signing of more than 15 free trade agreements from China with about 24 countries in 2017; in addition to 11 FTAs in negotiation and 11 more where the talks are just starting. Within the Soft Law Agreements, because of its importance, the Agreement signed by China with the Asian European group 16+1 stands out; the BRICS could also be included, as well as different resolutions, declarations, agreements, etc., that are of lower rank but are already in operation (Xixia, 2018).

As can be seen, China does not renounce the WTO international order but does not accept setting up its new global lines of trade and development exclusively under its conceptual framework, opening a debate on what should be the economic regulations for a new world that is more demanding and complex. Under these new BRI paradigms, the Western offer does not appear as a strategy that will be able to compete in vision, scope, financing, formality, etc., with the comprehensive offer of the new Silk Road, and the dogmatic legal criticism will not be enough to rescue the Western trade schemes, which continue to maintain the same vision and ambition of the developed countries of the previous century.

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Certainly, the architecture achieved by the European Union is still a required Western reference, because of its results and the consideration of its asymmetries and support of all its participants, despite its current crisis led by the Brexit phenomenon. But the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), now in its new version called the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA, for its acronym in English), and the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), in its new version known as The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP or TPP-11), among others, since its blurred re-negotiation as of Trump's arrival to power, distance themselves from these new inclusive initiatives of high levels of financing, which, in principle, offer greater room for maneuvering through the economic reality of most of the participating countries.

Regarding the results of the BRI (2014-2017), it has currently been signed by more than 100 countries and international organizations, according to Professor Shicheng. Furthermore, China has signed BRI Cooperation Agreements with more than 40 countries and international organizations. China has increased its trade with the BRI to 3 trillion dollars and has invested close to 50 billion dollars. 56 zones of economic and commercial cooperation have been installed with more than 20 countries. Chinese companies have paid 1.1 billion dollars of taxes with BRI 180 thousand jobs have been created outside of China. The AIIB handed over 1.7 billion dollars and the Silk Road Fund 4 billion dollars (Shicheng, 2018).

In addition to the foregoing, China has granted 10 thousand government scholarships; and will add 100 billion yuan to the SRF and will incentivize the SOEs with a new credit of 300 billion. The NDB will be endowed with 250 billion yuan and the Ex-Inc Bank with 130 billion yuan for infrastructure projects, productive capacity, and finance. In the next three years, in summary, China will contribute with about 8.7 billion dollars to BRI. In particular, a food aid of 2 billion yuan will be offered to the

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neediest BRI countries; 1 billion dollars to the Assistance Fund for South-South Cooperation. 1 billion dollars for projects that will benefit BRI countries and it will launch 100 *happy homes* projects; 100 for poverty relief and another 100 for health care and rehabilitation (Shicheng, 2018).

Up to 2019, the BRI is unfinished, confused, with lights and shadows. Most of the participating partners are invaded by hope and interest, at the same time by confusion, suspicion, fear and internal division.

They worry about their bulky debts, the quality of the investments, the strong corruption of their ruling classes, where in some cases; it is estimated that it amounts to between 10 to 30% of the credits. They are also concerned about what the ultimate goals of China may be.

Notwithstanding the above, the vast majority do not want to be left out of this great and imaginative wave of a new continental development that for many of these countries appears to be the only alternative.

For China, for Xi Jinping, the success of the BRI in the coming years, together with its economic and legal reform, are the only guarantees for their permanence in power to be prolonged during the third and fourth decade of the century, and thus the Chinese dream of a hegemonic China by 2049 may be fulfilled, 100 years after the Revolution and installation of the People's Republic of China.

F. The Economic Reform. Made in China 2025

At the end of the seventies, China had to build everything. Its growth in relation to its GDP was erratic with sharp falls and irregular increases that, in the period 1966-1976, led it to register an average annual growth of 4%. Forty years ago there were no FDI flows, which began to appear in a significant way from 1985 onward. Its trade was so weak that it was placed in the 34th position of the world ranking, and its exports represented only 4% of

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its GDP. In short, when its first reform process and opening took place in 1978, no political or economic actor believed that a country of 956 million people with extreme poverty levels of above 60% was a threat. Nobody believed that there could be a Chinese miracle (Oropeza, 2006, p. 274).

Over the next four decades, the global economic community did not believe either, each disbelief in its time, that China could manufacture motorcycles, vehicles, trucks, high-speed trains, airplanes, aircraft carriers, satellites, etc., and now China is a leader or prominent manufacturer of each of these goods or products.

Facing the third decade of the 21st century, the global economic and political community, especially the United States and the West, are once again asking themselves whether China will be able to ascend to the only economic leadership that it needs, which is the high-technology services of the of the fourth and fifth Industrial Revolution, to which some classic thinkers like Montesquieu or Weber, etc., argued that the Chinese civilization was not prone to science, which was one of the determinants of Western domination; or of the modern criteria that China was not capable of overcoming its cheap manufacture; or those who now think that it will not be able to displace the technological leadership of the United States or of the main European countries. And the essential question on the subject is again the same that was posed since the first decade of Chinese economic success. Why couldn't China do it if the internal and external conditions to achieve it remain basically the same?

Since 1978, China practices an economic model that grows and is updated, but that does not change in its nuclear structure. It corresponds to that of a powerful Developing State baptized by China as Market Socialism, which Deng Xiaoping would always explain as the experiment of combining both Capitalism and Socialism, both necessary to achieve his goals, which today seem to be, to turn China into the most developed hegemonic nation of the 21st century, based on its industrial manufacturing and intelligence services leadership.

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China, in the second decade of the century once again *intuits* and *interprets* the global winds, and understands that the economic success of yesterday does not guarantee today's success, and that it is not enough to continue with the strategic instruments of its first opening as its selective and gradual globalization, nationalist management of the FDI that arrives in the country, the modernization of special economic zones, a high-priority industrial policy, the alignment of a broad and powerful Development Bank at the service of industrial development, fiscal and financial incentives, etc., that led it to displace the United States in 2010 as the largest country in manufacturing production. For this, its last sectoral economic battle, now the most relevant at the global level, is to reach and overcome the technological advance of the United States.

Faced with such challenges, China decides to move away from the comfort of its important economic triumphs and transits towards a new strategy, called Made in China 2025, that it launched in 2015, (MCh 2025) through which China concentrates most of the actions that it considers will not only give it a new impetus to its growth, but based on a vision and a civilizing dream, it believes can place it as the leading nation of the century.

The spirit of the new strategy can be explained primarily, within the vision that Xi Jinping has been building since his arrival to power, which is reflected in the speeches and documents that he has been publishing since that date. For example, in his participation in celebration of the XIX Anniversary of the National Congress of the CCP (October 2017), where he commits himself to the people to provide a *better life*, a happy life; pointing out that for this, China has to become a country of innovation, reinforcing its task in scientific and technological research in order to break into new technologies, where China penetrates with technological innovations that improve the living standards of the Chinese people. He adds to this that innovation is the strategic force to promote development, as well as the strategic underpinning to build a more modern economy. In particular, Xi

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emphasizes that "We will promote basic research in applied sciences, to increase our achievements in science and technology projects, prioritizing innovation that generates key technologies, that break technological boundaries and modernize technological engineering; in short, that breaks technological paradigms" (China Daily, October 20, 2017).

By way of accompaniment of this vision, China launches its 13th Five-Year National Plan on Scientific and Technological Innovation (2016),[43] through which it accompanies 15 Preferential Programs in Scientific and Technological Innovation. In the same year, the Three-Year Implementation Plan of "Internet Plus" Artificial Intelligence (AI) appears; although in a significant way, because of its breadth and new vision, in 2015 China launched the Made in China 2025 Plan, as the new paradigm that unfolds and accompanies the strategy of its Second Reform and Opening to the West, which together with its Reform of Power (Constitutional Reform), as was already indicated, form the strategic triangle towards its success and geopolitical and geo-economic domination by 2049.

Certainly, Made in China 2025 is not the first scientific and technological program. In fact, since the first opening of Deng Xiaoping, he placed the issue as one of his four major priorities. However, the difference with this launching is that the services of high technology are privileged (Industry 4.0), without forgetting the traditional industry, setting the objectives of three scenarios in time, where, in 2025 it will seek to reduce the differences with other countries; in 2035, it seeks to strengthen and empower its position, and by 2045 (2049), it plans to be the world leader in the production of technological goods and services (Plan Made in China 2025, ICEX, 2016).

As in previous programs, the Plan selects 10 winning sectors, where electronic equipment, agricultural machinery, new

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[43] In 2005, it approved the National Medium and Long-Term Program for Science and Technology Development (2006- 2020). And since 1978, science and technology have been a priority for China.

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materials, energy saving, new energy vehicles, numerical control tools, robotics, medical equipment, advanced technology maritime equipment, railway equipment, aerospace equipment, and information technologies stand out. To reinforce this launch, it plans to build 15 innovation centers nationwide by 2020 and 40 by 2025.

However, where the plan moves away from previous exercises and is part of Xi Jinping's new policy is that in this project, Deng's *prudential* policy disappears and vectors of sensitive issues that were previously biased or that were denied are exposed publicly. The first is the recognition that the plan aims to integrate a national content of 40% by 2020 and 70% by 2025, in spite of confronting the WTO narrative. At the same time, the plan proposes that by that time, Science and Technology contribute to a GDP growth of 60% and investment in the sector reaches 2.5% of GDP. In order to achieve the national content, the protection and subsidy policies that, in their own way, were inaugurated together with the Chinese opening in 1978, are reiterated. Most especially, the strategies that also directly and indirectly make Chinese Statism ostensible for the implementation and achievements of the Plan's objectives appear. There is talk of *legal pressures* through the important National Development and Reform Commission regarding global actors in China, to favor technology transfer. There is also talk of pressure for the signing of Joint Ventures in technological matters. Requirements and constraints of the internal market in exchange for technology. Pressure for low prices in technology commercialization, for the facilitation of qualified human resources, for the manufacture of technology in China, etc. In fact, quasi-institutional issues in Chinese performance since the 1980's, but which were always denied and even a number of Western specialists overlooked in their analysis of the Chinese development miracle.

According to a *New York Times* research article (How this US Tech Giant is Backing China's Tech Ambitions, 2018), the United States evidences the application of these policies, noting that

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American companies, "Are being forced to transfer technology, sign Joint Ventures, lower prices and help with their specialists", to the Chinese areas of artificial intelligence and semiconductors. That Qualcomm, a leading company in the construction of high-tech chips, through the NDRC, received a fine of almost one billion dollars, and its participation in the Chinese market was conditioned to a decrease in prices and a larger transfer of technology to Chinese partners. For this, the Chinese government offered land and financing to be associated with the Chinese company Huaxintong, as well as with the company Thundersoft (drones), based in Beijing.

Another article from the *New York Times* (China Seeks Global Control in Technology, *Reforma*, 2018) reiterates the Chinese policy of demanding associations or transfer of intellectual property, "As the price of admission to the second-largest economy in the world". Even in collusion with American companies (Advanced Micro Devices, microchips license) they are trying to circumvent the new restrictions of the American government on the transfer of technology. Sensitive Chinese government technology systems such as banks and laboratories still use Intel and Qualcomm chips, and Microsoft and Oracle software, which they consider as a weakness of its national security. To solve it, China established a fund for the manufacture of semiconductors of more than 100 billion dollars, 150 billion dollars for artificial intelligence and 3000 million dollars for advanced manufacturing.

To the foregoing, it should be added that within this comprehensive strategy of formal and informal technological positioning, the Chinese strategists Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui since 1999 talk about an *Unrestricted Warfare*, where they include as part of the possible technology grab the use of financial and technological hackers through Internet browsers (Jalife-Rahme, *Reforma*, 2018).

Western manufacturers, as they did forty years ago, look to the Made in China 2025 Plan with distrust due to the open and strong will of the State to carry it out through all formal and in-

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formal channels, with great pragmatism and huge public financing. Bradsher and Mozurmarch summarize it as, "China's desire to gain control over the most profitable segments of the global production chain" (2018). Y Lewis, Vice President of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (USA), sums up China's informal participation saying, "Everyone fears reprisals. Nobody wants to lose the Chinese market" (*The New York Times*, *Reforma*, 2018).

The battle for the digital supremacy, as *The Economist* calls it (March 2018), or how it could escalate: The economic battle for the global hegemony of the century, is a central part of the trade war that was already declared to China by the United States through the Presidential Memorandum of March 22, 2018, based on section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, which is derived in general from the accumulation of trade inconsistencies between the two countries since the nineties, when the huge trade deficit of the United States with China began; and in particular, it focuses on the technological war between the two countries.

Within the framework of this trade war, together with the Presidential Memorandum, the United States is strengthening the surveillance of Chinese FDI towards US companies through the Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act (FIRRMA), where it includes, in a special way, the resources granted to start-ups in areas of national security. It especially monitors the new Risk Funds in which China has focused its financial triangulation to invest in the development of industrial technology in America. The Department of Defense (USA) estimates that China has contributed with 13% of the total of this type of investment (*The Economist*, August 2018). Added to that is the expanded powers of the Committee of Foreign Investment (CFIUS), to block the takeover operations of American companies when it represents a threat to national security, not only in the defense industry as it operated previously. As an example, in March 2018 this Committee blocked the hostile takeover bid of Qualcomm (*Reforma*, June 8, 2018).

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"If it is accepted as a starting point that we are in an intense power struggle with China and Russia —says John Janser of the National Defense University— then we should think about guaranteeing the innovative base, making the industrial base feasible and taking everything to scale" (*Financial Times*, July 2018).

In the framework of this historic debate over the technological-economic supremacy that will undoubtedly define positions and strengths in the coming decades, as it does now, China already has placed 9 companies in the Top Twenty Internet leaders, led by Alibaba (6) and Tencent (7); the rest are American. On innovation (2018), China ranks 17th worldwide and climbs five places over the previous year (place 22). In terms of innovation (2018), China is ranked 17th worldwide and it climbed five places with respect to the previous year (place 22). The United States lost two places in the same period, going from place 2 to 4. To date, China has 4.6 million graduates in science and technology, and the United States has one-eighth that amount. In 2016, China installed a record of 87,000 robots, more than the United States and Germany combined. In 2017, China's investment will exceed that of (43%) USA (38%) in artificial intelligence. Similarly, China is already the second generator of scientific publications (293 thousand publications 2000-2015), after the United States (354 thousand publications 2000-2015). It is a leader in patent registration in deep learning, artificial intelligence, and second in automatic learning, after the USA. By 2025, China plans to generate three-quarters of its own demand for industrial robots and more than a third of its demand for smartphone chips. In terms of electronic commerce, Porter Erisman, adviser for Alibaba points out, "If you want to understand the history of electronic commerce, study the United States, but if you want to understand the future of electronic commerce, study China" (*The Economist*, March, 2018/ *The New York Times*, *Reforma* 2018, *Vanguardia* Dosssier No. 70, September, 2018).

Certainly, the Economic Reform is linked to the Chinese Geopolitical Reform. For this purpose there is, among other alli-

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ances, a Digital Silk Road through which China tries, with about 35 satellites, to connect at a distance of one meter or less the geography, the routes, and the geo-references of 30 BRI countries that to date have signed with the Chinese company Bei Dou (Big Dipper), which is in charge of building the digital communication route for 67% of the Asian population that is not covered. Xi pointed out with respect to this silk road of communication, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, big data, etc., that it will help to create, "A community with a shared destiny in cyberspace" (*The Economist*, June 2018). Similarly, the millenary capital of the silk trade, Xi'an, is being promoted as a *Silicon Valley* in western China.

Finally, on 5G technology, which will define the technological leadership of the 21st century, Ren Zhengfei, leader and CEO of Huawei declares with no little pride: "Our 5G technologies are at least two years ahead (of the United States) and will be the world leaders for a long time" (El País, 2019).

G. The Reform of Power. Constitutional Reform of 2018

In the month of October of 2017, in the context of the celebration of the XIX Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, the figure of President Xi Jinping was elevated to the highest levels of Chinese power in modern times.

In an unexpected turn, according to the progressive political tendency that Deng Xiaoping had inherited, from a principle of political separation between the CCP and the government and towards a greater assimilation of the Rule of Law and the democratic order, at the end of the Congress the figure of President Xi was declared *Emperor for life* and his thinking rose to the level of President Mao Zedong and the Theory of President Deng Xiaoping, who were considered until then as the only political guides since 1949.

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Reinforcing this, during the celebration of the Congress, the reform of the constitution of the CCP was decided, which has happened a few times since its approval in 1982, in order to reflect within its legal body, "The thought of Xi Jinping, of a Socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era", which remain as the guide of the party and the State.

Given the historical change registered in the party, in March 2018, during the celebration of the XIII National People's Congress, the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China was made. In a relevant manner, among the changes that were made, is that the leadership of the CCP was raised, once again, as the central foundation of political power, and its secretary Xi, as the nucleus of this center, by amending Article 1 of the Constitution to highlight that, "The Socialist system is the basis of the People's Republic of China, and the CCP leadership is the characteristic of Socialism with Chinese characteristics", principle that was in the preamble of the Constitution of 1982, on the idea of generating an authority of the Rule of Law over the political power and not the other way around, as is evident by the change. Also, in a special way, the National Supervisory Commission was created, which covered a large part of the Constitutional Reform. This powerful committee against Corruption, which until 2017 had sanctioned a million and a half people, was constituted with the Confucian idea of moral control of the power of both the party and the government. Where, this committee will be supervised by the Permanent Committee of the NPC, where Xi is the supreme figure. Likewise, the power of judicial review was removed from the Supreme People's Court of China, transferring it to the Permanent Committee of the NPC and to the CCP, where Xi is the General Secretary of the Party.

In a most transcendent manner, the last paragraph of Article 79 of the Constitution was modified, thereby eliminating the limit to the presidential five-year terms with only one re-election. This leaves the door open to an indefinite term of the constitutional power in a political reform that tends toward the consolidation of

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a figure, Xi Jinping, and a political group, in the framework of the construction of the *Chinese Dream* and its objective, the great repositioning of the Chinese nation, through the achievement of a rich and powerful country that fulfills both the revitalization of the nation and the happiness of the people, as the ultimate goal (Vanguardia Dossier No. 70, September, 2018).

The result of this reform, which is made from the perspective of the reconstruction of the political power, achieves, in fact, the highest concentration of power in the figure of President Xi, who as of March 2018 became the new Emperor in Life of China, by concentrating the following legal and symbolic attributions:

1. General Secretary of the Communist Party of China
2. Chairman of the Central Military Commission
3. President of the People's Republic of China
4. Core of the Party
5. Ling Xin, maximum leader
6. Zuingao Tonge Huai, Supreme Commander
7. Dang Zhong Yang, Center of the Party

The Legal Reform of 2018, because of the depth of its changes and the impact of its consequences on the forms of construction of Chinese power, is a subject that requires further investigation. Inside China, the Reform is still part of a deep reflection that tells of the return of a power that is inspired by the millennial mirror of a neo-Confucianism, that despite its detractors, is still present in the forms of its politics and in the culture of the Chinese people of the 21st century, which seeks its modernization with its own characteristics. From a power, that based on its expressions still prefers order to social freedom, ethics, and morality over the law, and meritocratic political totalitarianism (Confucian mandarins) instead of democracy. Changes that the West cannot translate properly in the light of a unique thought and methodology that does not know or that denies, the presence of other *political forms* beyond its own truth.

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The reconstruction of power in China through its Constitutional Reform of 2018 is a topic of great depth that does not admit easy opinions nor the immediate application of absolutes in any sense. Therefore, over the next few years, the significance of its consequences inside and outside China should be observed at length, with the greatest care.

For the purposes of this work, it should be noted that the construction of a powerful, monolithic and central presidential figure in the person of Xi Jinping, should be seen as one of the three central strategies adopted by China in the pursuit of its long-term objectives, in the face of a Western democracy in crisis and lacking direction. In the political field, a central power without a doubt, in imitation of a totalitarian legacy with Asian characteristics, through which it tries both to show its *ontological* supremacy and its economic efficiency, with regard to a Western economic institutionalism that still does not resolve its State-Market dichotomy.

Furthermore, as part of this comprehensive strategic vision of China, the concentration of political power could be understood as an essential complement that facilitates both the positioning of an BRI that was planned for 20 or 30 years and a Made in China with goals for 2025, 2035 and 2049, which the Chinese vision considers easier to achieve through a solid, stable and permanent political power, that accompanies and supports the measures throughout the first half of the century.

The legal reform of power, like the BRI strategy and the economic reform of the conversion of services will have to travel, of course, through the inescapable proof of its results and its permanence over time.

H. Final Considerations

The Chinese offer of informal association launched to the world and in particular, to the Asian continent, under the acronym BRI (One Belt One Road), breaks with the regional paradigms estab-

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lished since the postwar period, and because of its size and possible implications, poses the starting point of a new global economic and political order with Asian characteristics, in general, and Chinese characteristics, in particular.

Its installation is explained in the geopolitical phenomenon evidenced at the beginning of the century, of a China and East Asia on the rise, and a Western decline shown by the main European countries and the United States.

Similarly, the BRI offer is part of the re-launching of the Chinese economic and political project (Second Opening and Reform), that from a measured and tolerant policy regarding its role in the global order established by the West (Deng policy), through the BRI, it starts to lead a more active role, which, in its unveiling, tries to raise new flags for a globalization with Chinese characteristics (Xi policy). In that sense,

> The BRI goes beyond the global trading system during the implementation of objectives, of mechanisms and of principles; at the same time, it is an exploration of a new model of global cooperation and governance, which not only seeks the development and prosperity of the world economy, but also proposes a more *just and reasonable* system of global governance (Xixia, 2018).

Under this perspective, the possibilities of the analysis of the BRI expand and multiply geometrically, hindering its explanation, which ranges from a new regional trade proposal, to the possibility of becoming a geopolitical and geo-economic strategy of unsuspected dimensions, which could have as its ultimate objective the repositioning of China as a hegemonic leader in the middle of the century. Furthermore, within this last objective, it could include the cultural and civilizational recovery of an always present Orientalism that was relegated in the last two centuries (small parenthesis from Huntington) in the face of the Western subjugation of the former Asian powers such as China, India, Japan, etc.

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Six years after its launch, the BRI also moves freely between a geo-political megatrend and an amorphous mechanism under construction, which has not yet been defined in structure, content, and direction. Likewise, its current narrative is divided between the celebration of a new economic and political global order, such as a high-risk investment scheme, located in a fearful and timid Asian geopolitical framework.

The interpretations of the BRI will tend to be more objective as its juridical, economic and political structure advances, which will allow the establishment of its true frontiers and possibilities.

However, given the numbers in terms of countries (70), world GDP (52%), world population (70%), global oil and gas reserves (75%), etc. its first explanations do not admit reductionism. In that regard and beyond the degree of success of its goals, the BRI scheme would have to be positioned as the spearhead of a Second Chinese Reform and Opening to the West, as a strategic movement of complementation with respect to its first Reform and Opening towards the Pacific in 1978, which to date is exhausted, not to sustain a moderate economic development of China, but to give China that final impulse to an Asian project that unlike the seventies, now seeks the leadership of a new global order with Chinese characteristics.

In the logic of this approach, the Second Reform cannot be seen only through the BRI, but because of its importance and strategic value, both the Economic Reform led by the Made in China 2025 program, as well as the Reform of its Political Power which came about in 2017/2018 through its Constitutional Reform should be included in this impulse.

These three reforms, each within the framework of its competency, are now a fundamental part of the new Chinese project of the 21st century, with which it is betting on its hegemonic leadership by the middle of the century.

Within a global disorder and a world in transformation, the Chinese proposal appears as an articulated option, waiting for a better response and interpretation from the West and peripheral countries.

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