

Research article

The Impact of COVID-19 on the Development of the Belt and Road Initiative and China's Foreign Policy

Harryanto Aryodiguno

Assistant Professor at International Relations Study Programs, President University, Cikarang, Indonesia

Abstract. This paper analyzes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Belt and Road Initiative adopted by the Chinese government for infrastructure development and global investment. A literature review was conducted using the perspective of China's foreign policy as a basis for analysis. The literature used included books, journals, electronic media, and official statements of Chinese officials with qualitative and quantitative data. In this paper, the author reveals the impact of this pandemic on the factors that influence China's foreign policy and, more specifically, the Belt and Road Initiative policy. This paper concludes that the Belt and Road Initiative has shown strong resilience and vitality in the face of the pandemic. Related projects are constantly advancing, and the associated cooperation has led to many benefits, which have become a bright spot in the haze of the pandemic.

Keywords: reform and opening-up, China rise, Belt and Road Initiative, COVID-19

Corresponding Author:
Harryanto Aryodiguno; email:
harry_anto@president.ac.id

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1. Introduction

Reform and Opening-up in China have always been regarded as an economic reform characterized by China, which was initiated by introducing the market principles of Chinese socialism. Actually, reform and opening-up in China is a political reform led by Deng Xiao Ping in the late 1970s after the death of Mao Tze Tung, the supreme revolutionary leader in China. The political change after Mao died was a drastic change and slowly but surely has changed China, which is famous for being poor, closed, full of underclass society, into a modern and very civilized society. After Mao's death, prime minister Hua Guo Feng was unable to control and purge the Gang of Four influence from the Communist Party. Hua Guo Feng couldn't make any meaningful changes because he still had to stick to Mao's thoughts and follow Mao's instructions, which caused chaos in China to become more and more. Even orthodox Chinese Communists considered the Gang of Four not guilty of various murders and purges of people, culture, and things against the Chinese Communist philosophy. [1]

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Finally, in 1978, Deng Xiao Ping succeeded in dispelling the political chaos in China, arrested the top leaders of the Communist Party, and then worked hard to distract the state and the party in China in economic and political reform. If the authoritarian leader does not die and China does not lose its unifying figure, chaos and power struggles will not occur. China will never enter the so-called reforms of the late 70s and early 80s. The economic reforms led by Deng Xiao Ping in early 1978 began with introducing market principles. The first phase from the early 1970s to the early 1980s involved the de-collectivization of agriculture, openness to foreign investment, and granting business licenses to entrepreneurs. However, most of the industry is still in the hands of the government. The second phase of reform from the late 1980s to the 1990s included privatization, contracting out state-owned industries, lifting price controls, protectionist policies, and regulations. However, state monopolies still existed in some areas, such as banking and oil. The private sector grew rapidly during the reforms and accounted for 70% of China's gross domestic product in 2005. From 1978 to 2013, China's economy experienced rapid growth at an average of 9.5% per year.[2]

China is in a new chapter entering what the author calls the 'Communism with China's interpretation' life, which is very challenging. Over the past 40 or so years, China has gone through starting from scratch and then integrating into the world towards globalization and economic integration. The reform and opening up echoed by Deng Xiao Ping entered difficult times when China began to enter an era of change that caused many young people to want massive changes in the economy. In addition, in the international world, China also has to face the challenges of international economic transformation, changes in structure, and competition in international regulations. The Belt and Road Initiative is one of the important signs of China's new chapter of reform and opening up. During this round of the process, China will adopt a more proactive opening strategy. After more than 30 years of development, China's economy has made great achievements. However, these achievements also pose more and more new challenges, including a series of problems such as slowing growth, environmental pollution, and infectious diseases. Various infectious diseases such as SARS in 2003 and Covid19 in 2019 have made the world have a bad view of China. The Covid19 pandemic had fostered anti-China sentiment on a global level that had never happened before since China implemented a policy to present itself as one of the main pillars in maintaining world order. The author considers Covid19, the Belt and Road Initiative, and China's foreign policy interesting during the change of life to this era of what we call the New Normal. [3]

2. Economic and Political Changes in China

In recent years, the rise of China has become a hot topic. The discussion between the United States and its allies continues, implying anxiety about the future trend of mainland China among western countries and countries in Asia, especially Southeast Asia, which is becoming the center of the battleground between the United States and China. So, will the economic revival and political change really threaten world peace, as Western countries and academics have pointed out? How do we understand the changes in China from China's own perspective, or how about we try to understand the changes in China from a neutral side to see all these changes?

In understanding China's economic and political changes, we must study the ideology and basic concepts behind these changes, especially in the era when Deng Xiao Ping began to play an active role in the government. In the history of the Chinese revolution, the idea of a figure greatly influenced political changes in the country. We look back to when Sun Yat-Sen startup the idea or philosophy of his life, which we know as the famous "San Min Chu I" or The Three Principles of the People has overthrown the power of the Qing dynasty in China. When Mao Tze Tung reverberating social justice and an overhaul of a just life order for the people with the basic principles he respected the most, namely Marxism and Leninism, the Chinese people who lived under colonial pressure and after World War II lived under pressure from landlords, called to fight with Mao to build a new, dignified China. [4] Likewise, in 1978, when Deng Xiao Ping had an idea to improve the lives of the Chinese people and began to lead and realize his thoughts with what he called "reform and opening-up" in China, it encouraged all Chinese people to follow his idea of changing people's lives towards prosperity. Deng believes that changes in China's foreign policy must start with China's domestic political reform. Changes and developments in domestic politics will decide foreign policy direction and determine China's foreign diplomacy.[5]

When the Cold War was still going on at the end of the 70s, countries that were pro-western block, eastern bloc, and those belonging to non-aligned countries tried hard to catch up with economic development, which was based on developing in peace. China's condition at that time was miserable. In Chinese politics, after the death of Mao Tze Tung and Chou En Lai, China seemed to have lost a spirit that had a passion for revolution. The Chinese people, who had always lived in dreams and considered Mao's words as divine instructions, had lost the spirit of revolution. Deng Xiao Ping saw this situation, began to think about how to change the situation in China, which had lost its revolutionary spirit, into one with reformation spirit. Deng started by putting

the spirit of reform into a system and policy that began to shape the mindset of the elites of the Communist Party and the Chinese people, who not only considered reform as a structure that consolidated the achievements of reform and opening-up but also changed the direction of China's development. [6]

Deng Xiao Ping realized that the Chinese Communist Party was losing its figure and that China was also devastated by the cultural reforms carried out by The Gang of Four. Deng took advantage of the uncertainty of the situation in China to smooth out his so-called reform and opening-up plans. The reform of people's thinking, from being lulled from the dreams and promises of Mao's revolution to raising the spirit of people's productivity. Although Deng himself did not admit that what he was doing had deviated from Mao's revolutionary lines, Deng's great move had lifted a dark cloud in China's sky. Deng's thought about the revolution is the peaceful development of the people's economy, and the rise of Chinese people's thinking has shifted China's old paradigm. This paradigm shift has drastically changed the views of the political elite and the Chinese people about pursuing the Chinese dream and changing the Chinese people's view of the world, and changing the world's view of China.[7]

Deng Xiao Ping's view of the development of the world has changed. He indeed highly praised Marxist, and Lenin thought, as well as Mao's thought at the beginning of the revolution to remove *Kuo Min Tang* from power. However, what underlies Deng's reforms is that he feels the need to reform Mao's view of the world. Mao always emphasizes equality and eliminates strata in society, while Deng adheres to socialism, which is different from Mao. He emphasizes people's productivity, that is, the real revolution or reformation that could prosper China.[8] However, Deng Xiao Ping cannot immediately eliminate the influence of communism in the lives of the Chinese people, especially the influence of Mao Tze Tung; he cannot immediately eliminate Mao's history and great contribution to the Chinese people. From the thinking of Marxists and Mao to form the basis of the reforms he proclaimed. For example, he emphasizes the Marxist view of the development of the productive forces, which proves that poverty is not socialism. In addition, he also dispelled the conservative view that Mao's thoughts and teachings were the spirits of the Chinese people by reenacting what was once Mao Tse Tung's slogan that "practice is the only criterion for testing truth." In this way, Deng has succeeded in breaking down communist ideological barriers to reform. [9]

The Chinese Communist Party is a party that highly respects the ideology, thoughts, and words of the party leader. During the revolutionary period in China, Deng Xiao Ping realized that the nationalist spirit of the Chinese people and the ideology of the Communist Party, which had been embedded in the soul of the Chinese people, could

not be changed immediately. Therefore, he also used his power and influence to instill ideology into the Chinese people. When he came to power, he preached about reform and opening up. He stated that the cultural revolution was a wrong ideology and had brought destruction to the people's social life. [10] Therefore, Deng called for the need to re-understand the outlines of the Communist Party by removing the negative effects of the cultural revolution. Deng Xiao Ping succeeded in influencing the thinking of the party elite. The pro-reform elite group in 1981 passed a resolution on the resolution of problems caused by deviations from party outlines. One of them is accusing the cultural revolution group of having deviated and led the Chinese people in the wrong direction, causing misery, starvation, and serious death in China. This movement was called the movement to purge the Communist Party from the influence of the cultural revolution group that was still entrenched in the party elite. But to gain the support of the party elite and the people, Deng continued to emphasize the importance of Mao's thoughts and teachings in establishing a new China. So that what Mao's teachings and sayings still have the first position in the people's hearts, while Mao's mistake is not a mistake, and the people must still place Mao as the main figure in the formation of the new China.[11]

The reforms initiated by Deng caused a lot of controversies. With his famous slogan "Crossing the river by touching the stones," Deng has provoked a riot in the party. Party officials who are still conservative questioned whether the openness carried out by Deng violated the system of people's lives in a socialist country? Deng felt this was nothing to worry about. Reform and Opening-up in China will actually strengthen the people's economy. What is really worrying is when the reform deviates from the principles of the Chinese Communist Party. Deng Xiao Ping insisted on opening-up the economy and political adherence to the leadership of the Communist Party. Therefore, the Central Communist Party has taken countermeasures against liberal thought introduced through the reforms. In 1987, the Central Communist Party launched the "Against Bourgeois Liberalization" campaign to crack down on developing democratic and free ideas.[12]

Although Deng Xiao Ping tried hard to convince party cadres that reforms would bring prosperity, the debates and differences of opinion did not stop there. Especially when in 1989, where the largest student demonstration in the history of the Chinese Communist Party in Tiananmen, which in addition to causing the deaths of thousands of Chinese students, has also caused several high-ranking Communist Party officials who are pro-change to be removed from their political positions. Deng Xiao Ping had always believed in his breakthrough, despite the many conflicts among the party elite.

Deng himself was aware that Reform and Opening-up went against socialism and the leadership of the Communist Party and caused great political turmoil, especially for the Chinese people who had long lived in Mao's thinking. But Deng believes that the great benefits brought about by Reform and Opening-up have allowed his Communist Party to win the hearts of the majority of the Chinese people and have also made socialism in China turn into a blur.[13]

3. The Ideological Foundation of the Belt and Road Initiative

In 2013, the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, or President Xi Jin Ping, conveyed his idea of building the country's economy by reviving the global trade route known as "One Belt One Road." One Belt One Road later became Belt and Road Initiative in English without changing its official meaning in Chinese. The Belt and Road Initiative approach aims to revive China's ancient silk trade routes 2000 years ago, inspired by the Han Dynasty government policies. In addition, the policy seeks to connect the China mainland with the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe by land and sea routes to facilitate trade routes and promote global economic growth and development. [14]

Like previous Chinese leaders, Xi Jin Ping's background has never been separated from the thoughts of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Both are often called the "Founding Fathers of Communism," where some ideas related to Marxism are already visible. "a system must keep up with the times, and times are shaped by the needs of the time." This is the view of Marxism which is the main basis for Xi Jin Ping in forming the Belt Road Initiative, which is based on socialism with Chinese characteristics. The socialism with Chinese characteristics that Xi Jin Ping meant is that times have changed. Therefore, China must keep up with the times without abandoning the spirit of socialism as the core but must use the rationale of socialism to realize development according to the needs of the times.[15]

For the Chinese, the Belt and Road Initiative is a big step in continuing Deng Xiao Ping's reform era to implement openness in a sophisticated era. As socialism characterized by China enters a new era, reforms without leaving Chinese culture must also deepen. Some contradictory problems or things that limit the further development of the productive forces and meet the needs of the people for a better life still have to be resolved through reform and openness. The international community also hopes that China can balance the world's economic power. Therefore the Belt and Road Initiative is the right way and by the changes in the main social contradictions of the Chinese state

in the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics. This change has a broad pattern and purpose. This new pattern will have an important and far-reaching impact.[16]

From the point of view of the international relations arena, the "Belt and Road Initiative" is a strategic choice to resolve world conflicts, enhance current international development. Although the current general trend of peace and development has not changed, peace and development is still a major and unresolved problem. According to the Chinese leader, currently, international relations are being cordial towards mutual economic development. That's why we need a shared development philosophy further to enhance the economic development of our respective countries. The ideal world economic development is equal development without any conflict of interest. The Belt and Road initiative is expected to reduce the gap between rich and poor.[17]

China, from various aspects, is constantly changing and seems to be starting to compete with the western world. In the History of Chinese, the Belt and Road Initiative inherits and carries on the ideals of the founding father of the Chinese nation to continuously maintain diplomatic relations with foreign countries. Chinese people are very proud of current developments; from the downturn in the Qing dynasty era, the beginning of the Republic, and the era of war with foreign nations, China has actually innovated a lot to exchange culture and knowledge with the outside, even though China's political condition was unstable at that time. Cultural exchanges and outbound trade continued and continued; this allowed China to maintain the ancient silk route that stretched for thousands of miles and lasted for thousands of years. This makes the Chinese people eager to advance in hard work, the spirit of tolerance, openness, mutual learning, and fostering peaceful and mutually beneficial cooperation. That's why the Chinese leader, Xi Jin Ping, has always insisted that the "silk road" spirits are a very civilized ancient relic. The ideas of the predecessors through the silk route have led the Chinese nation towards progress, and it is because of these ideas, the Chinese people work hard and ultimately determine the destiny of the Chinese nation itself. The Chinese themselves believe that the Belt and Road Initiative is not a "debt trap." Belt and Road initiatives are also not international funds or cooperation to build a country after the war. Instead, this Belt and Road initiative will develop the economy along this Silk Road. Cooperation and mutual trust in the Belt and Road Initiative benefit the Chinese people and benefit all countries along the route. This is a bright path for cooperation and mutual benefit among all countries. [18]

China is trying to create a perspective that the Belt and Road Initiative can lead global orders. One of the important reasons why the "Belt and Road" initiative has attracted the attention of many countries globally is that as China's development is

increasingly integrated, interconnected, and interactive with the outside world, the impact of change is getting bigger. This is the most important moment in changing relations between China and the world. As the world's largest developing country, China took the opportunity to develop the world economy and proposed the "Belt and Road" initiative, which is the best way to achieve mutual prosperity; this goal also actually wants to demonstrate China's new role. [19]

China hopes that the Belt and Road initiative is the needle or direction of joint development because poverty is the main problem for every government. Therefore, development is the primary key in solving the problem of poverty. Thus, the Chinese government hopes that the Belt and Road initiative is the solution and the basis for development in all fields. Development in all areas through the Belt and Road initiative is focused on development in China, but other countries can also use this opportunity to advance together with China. China, through the BRI, will endeavor to help countries in the world eradicate poverty, so that true peace and prosperity can only be achieved. [20]

Development cannot be separated from a peaceful and safe environment; only peace and tranquility can prosper. Prejudice and discrimination in any form, including hatred and war, will only bring disaster and suffering to the people. The international community must respect each other to achieve equality, peaceful development, and shared prosperity in the world. As the largest developing country, China, through the "Belt and Road" international cooperation, consultation, joint development, and sharing, brought together most developing countries to jointly maintain the trust and strength of world peace, security, and development. Peaceful development with Chinese characteristics, historical and cultural traditions, national conditions, trends of the times, and fundamental national interests, China has gradually shaped through arduous and ongoing exploration. Since the founding of the PRC, especially in the 40 years of reform and opening-up. China's development will never sacrifice the interests of other countries and will never do things that harm others and benefit oneself. History has and will continue to prove it. [21]

Belt and Road Initiative has made new contributions to improving the reform of the global governance system. It has far-reaching significance in promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind. With the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind as the core, the Belt and Road are actively developing global partnerships, promoting the reform and building of the global governance system, and clarifying to the world the fundamental values of China and the world. The Belt and Road initiative adheres to the global governance concept that the government should

discuss and handle all matters. It strives to eliminate the disparity between the rich and the poor between the Western world and the non-Western world in the old order and profoundly participates in adjusting the international order. More and more people in the international community feel that only the pursuit of mutual benefit and win-win cooperation can gather the forces for common development. The joint development of the Belt and Road has made essential contributions to the improvement of the global governance system and will effectively promote the construction of mankind. It will surely make new and more remarkable contributions to promoting world economic development and building a community with a shared future for mankind. [22]

4. Research Methods

In analyzing this topic, the author uses a qualitative method because the author feels that this method is appropriate to describe the situation of China's political and economic developments and the impact of Covid-19 on the principles of China's economic growth. The Chinese government often uses economic developments in China to prosper the world economy, often in a framework called the Belt and Road Initiative. Furthermore, the author uses this qualitative model method not only because it is often used in social humanities research but also because it considers this method to reveal an appropriate explanation of the background of the author's problem. Furthermore, the author finds the flexibility of this research method to create an understanding that cannot be obtained through quantitative modeling methods.

The author collects data through journal articles, Chinese government websites, news in the mass media, books, and writings from non-Chinese authors related to economic and political developments in China and most recently associated with the Belt and Road Initiative and Covid-19. First, the author uses this information to explain the political changes in China during the time of Leader Deng Xiao Ping, which brought significant changes to the lives of the Chinese people. Then in the era of economic development carried out by Xi Jin Ping for the Chinese people and the world community. In addition, the author tries to analyze economic growth in the form of a Belt and Road initiative that stumbles upon a world disaster that we know as Covid-19.

5. Peaceful Development and Peaceful Rise

Jiang Ze Min's report on the Communist Party's 2002 national congress on the development of Chinese society emphasized that a prosperous society is a key to improving

the socialist market economy system and opening up to the outside world. Therefore, after building a just and prosperous society, China will continue to strive to achieve modernization and reach a strong, prosperous, democratic, and civilized state within a socialist framework. In other words, China will still focus on construction as the center of economic development, so that it is hoped that there will be no more poverty in Chinese society. [23]

At the time of Hu Jin Tao, China's foreign policy still adhered to "continue to pursue an independent foreign policy of peace and strive for a good long-term international environment and the regional environment." Therefore, since 1978, the basic policy has been centered on the economy, not because of leadership, meaning that administration can change. Still, political, foreign, and development policies towards a prosperous society have never changed. During the Hu Jintao period, the most prominent aspect of foreign relations was the positive response to the international effects of the rise of China. At the same time, the Chinese Communist Party emphasized "China's peaceful rise to a new path and the future of Asia." The communist party admits that China is indeed in a period of development, but China's growth will not follow the ways of other superpowers. China will not attack and launch so-called aggression to undermine the existing world order. China insists that the rise of China is necessary and rises in peace and harmony.[24]

President Hu Jin Tao and Premier Wen Jia Bao at the same time echoed the concept of China's foreign relations is the peaceful rise of China. Therefore, China's foreign policy will always be based on peace and harmony because the current world trend is for peace and development. China's development is facing a period of very hard to come by strategic opportunities. Therefore, China has decided to strive for a peaceful international environment and a stable domestic environment, concentrate on self-development, and use China's development to promote world peace and development. [25]

The essence of China's peaceful rise is: First, China's rise is to take full advantage of the good opportunities for world peace and strive to develop and strengthen itself. At the same time, China maintains world peace through its development. Second, China's rise must be based mainly on its strength, self-reliance, independence, reliance on a broad domestic market, sufficient labor resources, and substantial capital accumulation, and the innovation of the mechanisms brought about by reform. Third, the rise of China cannot be separated from the world. China must adhere to the policy of openness to the outside world and develop economic and trade relations with all friendly countries based on equality and mutual benefit. Fourth, the rise of China takes a lot and a long

time. Therefore it will take many generations of hard work. Fifth, the rise of China will not deter anyone, nor will it threaten anyone. China seeks neither present nor future hegemony and will never dominate even if it becomes vital in the future. [26]

The attitude of the Chinese leaders when determining the peaceful rise of China is: first, on various occasions in interviews and statements or speeches on numerous occasions, the Chinese leader has not avoided questions about the issue of China's rise. Second, China's elite leaders have always emphasized that the rise of China is different from the rise of other powers or countries because of its peaceful manner and process. Even the Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the Chinese Communist Party emphasized that China will not be like a Western country that monopolizes and suppresses other countries. But instead places the foundation for development at domestic and achieves mutually beneficial results cooperation with the international world. In other words, peaceful development to peaceful revival is not a change in Beijing's national strategy but rather a declaration of policies and defenses beneficial to Beijing's national power. [27]

There are also differences of opinion among the party elite. Opponents of the peaceful revival policy argue it violates Mao's socialist policies and theories. In addition, the rise of China may remind people of the history of the rise of Japan with its Greater Asia, which ended in world war and caused people's suffering. In addition, economic revival will make people hallucinate about prosperity, while China is currently still experiencing various financial problems. The current reality is that the wealth of the Chinese people has not yet been achieved, and there are still Chinese people living in poverty. [28]

On the other hand, those who support the idea of a peaceful rise believe that a peaceful rise seeks truth from facts and is actively dealing with the international effects of rising national power. Although, in the past, mainland China's economy was sluggish, and those who longed for peace in the global environment, other countries are now worried that China's economy will improve. Its national strength will increase. Will it still maintain the existing order and not expand to other countries? If China cannot explain the concerns of international countries that are pessimistic about China's peaceful rise, the theory of the Chinese threat will still exist, which will harm China's international relations. [29]

After the Tiananmen Square incident on June 4, speeches regarding China as a threat have long appeared. Deng Xiao Ping responded to Chinese nationalism and socialism and considered that western countries did not want to see China become strong; capitalist countries began to launch an attack that reversed the facts about

peace in China. But after Deng's era, China became the leading socialist country in the world, and China is considered to have begun to understand international problems more deeply. It's just the problem of ideological differences between China and the West. This is a recurring problem from the past, present, and future in China's relations with the western world. China has driven the transformation of the region and the world from high-level politics to low-level politics. Different issues have different impacts, and there is a large gap between actual and expected change. There is no doubt that the changes driven by China have created opportunities but have also brought friction due to China's more substantial interests. With this complex transformation process across time and space, expertise in International Relations alike recognizes the uncertain impact of China's rise on the world. [30]

Therefore, in the early 2000s, China felt pressure from neighboring countries on China's growth. As a result, China tried to accelerate the integration process with the world and prove that China's economic growth was not threatening. But in early 2000, Chinese leaders such as Hu Jin Tao could only convince the people at home that China had to rise; otherwise, he did not win international trust about the conditions in China. Therefore, proposing the concept of peaceful rising is based on a language that the international community can accept to reduce the anxiety of significant powers and neighboring countries. At the same time, it better links Deng Xiaoping's concepts of reform and opening-up and peaceful development and continue to build China's economy in the next 20 years. [31]

In short, from Deng Xiaoping to Hu Jintao, China is investing in domestic construction by introducing foreign capital and technology and accelerating modernization through trade. Therefore, in an international environment that longs for peace and stability, although Beijing has complaints on the surface, it accepts existing countries. The global political and economic order agrees with the hegemony of the United States. From Deng Xiaoping to Hu Jintao, China's development strategy has been consistent across the region. It has no intention of expanding its sphere of influence or competing with significant powers in its external relations to create a favorable external environment and develop its economy. Therefore, the peace-based development model has allowed China to taste the fruits of reforms in the last quarter-century. It is hard to imagine that China will abandon Deng Xiaoping's development concept and switch to a path of expansion. What's more, Deng Xiaoping's ideas are not dogma but represent the structure of interests from the center to the local, from the city to the countryside, from the party to the military to the government, and that is the consensus of Beijing's current leadership in government. In this case, the idea of moving from peaceful development

to peaceful rising will guide China's external behavior, not what realists and international relations expect in various theories about China's threats to other countries. [32]

6. BRI from the perspective of China's International Relations

Many observers of politics and international relations predict that there will be a super-power transition in the global world. This means that China will gradually replace the United States as a world power. Observers from China themselves also stated that China, which will soon become strong, must maintain its interests on the international stage and bear great responsibility as a prominent actor in the global world. Therefore, the Belt and Road Initiative could be the beginning of China's full expansion into the modern world, and it could also be a test for China in its renaissance process. Concerning implementing the Belt and Road Initiative, China has played a role in shaping foreign relations and diplomacy as a significant country. The Belt and Road Initiative has demonstrated the spirit of peace, respect, openness, and tolerance between nations. Its international strategy is mainly reflected in three aspects: one is to break through the security dilemma between countries, the other is to assume the responsibility of the great powers, and the third is to establish soft power in the international community. [33]

China considers its new diplomacy in the Belt and Road Initiative diplomacy that is ostensibly like "Two legs and One circle" diplomacy. So named because China is forming new relationships with major world powers such as the United States, Russia, India, and other major powers that China calls "Two-legged" diplomacy. So then, "One Circle" are countries included in the One Belt and One Road program, and countries in Asia, the three are interdependent and form "One Circle." [34]

Through the Belt and Road Initiative, China builds diplomacy with major powers, which is called an interdependent relationship. Although a new type of great power relationship is proposed for China-US relations, this concept also applies to China's bilateral relations with Russia, India, Europe, and other major powers. Most of these countries are also great powers along the "Belt and Road." From a geopolitical point of view, these major powers can pose deadly external threats and challenges to China's development and Belt and Road initiatives. China ensures the smooth implementation of the "Belt and Road" initiative by adequately handling relations with these major powers. When China interacts with this great power, it is not only economic and trade issues that must be resolved, but more importantly, issues of war and peace. Peace

is a prerequisite for China's sustainable development. For China, establishing a new type of relationship between the great powers with the United States, Russia, India, and Europe is a need to maintain sustainable domestic development and a need to maintain international peace. [35]

Among the world's major powers, China's geopolitical environment is exceptional. Compared with the United Kingdom, the British Isles are isolated in the Atlantic Ocean, and the United Kingdom is a typical maritime country. At the same time, China is both a land power and a naval power. Compared with the United States, the United States has only two neighboring countries, namely Canada in the north and Mexico in the south. The geographical environment is straightforward, and the strength of these two countries is not comparable to that of the United States. Both rely on the United States for development, while China is different. More than a dozen countries in the surrounding area, including powerful countries such as Russia, Japan, and India. Therefore, China's diplomacy cannot imitate Britain and the United States mechanically. It must formulate a pragmatic and feasible diplomatic strategy based on its geopolitical environment. [36]

Most of the current hot issues in the field of international security occur around China. Many of which are directly related to China, including North Korea's nuclear issue, East China Sea sovereignty disputes, Taiwan issues, South China Sea sovereignty disputes, Myanmar issues, China-India border issues, Afghanistan issues. In recent years, old problems and contradictions have still existed or even intensified. Moreover, new issues are emerging, which may turn into significant crises at any time. The surrounding areas are the foundation of China's international order. Thus, if China wants to shape its international order, it must focus its strategy on its periphery. In the future, the crises China will face are more likely to come directly from surrounding small and medium-sized countries. And suppose there is a significant crisis in the surrounding area or the relationship between China and neighboring countries. In that case, it will have a direct and severe impact on China's international order and may even cause the foundation of China's rise to become unstable. [37]

Almost all neighboring countries are countries along the "Belt and Road." In the past few years, the Chinese government has put forward the concepts and goals of neighboring diplomacy of "good neighborliness, peace and prosperity" and "friendship, sincerity, benefit, and tolerance." The "Belt and Road" initiative is to put these concepts into action and realize The best way to achieve these goals. In addition, in the long historical period to come, the central geopolitical pressure facing China will still come from the United States. However, there is no direct geopolitical dispute between China and the United States, and the two countries are highly dependent on each other

economically. Therefore, frictions and conflicts between China and the United States are more likely to be frictions and disputes between China and neighboring US allies. This means that building a new relationship between major powers and neighboring diplomacy is also inseparable and must go hand in hand. [38]

For China, the international significance of the "Belt and Road" mainly includes three aspects: First, it can help break through the security dilemma between China and related countries; second, it can achieve a win-win situation with the vast number of developing countries, and to assume the responsibilities of great power better; The third is to form China's global soft power. The Belt and Road initiative is China's inevitable choice to cope with the strategic squeeze of the United States. In recent years, with the deepening of the US Asia-Pacific rebalancing strategy, China's diplomatic space in Asia has been squeezed. But China has not challenged the prudent American approach and national intentions. Regardless of China's cultural spirit of practical capabilities, China will not "head-to-head" with the United States. At the same time, the United States' "return to the Asia-Pacific" forces it to mobilize strategic resources from other regions to East Asia, which will inevitably lead to a relative decline in US strategic capabilities in these regions. Therefore, today in the Middle East, Africa, Central Asia, and other areas, the US's influence and international prestige are not as good as before. Under such circumstances, China will inevitably move to a region where the impact of the United States is relatively declining. Belt and Road Initiative is such a strategic choice. Of course, its central axis is economy and trade. Still, it more or less reflects China's foreign policy consideration of "looking westward" in the face of the strategic squeeze of the United States. [39]

7. The Effect of Covid-19 on the Belt Road Initiative

In 2020, the sudden new pneumonia epidemic swept the world, severely affecting the economic and social lives of all countries in the world. According to the presentation of Foreign Minister Wang Yi, as quoted by the Xinhua news agency said that in the face of the pandemic Covid-19, the "Belt and Road Initiative" has shown strong resilience and vitality. [40] Related projects have continued to advance, and cooperation results have many highlights, which have become a bright spot in the haze of the epidemic. Since the outbreak of the epidemic, international cooperation in the joint construction of the Belt and Road has shown the following characteristics:

1. The demand for cooperation has further increased. The epidemic has strongly impacted the regular operation and development of the economies of all countries

in the world. Whether it is fighting the epidemic or recovering the economy, the countries involved in the “Belt and Road” need this international cooperation platform to improve their anti-risk capabilities, and at the same time, strengthen policy coordination and communication with relevant parties and share relevant information.

2. The areas of cooperation have been further expanded. For example, in response to the various new challenges brought about by the epidemic, the “Belt and Road” circle of friends focuses on global public health cooperation and strives to build a “healthy silk road,” which further enriches the connotation of high-quality co-construction of the “Belt and Road.” At the same time, cooperation in the digital economy, green development, and regional economic integration is also deepening.
3. The forms of cooperation are further diversified. In the past, the joint construction of the “Belt and Road” was mainly based on the cross-border flow of trade, investment, and goods, and services. Nowadays, all kinds of online transactions are on the ascendant. The degree of online and offline integration continues to deepen. The actual and virtual economies promote each other, making the “Belt and Road” more dynamic.
4. The level of institutionalization of cooperation has been further improved. Facing the new situation of a century of change and a global epidemic, countries related to the “Belt and Road” have strengthened policy communication and rule alignment, such as signing RECPs and completing China-EU investment and trade agreement negotiations. These achievements have made the “Belt and Road” cooperation develop in the direction of institutionalization. [41]

Since the outbreak of the epidemic, the effect has become more prominent. It contains two dimensions of meaning: hardware, that is, to promote interconnectivity in the field of infrastructure. The contrarian development of China-Europe Express is a typical case.

In terms of software, it means stabilizing the global industrial supply chain. In 2020, compared with the sharp contraction of worldwide investment and trade, the acquisition and trade of countries related to the “Belt and Road” show strong resilience. The achievements of interconnection construction in the previous years have played a fundamental role in this. This is conducive to speeding up the recovery of the industrial chain and supply chain damaged by the epidemic and injecting strong impetus into the regional and global economic recovery. [42]

The "Belt and Road" initiative is a public product that China has contributed to the world. China's proposal has won wide recognition from the international community. From the perspective of development concept, the epidemic has tested the cooperation concept and basic principles of jointly building the "Belt and Road," that is, the importance of upholding the principles of openness, inclusiveness, and transparency, and the principles of mutual consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits. The epidemic has made countries more and more aware that human beings live in the global village. The "Belt and Road" is an essential platform for practicing the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind.

In terms of actual actions, China speaks louder than words, provides materials and technical assistance within its capacity to countries related to the "Belt and Road" initiative, and actively assists other countries and regions in fighting the epidemic and restoring their economies. During the epidemic, China became the world's largest supplier of anti-epidemic materials. In today's world, unilateralism and trade protectionism is on the rise, anti-globalization trends are surging, and the international multilateral trading system faces severe challenges. Against this background, the "Belt and Road" cooperation has achieved spectacular results, once again proving the importance of multilateralism. Promoting interconnectivity and persisting in openness and inclusiveness are the only way to respond to global crises, achieve long-term development, and fundamentally upgrade human society's expected growth and prosperity. [43]

8. Conclusions

In the context of international relations, humans observe the outside world through frames to filter information. Realism and liberalism in international relations theory, for example, are only frameworks for watching the world, and through such frameworks, international relations experts can analyze interactions and behavior between states. The framework is not the ultimate truth. If a country understands the world differently, it will adopt a different framework from realism to discuss non-realist behavior. And this observation may be wrong; in other words, not entirely correct.

From 1978 to the present, China has gone through a cultural revolution to open up. The changes behind it are derived from Deng Xiaoping's concept of China's development. The framework for the construction of this concept has guided China's foreign relations. According to Deng Xiaoping, it was applicable until the middle of the 21st century, when China developed into a middle-level country. Therefore, to discuss the

issue of China's rise, we must deeply understand the thinking of the Chinese leadership and the guiding thinking behind it so that we can accurately grasp Beijing's intentions.

Initiated by Deng Xiao Ping, who built China from adversity, although the scale of China's economy continues to expand, the ability to transform resources into policies and control the external environment is still far behind advanced countries. Therefore, the rise of China is not a process of hegemony rise and fall. Therefore, every Chinese leader tries to develop and upgrade China's nationality. For example, Xi Jinping's One Belt One Road initiative. The Belt and Road Initiative is a major regional economic initiative put forward by China under the leadership of Xi Jinping. It is an important starting point for China's reform and opening up in the new era. It has outstanding strategic significance in helping to solve the various challenges China faces in the process of its rise. Considering China's rise as a new type of great power, this initiative will trigger corresponding changes in the regional order and even the global demand. Its progress will not be smooth sailing, and it will bring about various reactions from neighboring countries and other large countries. Therefore, China should promote and implement the Belt and Road Initiative with a cooperative mindset and promote a regional community's construction. Besides that, China needs to accommodate the interests and demands of other major powers in the region. Furthermore, China needs to transform the Belt and Road Initiative into a new model for China's peaceful rise and a new model for constructing a new type of major-country relationship.

In the past seven years since China's Belt and Road initiative was put forward, the international community's recognition of the initiative has continued to increase. The international recognition of the Belt and Road initiative is affected by multiple complex factors such as politics, economy, diplomacy, public opinion, cultural traditions, etc., and presents specific regional and national characteristics. The global outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020 has had a profound impact on the construction of the Belt and Road, making it increasingly prominent in its generation value to lead a new type of globalization and promote the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind. Further enhancing the international recognition of the Belt and Road initiative has important practical significance for effectively avoiding political and economic risks and public opinion traps and promoting the construction of the Belt and Road to high-quality development.

As the Covid-19 broke out and continued to spread around the world, China actively liked the actions of countries along the "Belt and Road" to combat the epidemic of Covid-19, which was interpreted by some Western countries as a frequent response to expanding the Belt and Road through the global fight against the epidemic. However,

the facts fought back against these false public opinions. As a result, although the Covid-19 continues to spread globally, 70% to 80% of the Belt and Road construction projects have not been significantly affected. Instead, they have been steadily promoted while preventing and controlling the epidemic. Thus, in the face of significant damage, the construction of Belt and Road ensures delivery of anti-epidemic materials and has contributed to the global fight against the Covid-19.

As a development practice that has been actively supported and participated by more than 160 countries and international organizations, the pioneering and historical progress of the "Belt and Road" construction cannot be denied. The practical significance and current value of the "Belt and Road" construction to lead inclusive globalization and promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind are becoming increasingly prominent. Although the structure of the "Belt and Road" in the future may still encounter massive resistance from other powers and face various risks and challenges. It aims to achieve mutual benefit, win-win and common development for all countries in the world, which is in line with the general interests of the people of the world and the history of the world.

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10. Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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