

INTRODUCTION

I.

The first opening and reform of China in 1978 comes as an obligatory act, as an exogenous alternative that helps to alleviate the serious social lags of food, clothing, and housing suffered by the Chinese population as a result of the economic insufficiency of its post-revolutionary period.

In its millenary trajectory, as the oldest living society on Earth, China had never opened, so its opening was quite an event that generated innumerable concerns both in its internal life and in a global society that had already forgotten its importance and its historic success.

The first reform and opening of China, oriented towards the Pacific, which was its strategic strength, was conducted as an experiment in an economic orbit that China did not know. Despite this, China managed its opening with great talent in spite of its structural and financial weakness and its lack of experience in inhabiting the capitalist world of development and the market.

After 43 years, the economic, social, and political successes of its decision to open itself up to the global world of its time are beyond doubt, and these successes are entirely well known.

From the China of Deng Xiaoping of 1978, that launches a project of global reform within the framework of its economic weakness and large social needs, we moved, in 2012, to a China of Xi Jinping, which, in line with its shocking economic and geopolitical success, warns us of a second phase of reforms and opening, now toward the West, through the launch of the BRI project (Belt and Road Initiative).

Since its start, the BRI is presented as a project of great dimensions that involves more than 70 countries from Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa; approximately 70% of the world population, 55% of the world economic GDP, and 75% of the world oil and gas reserves.

From a China, apprentice of the global phenomenon, we now turn to a China that takes the banner of 21st century economic development and,

through the BRI, invites the majority of the world population to the integration of a new strategy of *fairer* and more *reasonable* development.

The global society that contemplated the opening of China in the seventies with surprise and carelessness, faced with the strength of the now second world economy, wonders about the terms of the strategy and dimensions of the BRI, and together with it, about the economic and political objectives that China is pursuing with it.

President Xi Jinping announced the BRI in Kazakhstan in 2013, and he ratified its maritime part in Indonesia in the same year. However, the structure and content of the BRI are still in their formative stage, where a good part of its central aspects are expectations. Nevertheless, in 2015, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), in coordination with the Ministries of Trade and Foreign Affairs, through the agreement entitled Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, issued the statement of its objectives, background, and general projects. To date, this Program contains the general elements of the proposal. The fact that it is an international cooperation initiative for a more reasonable and fairer global governance stands out among its objectives. It is a proposal for the facilitation and opening of markets to increase trade and investment, favoring a more rational regulation of international trade. It serves as a tool to stimulate regional cooperation, which proposes a new thinking and a new project to perfect global governance (Shicheng, 2018).

Despite its short institutional life, the BRI is currently supported by nearly 100 countries and international organizations. China has already signed Agreements of Cooperation with 40 of these countries and has invested nearly 50 billion dollars. Moreover, six International Economic Cooperation Corridors and 56 economic cooperation zones, with more than 20 countries, have been installed through the BRI scheme, through which 180,000 new jobs have been created in the BRI countries. Alongside this, multiple government scholarships, social programs of support and welfare, South-South aid programs, and health and poverty improvement packages, etc. have come about.

The financial strength of the project is supported by its own Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB, 2015), together with the Silk Road Fund (SRF, 2015) and the New Development Bank (NDB, 2015), as well as the entire Chinese state-owned banks and international financial bodies.

Furthermore the special proposal of the Digital Silk Road, presented as an innovative instrument typical of the 21st century, enriches the regional integration process. It breaks with previous integration models and suggests

that the agreements to be reached in the coming decades should include these alternatives, which are already making a difference in the economic development of the world.

Despite its short Introduction, the initiative already presents itself as the most important geopolitical and geo-economic project of the century, with characteristics and definitions that in many cases break with the trade paradigms that dominated the 20th century.

Therefore, in this take-off of the BRI through multiple initiatives, credits, actions, plans, regions, etc. of different speeds and depths in six economic corridors and about 70 countries, knowing the level and scope of the proposal becomes an imperative for academia, the private sector, and the public sector in general, with the idea of establishing the appropriate benchmarking and opportunity lines that proceed from it, as well as clarifying its impact or possible consequences on the internal life of the other countries and regions of the world.

II.

The Chinese offer of informal association launched to the world and in particular, to the Asian continent, under the acronym BRI (Belt and Road Initiative), breaks with the regional paradigms established 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 OBOR 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.

Seven years after its launch, the BRI also moves freely between a geopolitical 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.

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.

III.

Under this concern, the Institute of Juridical Research (IJ) of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), in coordination with the University Program of Studies on Asia and Africa (PUEAA, UNAM), established the need to carry out a comprehensive investigation of the BRI, through it, both the geostrategic elements, which originated it, and the first results of its contact with the various regions and nations of the BRI system could be known. The premise is that the global society now finds itself in a period of profound transformation, of the realignment of geo-economic and geopolitical actors and blocs, which must be known in a timely manner.

For this purpose, the participation of 25 specialists from countries of Asia, the United States, and Latin America was scheduled, under an interdisciplinary index, to contribute to better understanding the global phenomenon of the BRI.

We deeply appreciate the generous participation of all the participants of each of the invited countries in the completion of this book, understanding that its content is just a starting point for a task that will demand, in the coming decades, the greatest study and rigor to interpret a multi-factorial strategy that in any of its scenarios is already changing the paradigms of the 21st century.

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