



China's New Silk Road to the Mediterranean: The Eurasian Land Bridge and Return of Admiral Zheng He

Dr. Christina Lin

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Abstract

The "New Silk Road" Concept is *en vogue* these days in the policymaking world. Recently, on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly conference on September 22, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle and Afghan Foreign Minister Zalmay Rassoul issued a joint statement to revive the ancient Silk Road via a combination of modern highways, rail links and energy pipelines running across Central Asia, as a way of preparing Afghanistan's economy for post-2014 when coalition forces pull out of the country. In 1999 and 2006, U.S. Congress issued and updated *The Silk Road Strategy Act* to maintain U.S. influence in Eurasia. In 2004, Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s mouthpiece *China Daily* published an article outlining China's concept of its Silk Road as an Eurasian Land Bridge connecting China to Europe across the Eurasian continent. Are all these Silk Road concepts the same, or are there different versions?

The purpose of this paper is to examine the Chinese concept of the New Silk Road, which differs from the Western concept. It is important to understand China's own historic narrative in order to gauge China's intentions and strategy on the New Silk Road across Eurasia. Absent this, the U.S. and NATO could miscalculate China's motives and the actions they inspire, to the detriment of the West's standing vis-à-vis China.

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ANALYSIS

I. Introduction

The “New Silk Road” Concept is *en vogue* these days in the policymaking world. Recently, on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly conference on September 22, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle and Afghan Foreign Minister Zalmay Rassoul issued a joint statement to revive the ancient Silk Road via a combination of modern highways, rail links and energy pipelines running across Central Asia, as a way of preparing Afghanistan’s economy for post-2014 when coalition forces pull out of the country.¹ In 1999 and 2006, U.S. Congress issued and updated *The Silk Road Strategy Act* to maintain U.S. influence in Eurasia.² In 2004, Chinese Communist Party (CCP)’s mouthpiece *China Daily* published an article outlining China’s concept of its Silk Road as an Eurasian Land Bridge connecting China to Europe across the Eurasian continent.³ It appears the latest policy fad is the resurgence and popularity of the Silk Road concept. However, is everyone speaking of the same road? Or are there different roads and concepts?

The purpose of this paper is to examine the Chinese concept of the New Silk Road, which differs from the Western concept. China’s New Silk Road is based on three main corridors across the Eurasian Continent, called the Eurasian Land Bridge, which serves as the main arteries from which offshoot rails, highways, and pipelines will be built. The first one is the existing Trans-Siberian Railway running from Vladivostok in Eastern Russia to Moscow and connecting onto Western Europe and Rotterdam; the second runs from Lianyungang port in Eastern China through Kazakhstan in Central Asia and onto Rotterdam; and the third runs from Pearl River Delta in Southeast China through South Asia to Rotterdam. Conceptually, China’s New Silk Road is based on China’s view of its resurging imperial role in the world, replete with historic narrative of the Dragon Throne, of an era of global reach as in the times of Ming Dynasty Admiral Zheng He who sailed to the Middle East and Africa – projecting China’s power and cultural superiority to a system of tributary states. Doctrinally, China does not adhere to the Western Westphalian Concept of nation-states with stationery borders, but rather to “strategic frontier” theory whose borders expand or contract according to national power projection. Currently, China appears to be expanding territorial sovereignty in the Western Pacific, around its periphery of neighboring countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, and increasing its influence across the Eurasian continent. Given China’s different concept of the New Silk Road from Western concepts, it is thus important to study its views in order to understand China’s intentions and strategy across the Eurasia heartland and hedge against potential surprises from the U.S.’ peer competitor.

¹ “New ‘Silk Road’ eyed for Afghanistan”, *Agence France Presse*, September 22, 2011.

² “S2749: Silk Road Strategy Act of 2006”, <http://www.govtrack.us>.

³ Fu Jing, “Rebuilding the ancient Silk Road”, *China Daily*, September 1, 2004.

II. China's New Silk Road Concept

The Silk Road is a collection of trade routes dating back more than 3,000 years. The routes connected China, India, Persia, Arabia, Egypt and Rome. Modern countries on the Silk Road include Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Eastern Mediterranean, Arabian Peninsula, Iran, southern Russia, Afghanistan, Central Asia, Pakistan, India, China, Korea and Vietnam. During the Middle Ages, trade caravans would start from the modern Chinese city of Xi'an to Kashgar and take one of two routes: either to the Caspian via the plains of Afghanistan or to Anatolia over the mountains of Karakorum and Iran. From Anatolia, further progress to Europe is possible by sea over the Mediterranean and the Black Sea or by land over Thrace.⁴

The revival of the Silk Road is not a new concept. It had its first inception in 1959 when the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), a UN organization based in Bangkok, initiated a project of a Trans-Asian Railway (TAR) network (See Map 1).⁵

Map 1: Trans Asia Railways



Source: UNESCAP, <http://www.unescap.org>. 2011

However, major conflicts and insurgencies in Southeast Asia during the Cold War stalled the project's progress. After the Cold War, in 1994, China's Premier Li Peng once again revived the concept of modern infrastructures across Eurasia during an official visit to Central Asia and pronounced that, "it was important to open up a modern version of the Silk Road."⁶ In 2002, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) began to work on development programs in Central Asia and the TAR that would link to Europe (e.g., railroad would link Cologne with Vienna,

⁴ "Not only silk travels over silk road", *Diplomatic Observer*, February 4, 2010.

⁵ Richard Rousseau, "From Shanghai to Rotterdam: The New Iron Silk Road", *Diplomatic Courier*, June 27, 2011.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Armritsar, Tehran, Lahore and Delhi via Istanbul before reaching Dhaka and eventually China). *China Daily* published an article on the Eurasian Land Bridge in 2004, and in September 2005 President Clinton in front of an audience of 50 CEOs of large companies expressed his support of the TAR in a conference in Xinjiang.⁷ On November 10, 2006, China and India signed an agreement to restart the TAR along the ancient Silk Routes, along with 20 other countries.⁸ Representatives from 40 countries participate in a two-day Ministerial Conference on Transport, sponsored by UNESCAP. China, Indonesia, Laos, Korea, Cambodia, Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Iran and others designed a 81,000 km railway network linking 28 countries through tracks and ferry routes to boost Asia's economic development and direct route to European markets.⁹ The plan is to develop routes between Asian countries, then expand to its Central neighbors, and unto Europe.

Eurasian Land Bridges

The UN engineered the TAR agreement, but China has done more than any other nation to reforge trade and transport links and reestablish the Silk Route.¹⁰ China is especially focused on rail links – light, heavy, freight, and high-speed. This Iron Silk Road is designed to deal with the incredible logistics of Chinese sea freight, which is expensive and time-consuming to ship anything from Asia to Middle East and Europe.¹¹ In 2004, *China Daily* outlined China's version of an Eurasian Land Bridge as the new Silk Road to connect China with Europe (See Map 2).

Map 2: Eurasian Land Bridge



Source: Fu Jing, "Re-building the ancient Silk Road", *China Daily*, 1 September 2004

In a 2009 *China Daily* article three Eurasian Continental Bridges are proposed: the first one is the 13,000 km route from eastern Russia to Rotterdam, based on the existing Trans-Siberian Railway; the second is the 10,900 km route from Lianyungang in Jiangsu province to Rotterdam; and the third is the 15,000 km route from Shenzhen to Rotterdam (See Map 3).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Richard Johnson, "Review of the Trans Asia Infrastructure Network", *Move On Inc.*, November 15, 2010.

⁹ *Ibid.e*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Paul Wallis, "Op-Ed: The Silk Track—China decides to build a New Silk Road to Europe", *Digital Journal*, April 15, 2011.

Map 3: Three Main Eurasian Land Bridges



Source: "Third land link to Europe envisioned", *China Daily*, 2 July 2009.

Qin Guangrong, governor of Yunnan province, said China should promote construction of a 3rd continental transportation link with Europe.¹² Under the proposal, the 3rd Eurasian land bridge would start from port cities in Pearl River Delta, including Shenzhen, travel west to Yunnan province, through Myanmar, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey, cross Europe and end at Rotterdam in Netherlands.¹³ The route would stretch 15,000 km through 17 countries. A branch line would start in Turkey, cross Syria and Israel, and end in Egypt, which would facilitate transportation from China to Africa. It would be "the most convenient channel for the Pearl River Delta region to reach other parts of Asia, Europe and Africa", Qin said.¹⁴

In January 2008, China, Mongolia, Russia, Belarus, Poland and Germany implemented the 1st corridor of the Eurasian Land Bridge and agreed to create conditions to pave way for regular container train service between Europe and Asia.¹⁵ A demonstration container train dubbed "The Beijing-Hamburg Container Express" carrying a load of Chinese goods rolled out of one of the logistics bases of China Railway Container Transport Corp Ltd. in Dahongmen, Beijing to mark the occasion.¹⁶ The train covered 10,000 km (6,200 miles) in 15 days, crossing China, Mongolia, Russia, Belarus and Poland before arriving in Hamburg, Germany.¹⁷ By comparison, sea transport adds 10,000 km to the journey through the Indian Ocean, and would have taken 40 days to ship goods from China to Germany – more than double time to send trains through Eurasian corridor.¹⁸ Deutsche Bahn

¹² "Third land link to Europe envisioned", *China Daily*, July 2, 2009.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Xin Dingding, "Agreement reached on Eurasian rail links", *China Daily*, January 10, 2008; Jean Paul Rodrigue, "The Northern East West Freight Corridor (Eurasian Landbridge)", Hofstra University, <http://people.hofstra.edu>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*; Patrick J. Lyons, "A Railroad Rarity: Train Arrives Five Days Early", *The New York Times*, January 25, 2008.

¹⁷ "Beijing-Hamburg freight service completes maiden journey," *Terra Daily*, January 24, 2008.

¹⁸ *China Daily*, January 10, 2008.

chief Harmut Mehdorn was pleased with the successful test run and said, “by the end of the decade we can aim at launching regular freight transport services along this axis.”¹⁹

In 2011, China conducted a test run of the 2nd corridor of the Eurasian Land Bridge. This is based on the original 2nd corridor launched In September 1990, when China’s Bei-jiang Line linking Urumqi and Alashankou was connected to Kazakhstan Railways, thereby linking Lianyungang and other ports in east China directly by rail with Rotterdam.²⁰ An extremely long and narrow corridor crossing the belly of the Eurasian heartland connects these two bridgeheads (See Map 4).

Map 4: Route of New Asia-Europe Land Bridge and Trans-Siberian Railway



Source: Reproduced from Xu Shu, “The New Asia-Europe Land Bridge—Current Situation and Future Prospects,” *Japan Railway & Transport Review*, December 1997.

Since currently Chongqing in Sichuan Province is China’s industrial hub, In May 2011 a freight rail from Chongqing to Port Antwerp in Belgium was launched. The 11,178 km rail running through Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Poland, Germany was first used in March 19.²¹ Connecting Xinjiang’s Alataw Pass with Kazakhstan, and further extending to Moscow in Russia, the rail freight service offered by the Eurasian Land Bridge was extended to Germany’s Duisburg via Poland in March 2011, and expanded to Antwerp in May.²² Transporting goods from Chongqing to Antwerp on this route took 16 days, half the time via sea that would take 36 days, Chongqing Mayor Huang Qifan told reporters.²³ This rail supplements the 10,800 km long Eurasian land bridge to northeast China, and will be used to link south China’s Pearl Delta manufacturing hub and the country’s south-

¹⁹ *Terra Daily*, January 24, 2008.

²⁰ Xu Shu, “The New Asia-Europe Land Bridge—Current Situation and Future Prospects”, *Japan Railway & Transport Review*, December 1997, p.30.

²¹ “Freight Rail across Eurasian cuts travel time for trading goods between China, Europe”, *Xinhua*, May 10, 2011; “Freight rail linking Antwerp and Chongqing launched,” *Supply Chain*, May 27, 2011.

²² Aubrey Chang, “Antwerp-Chongqing Direct Rail Freight Link Launched”, *Industry Leaders Magazine*, May 12, 2011.

²³ *Xinhua*, May 10, 2011; “Direct rail link speeds up Europe-China cargo trip,” *China Daily*, May 11, 2011.



west belt with Europe, officials said.²⁴ Antwerp is the second largest port in Europe (after Rotterdam in Netherlands) with cargo throughput that reached 178 million tons in 2010.²⁵ It is also Europe's 2nd largest rail hub, conducting 250 freight trains per day and is a key logistics center for Europe. Since Duisburg is 202 km from Antwerp and conveniently reachable for ports across over half of Europe such as Rotterdam, Amsterdam and Hamburg, Zeng Su, POM Antwerp Chief Representative in Chongqing, said this rail route is of strategic importance for trade across the Eurasian continent.²⁶

Moreover, Liao Qingxuan, deputy secretary general of the Chongqing municipal government, said the rail link is significant in promoting China's western development and changing the structure of China's logistics sector.²⁷ With freight journey from Antwerp to Chongqing half of maritime transport between China's eastern sea ports and Europe's western ports, China faster rail transport will provide China's southwestern interior regions and even some countries in southeast Asia with additional option for trade with Europe.²⁸

Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and Eurasian Railways

As for implementing the 3rd corridor of the Eurasian Land Bridge, China is currently negotiating with various countries under Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and especially Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) auspices including Iran, Pakistan and India to build high-speed networks, said Wang Mengshu, professor at Beijing Jiaotong University.²⁹ Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) was founded in 1985 by Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan and is based in Tehran, Iran. In 1992, ECO expanded to include Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (See Map 5). On September 27, 2011, ECO held a meeting on the sidelines of the 66th Session of the UN General Assembly, and discussed key transport developments.³⁰ Hosted by Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, the member states discussed progress on constructing a railway line on the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran route, feasibility study on Kyrgyz-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran routes, revitalizing ECO Container Trains on Istanbul-Almaty and Almaty-Bandar-Abbas routes, and commercialization of freight services on the existing Turkey-Iran-Pakistan container train.³¹

Although China is not an ECO member, ECO Secretary General in March 2009 outlined plans to connect ECO trains to China's city of Urumqi in Xinjiang.³² The container service between Islamabad through Tehran to Istanbul is running regularly, and a demonstration train from Almaty in Kazakhstan to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas is planned for October 2011.³³

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ "Freight rail linking Antwerp and Chongqing launched", *Supply Chain*, May 27, 2011.

²⁶ *China Daily*, May 11, 2011.

²⁷ *People's Daily Online*, May 27, 2011; Fu Jing, "Rebuilding the ancient Silk Road", *China Daily*, September 1, 2004.

²⁸ "Rail linking Europe to open up China's West," *China Daily*, July 2, 2011.

²⁹ Yonah Freemark, "China Promotes Its Transcontinental Ambitions with Massive Rail Plan", *The Transport Politic*, March 9, 2010.

³⁰ "48th Informal Meeting of ECO Council of Ministers (COM), New York—September 27, 2011" Press Communique, http://www.ecosecretariat.org/ftproot/Press_RIs/2011/sep27.htm.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² "ECO railway to reach China," *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB)*, March 8, 2009.

³³ "Connecting China and Europe", *Railway Gazette*, April 25, 2011.

Map 5: ECO Member States



Source: ECO Secretariat, <http://www.ecosecretariat.org/countries/map.htm>

From Land Locked to Land Linked—Filling in the Last Missing Link in Afghanistan

ECO is also coordinating plans for lines in northern Afghanistan. Iran is building a rail link to Herat, and China is viewing a line from Kashgar in Xinjiang through Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Mazar-i-Sharif, while the ADB is working on plans for a link to Herat from Mazar-i-Sharif, terminus of the recently completed extension of the Uzbek network funded by ADB.³⁴ ECO plans to integrate these into a coherent plan for a 2,200 km standard gauge rail corridor between Iran and China, running 1,620 km through northern Afghanistan. A feasibility study has put the cost at US\$4 billion, which ECO Transport Director Esamil Tekyehsadat said is a small sum when set against the economic benefits of the line.³⁵ China will likely provide the bulk of the financing – given its vast \$3.5 trillion reserve and that it has already signed a \$2 billion deal in September 2010 to build a line to Iran, with eventual links to Iraq and Syria.³⁶ The new route reduces China's reliance on railways controlled by Russia, Europe or America, and allows Iran to hedge against U.S./Allies trade embargoes over its nuclear program.

Another issue is gauge – Russia uses the broad gauge of 1,525mm while China uses the standard of 1,435 mm, so if China sponsors new rails then they have control over the gauge. Looking at Map 6 below, China, the Middle East, North Africa and Europe all use the standard gauge in blue (excluding Spain, Portugal and Ireland).

As such, if China sponsors railways in Central Asia (currently using Soviet-era broad-gauge) and Afghanistan, then it will realize a continuous Silk Railway from China across all of Eurasia to the Mediterranean basin (See Map 6).

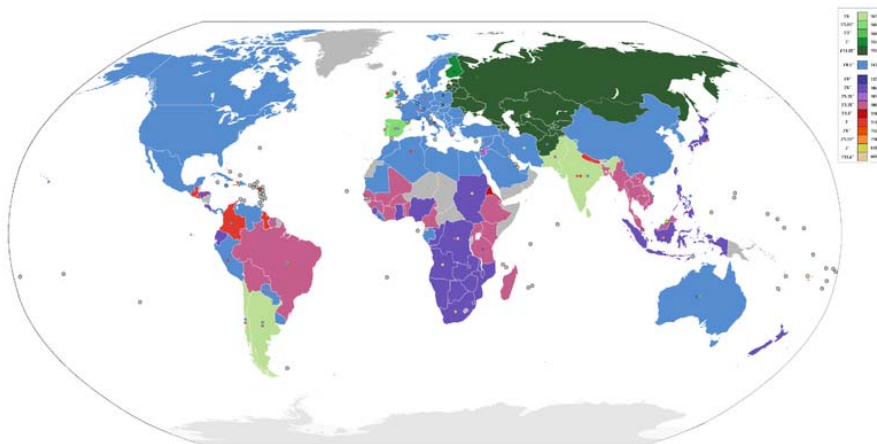
³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ "Chinese banks' forex surplus rises", *The Financial Express*, September 28, 2011; Malcolm Moore, "China to build \$2bn railway for Iran", *The Telegraph*, September 7, 2010; Christina Lin, "The New Silk Road: China's Energy Strategy in the Greater Middle East—The Four Seas Strategy", *The Cutting Edge News*, May 28, 2011; Richard Johnson, "Review of the Trans-Asia Infrastructure Network", *Logistics Week*, November 15, 2010.

This New Silk Road project is strategic in transforming Central Asia from being ‘land-locked’ to ‘land-linked’ with market access and seaports to the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf.³⁷ It will greatly improve rail logistics across the region, linking Iran to railways of Tajikistan via Afghanistan, and connect China to the Tajik railways via Kazakhstan. Most importantly, by filling in the missing link in Afghanistan, the project is en route to propel Afghanistan as the ‘Asian roundabout’ in Eurasian trade and commerce.³⁸

Map 6: Rail Gauge in the World



Source: Wikipedia

Thus we see the Chinese version of the New Silk Road, or the Eurasian Land Bridges via the three main arteries from which subsequent capillaries of other rails, highways, and pipelines will be based. There appears to be great overlapping of the Chinese, U.S., and UN rail maps that comprise the modern Silk Road. However, are the rationales also the same? Or does China have a different motivation for the New Silk Road towards a different end?

III. China's Strategic Doctrines behind the New Silk Road

While U.S. motivations for the New Silk Road address security issues such as denying safe havens for terrorists, WMD proliferation, the need for energy and stability in the region, and the UN is about trade and commercial issues such as regional economic integration, for China, the New Silk Road is about reasserting itself as a neo-imperial power in the new global order. In the 21st Century a rising China is expanding its reach in the world – through investments, infrastructure projects, military power, and more. As it is projecting its trade and growing economic power, China is correspondingly ‘going out’ to procure energy and mineral resources and deploying

³⁷ Juan Miranda, Director General, Central and West Asia Department/Asia Development Bank. Remarks at CACI Forum, ‘The U.S.’s New Silk Road Strategy: What is it? Where is it headed?’ at SAIS-Johns Hopkins University, Washington, DC, September 29, 2011.

³⁸ Robert D. Hormats, Under-Secretary of Economics, Energy and Agriculture/U.S. Department of State, and Juan Miranda, Director General, Central and West Asia Department/ADB. Remarks at CACI Forum, September 29, 2011.



military power to protect supply of these resources. In 2004 Chinese President Hu Jintao spoke of PLA's "New Historic Mission" of proactively protecting China's overseas interests,³⁹ which is evidenced by China's recent military operation in evacuating 36,000 Chinese nationals from Libya in March 2011, anti-piracy exercises in Gulf of Aden since 2008, stepped up military cooperation and joint military exercises in the Mediterranean Basin, Africa, Central Asia and South China Sea.⁴⁰ There is also increasing debates over changing its policy of 'non-intervention', which has been sorely tested in the case of Libya and Sudan.⁴¹ All these activities have raised alarm in China's neighboring countries, the U.S., and elsewhere of a rising "China threat". As such, China needs a narrative to allay these fears, by using the historic narrative of Ming Dynasty's Admiral Zheng He as a symbol for China's 'peaceful rise'.⁴²

Ming Dynasty Zheng He Narrative

Zheng He is the renowned Muslim admiral who helmed the famous treasure ships that explored Southeast Asia, South Asia, Middle East and East Africa during 15th Century Ming Dynasty, almost 100 years before Columbus and Vasco Da Gama explored the New World. He established a tributary system centered on the Middle Kingdom, along the maritime silk routes in the Indian Ocean (See Map 7). According to James R. Holmes at U.S. Naval War College, China uses the Zheng He narrative to bestow legitimacy on China's naval aspirations.⁴³

Chinese leadership has woven an intricate narrative, portraying the swift ascent of Chinese economic, military, and naval power as merely the latest phase in a benign regional dominance with its provenance in the Ming era. As such, Holmes argues that it is important to understand this historic narrative in order to gauge China's intentions and strategy on the New Silk Road. Absent this, the U.S. could miscalculate China's motives and the actions they inspire, to the detriment of America's world standing vis-à-vis its peer competitor.⁴⁴

³⁹ James Mulvenon, "Chairman Hu and the PLA's 'New Historic Missions'", *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 27, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, January 9, 2009.

⁴⁰ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2011*, August 2011, pp. 80-83.

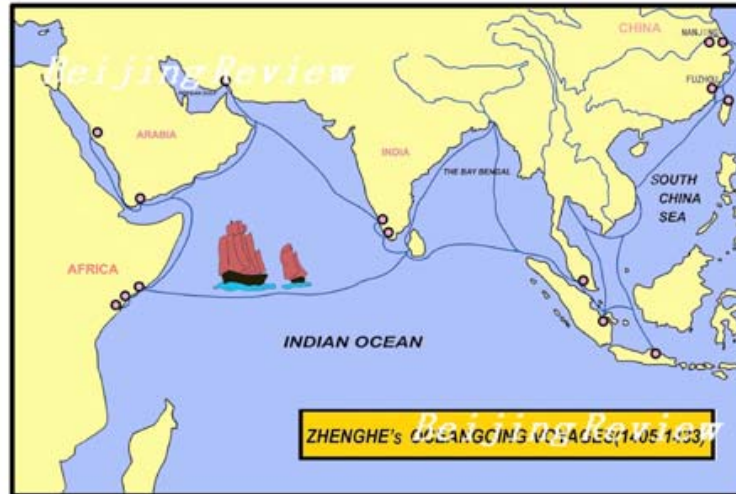
⁴¹ Chris Zambelis, "A Swan Song in Sudan and Libya for China's 'Non-Interference' Principle", *China Brief*, Vol. 11, Issue 15, August 12, 2011; John Chan, "Libyan war accelerates Chinese debate over 'non-intervention'", *World Socialist Web Site*, April 19, 2011; Daniel Bardsley, "China facing a new reality: it can't always remain neutral", *The National*, August 28, 2011; Brian Fishman, "Al-Qaeda and the Rise of China: Jihadi Geopolitics in a Post-Hegemonic World", *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2011.

⁴² Michael Veseth, "Understand China's Foreign Policy, Know Zheng He", *International Political Economy Zone*, March 4, 2010.

⁴³ James R. Holmes, "Soft power at sea: Zheng He and China's Maritime Diplomacy", *Virginia Review of Asian Studies*, 2007.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Map 7: Admiral Zheng He's Voyages in the 15th Century



Source: Li Rongxia, "Significance of Zheng He's Voyages", *Beijing Review*, May 28, 2005.

Correspondingly, since 2005, there has been increased writing and research into Admiral Zheng He.⁴⁵ On July 11, 2005, China commemorated the 600th anniversary of Zheng He's first voyage as National Navigation Day to signal China's maritime resurgence in the world.⁴⁶ True to form, three years later in December 2008 China deployed its naval vessels to the Gulf of Aden for anti-piracy exercises, with subsequent port calls in the following years to the Mediterranean.⁴⁷ Research on China's diplomatic outreach to Southeast Asia, Africa, and Middle East reveals the constant allusion of Chinese officials to this historical figure. In a speech by State Councillor Dai Bingguo before the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta in 2010, he stated: "Let's look at Chinese history. Does China have the tradition and culture of aggression and expansion? I have noted many people across the world say "no". China did not seek expansion or hegemony even at the time when it was the most powerful country in the world with 30 % of the global GDP a few hundred years ago. Many of you know about Zheng He's voyages to the Western Seas. Leading the most powerful fleet in the world, Zheng He made seven voyages to the Western Seas, bringing there porcelain, silk and tea, rather than bloodshed, plundering or colonialism. They also brought those countries tranquility and well-being by helping them fight pirates. To this day, Zheng He is still remembered as an envoy of friendship and peace, and his merits are widely recognized by people of Southeast Asia, including Indonesia."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ "800 year old ship on 'Marine Silk Road' to be recovered", *Xinhua*, December 21, 2007; "A scroll of Zheng He Navigational Chart released in Tianjin", *People's Daily*, July 6, 2005; "People's Daily calls for peaceful development in spirit of ancient navigator", *Xinhua*, July 12, 2005; "A dialogue and exchange between civilizations", *People's Daily*, July 9, 2005; Wiu Quanlin, "Second search of ancient shipwreck set to start soon", *China Daily*, March 16, 2011; Tania Branigan, "Zheng He: messenger of peace, or of power", *Guardian*, July 25, 2010; Ishaan Tharoor, "Searching for Zheng—China's Ming-Era", *Time*, March 8, 2010.

⁴⁶ "Why do we commemorate Zheng He", *People's Daily*, July 12, 2005.

⁴⁷ Christopher Cavas, "Chinese warships tour the Mediterranean", *Defense News*, August 9, 2010.

⁴⁸ Dai Bingguo, "Embrace New Opportunities for China-ASEAN cooperation", ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, Indonesia, January 22, 2010.



Likewise in Africa, Barry Sautman, specialist on China-Africa relations at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, said that “discussion of Zheng He is being carried out in China at higher and more expensive levels not just to boost the glory of his personal story, but as a particular cog in China’s projection of itself onto Africa.”⁴⁹ Nonetheless, China has come under criticism for its ‘neo-colonialist’ approach to Africa, as it supports autocratic regimes from Zimbabwe to Sudan and turns a blind eye to human rights abuses as it secures natural resources and political influence. In the Middle East, *Saudi Aramco World* in 2005 also ran a story on Zheng He and portrays his non-peaceful intentions, driven by Ming Dynasty to display their power and gain token allegiance from rulers of Indian Ocean emporia. The article stated that if submission was not forthcoming, Zheng He did not hesitate to intervene militarily – e.g., the ruler of Sri Lanka refused to recognize the emperor and was taken to China as a prisoner, while similar fate befell two rulers in Sumatra.⁵⁰

Indeed, despite China touting Zheng He’s peaceful intentions and non-aggression, historical evidence point otherwise, argued Geoff Wade from National University of Singapore in 2004. He stated that Zheng He’s voyages were about ‘gunboat diplomacy’, coercion, and recognition of Ming dominance.⁵¹ Zheng’s missions were intended to control ports and shipping lanes, of political and economic control across space rather than territorial control. By controlling economic lifelines of nodal points, networks, ports and trade routes, China was thus able to control trade. Wade coins this as proto-maritime colonialism whereby a dominant maritime power takes control of main port polities along major East-West maritime trade networks as well as the seas in between, thus gaining economic and political benefits.⁵² China appears to be replicating this proto-maritime colonialist strategy today by investing in various seaports along the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean Sea in what some have termed “the string of pearls” strategy (See Map 8).⁵³

⁴⁹ Ishaan Tharoor, “Searching for Zheng—China’s Ming Era”, *Time*, March 8, 2010.

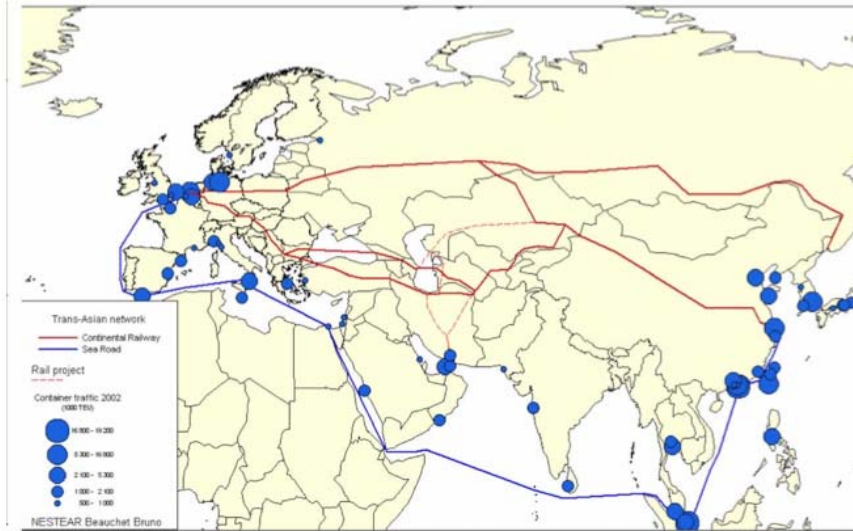
⁵⁰ Paul Lunde, “The Admiral Zheng He”, *Saudi Aramco World*, July/August 2005, pp.45-48.

⁵¹ Geoff Wade, “The Zheng He Voyages: A Reassessment”, Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series, No. 21, National University of Singapore, October 2004, p.18.

⁵² *Ibid.* p.19.

⁵³ Nasos Nihalakas, “Chinese Trojan Horse—investing in Greece, or invading Europe (Part I)”, *Foreign Policy*, January 15, 2011; Peter Leach, “Hutchison Ports to Develop Fos Terminal”, *Journal of Commerce Online*, March 19, 2010; Silvia Marchetti, “Chinese investments in Italy increase”, *Xinhua*, November 5, 2009; “Greece to become China’s Mediterranean gateway”, *Network 54*, August 1, 2006; “Barcelona hopes the Chinese landed”, *Economics News Paper*, July 7, 2011; “Ashdod port handled TEU 84,611 from China in 2008”, *Port2port News Service*; Veronique Salze-Lozach, “A Chinese Marshall Plan for Greece?”, *Asia Foundation Weekly Insight*, October 6, 2010; Daniel Sayani, “Red China increases investments and influence in Sudan”, *The New American*, January 31, 2011.

Map 8: Main Maritime Ports of Container Traffic



Source: NESTEAR, reproduced from "Policy Actions for Developing Efficient Inland Transport Links between Asia and Europe", paper presented by Alain Rathery, Deputy General Secretary, International Transport Forum, in *1st Black Sea & 4th Silk Road Conference*, Istanbul, Turkey, 14-16 May 2007.

Wade also provided evidence of how Zheng's voyages invaded and occupied areas in modern Yunnan Province, Burma and Vietnam and incorporated them into the Ming Empire.⁵⁴ This invasion is repeated in 1979 when China launched a punitive invasion against Vietnam, after Hanoi aligned with Moscow and invaded Cambodia to overthrow Beijing-backed Khmer Rouge.⁵⁵ However, now China is a leading investor in Vietnam, Burma and Laos with projects in mines, dams, industrial processing, agriculture and services, and is also negotiating to build high-speed rails to these neighbors.⁵⁶

Strategic Frontier Doctrine

While China is evoking the Zheng He narrative for its maritime power projection, for overland power projection China appears to be engaged in a strategic frontier doctrine. According to Masako Ikegami from Stockholm University, China does not adhere to the western Westphalian concept of nation states with stationary borders. Rather, its concept is based on "strategic frontier" of geopolitical landscape, whose flexible territorial borders expands or contracts according to a nation's power projection.⁵⁷ As such it is an expansionist concept of sovereignty. Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in October 2010 stated in a speech that China is seeking

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Anthony Kuhn, "Full Steam Ahead for China's Rail Links Abroad?" *National Public Radio*, June 14, 2011.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Masako Ikegami, "Neo-imperialism: China's Quasi-Manchukuo Policy toward North Korea, Mongolia, and Myanmar", *Tamkang Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. XIC, No. IV, April 2011, p.93; Shigeo Hiramatsu, *Chugoku wa Nihon wo Heigo suru [China's Annexation of Japan]* (Tokyo: Kodan-sha International, 2006).



Lebensraum with its growing assertiveness over disputed territories.⁵⁸ *Lebensraum*, or living space, was a key tenet in the philosophy of Adolf Hitler who believed that Germany deserved space, especially in eastern Slavic areas, in which to grow.⁵⁹ Abe observed that, "In a nutshell, this very dangerous idea posits that borders and exclusive economic zones are determined by national power, and that as long as China's economy continues to grow, its sphere of influence will continue to expand." In this vein, Andrew Krepinevich from Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) also penned an article in the *Wall Street Journal* in September 2010 on China's "Finlandization" of the Western Pacific.⁶⁰

Indeed, China's behavior appears to confirm this strategic frontier doctrine. For example, in the Arctic, despite that it is not a littoral state,⁶¹ China wants to be among the first states to exploit the region's natural resources wealth and ply ships through its sea routes, claiming that the Arctic is a part of global commons. Its ice breaker *Snow Dragon (Xue Long)* has embarked on four Arctic research expeditions in recent years, and China's larger polar scientific research effort has seen 26 expeditions in the Arctic and Antarctic since 1984.⁶² Yet Finnish scholar Linda Jakobson of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) observed this is a double standard, since China has a long record of insisting on sovereign state rights as paramount principle in international relations,⁶³ as it claims in the South China Sea, Yellow Sea and East China Sea.⁶⁴ China's sense of entitlement is expressed by Chinese rear admiral Yin Zhuo in March 2010: "The Arctic belongs to all the people around the world, as no nation has sovereignty over it...China must plan an indispensable role in Arctic exploration as we have one-fifth of the world's population."⁶⁵ This sense of moral entitlement to resources and space, that China has 20% of the world's population and therefore is entitled to 20 % of the Arctic's resources,⁶⁶ seems to reflect a type of *Lebensraum*.

Quasi-Manchukuo Policy

In operationalizing this 'Strategic Frontier' doctrine, Ikegami argues that China is following 1930s Imperial Japan's Manchukuo policy towards its neighboring countries. The Manchukuo policy is in three phases: (1) large investment in economic infrastructure for extracting natural resources; (2) military intervention to protect economic interests; and (3) social-political absorption by means of puppet government. This is how Imperial Japan eventually invaded Manchuria in China and set up its puppet government with Qing Dynasty's last emperor Puyi.

⁵⁸ Shinzo Abe, former Japanese Prime Minister, remarks on U.S.-Japanese Relations, Hudson Institute, Washington, D.C., October 15, 2010; "Japan's former PM says China seeking 'lebensraum'", *Agence France Presse*, October 19, 2010.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Andrew F. Krepinevich, "China's 'Finlandization' Strategy in the Pacific", *The Wall Street Journal*, September 11, 2010.

⁶¹ Arctic littoral states are Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Norway, Russia, and the U.S.

⁶² Joseph Spears, "The Snow Dragon Moves into the Arctic Ocean Basin", *China Brief*, Vol. 11, Issue 2, January 28, 2011.

⁶³ Linda K. Jacobson, "China Prepares for an Ice Free Arctic", *SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security 2* (2010), p.13.

⁶⁴ Huy Duong, "The South China Sea is not China's Sea", *Asia Times*, October 5, 2011.

⁶⁵ Gordon G. Chang, "China's Arctic Play", *Diplomat*, March 9, 2010.

⁶⁶ Brian Lilly, "Canadian Jets Repel Russian Bombers", *Cnews*, July 30, 2010; David Curtis Wright, "The Dragon Eyes the Top of the World: Arctic Policy Debate and Discussion in China", *China Maritime Studies* Number 8, August 2011, U.S. Naval War College.



According to Ikegami, China's 'quasi-Manchukuo policy' has similar effects in terms of incremental and discreet expansion of its strategic front that is initially disguised as investment for industrial infrastructure or "economic cooperation." Ikegami calls this "stealth imperialism", in which a relatively weak "latecomer imperial state" tries to expand its own interests incrementally and discreetly by avoiding direct confrontation or frictions with existing powers, such as the U.S. and Japan.⁶⁷ Now China is assuming an aggressive "development" strategy towards neighboring countries that are geographically important, rich in natural resources, yet political vulnerable: North Korea, Burma, Mongolia, and increasingly Afghanistan. It is conducting large-scale infrastructure constructions (e.g., roads, highways, pipelines, seaports) in these strategically important areas under the cover of "development." For Ikegami, this is in order to conduct strategic operations such as establishing military bases, exclusively securing mineral resources, and sending numerous Han Chinese settlers who are often paramilitary troops such as the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC).⁶⁸ XPCC, known in Chinese as *Bing Tuan* or Army Group, is an organization of military settlers with a mission to keep Xinjiang within China.⁶⁹ In 1954 Chinese central government ordered most PLA units in Xinjiang to form production and construction corps, whose missions were to carry out both production and militia duties, and cultivate and guard border areas. According to Chinese government's 2003 White Paper, XPCC is organized as a military structure with "14 divisions, 174 regimental agricultural stockbreeding farms, 4,391 industrial, construction, transport and commercial enterprises, and well-run social undertakings covering scientific research, education, culture, health, sports, finance and insurance, as well as judiciary organs."⁷⁰ XPCC is headquartered in Urumqi and has 2.8 million members that serve as reserves for the PLA.⁷¹

Western Frontiers Development Strategy

Beijing's economic and security imperatives in Xinjiang drive its westward development strategy towards Eurasia. The Qing Dynasty annexed Xinjiang in 1884 and in 1949 it became an autonomous region. It was China's original frontier region. Owen Lattimore in *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*, first published in 1940, described frontiers as "the geographical and historical boundaries conventionally set down as lines on a map [representing] the edge of zones."⁷² Lattimore observed that China's frontiers were continually shifting: "variants, alternatives, and supplementary lines of Great Wall fortification...proves that the concept of a linear boundary could never be established as an absolute geographical fact. That which was politically conceived as a sharp edge was persistently spread by the ebb and flow of history into a relatively broad and vague margin...that signified the optimum limit of growth of one particular society."⁷³ Hasan H. Karrar in *The New Silk Road Diplomacy: The Making of China's Central Asian Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era*, agreed that 'the optimum level of ex-

⁶⁷ Ikegami, 'Neo-Imperialism', April 2011, p.89.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*,

⁶⁹ Mark O'Neill, "The Conquerors of China's Wild West", *Asia Sentinel*, April 13, 2008; Sohun Desai, "A Study of Infrastructure in Xinjiang", *Security Research Review*, Vol.12, October 22, 2008; "Establishment, Development and Role of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps", *China White Paper*, May 26, 2003.

⁷⁰ China's White Paper, May 26, 2003, <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20030526/9.htm>; "Role of Xinjiang Production, Construction Corps important: white paper", *Xinhua*, May 26, 2005.

⁷¹ Mark O'Neill, "The Conquerors of China's Wild West"; Sohun Desai, "A Study of Infrastructure in Xinjiang".

⁷² Owen Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (Beacon Press, 1962).

⁷³ *Ibid*.



pansion varied over time, a fact borne out by the cyclical expansion and withdrawal from Western Regions that corresponded with the centre's ability to project decisive power into the contested frontier zone.⁷⁴

Lattimore's analysis is important for understanding China's western development strategy based on 'strategic frontiers' concept. He viewed Inner Asian frontiers as concentric circles where imperial power waned away from the center. The extension of the frontier zones depended on how far the influence of the center could project, and inevitably the power of the centre conflicted with sources of power from within or beyond the frontier zone. The optimum outcome of frontier expansion was determined by the outcome of these conflicts – e.g., the Han (BC 202-20 AD), the Tang (618-907), and the Qing dynasties (1644-1911) each expanded into the Western Regions and retreated when faced with insurmountable challenges.⁷⁵ Hasan argued that depending on their military might, empires either expand or withdraw from this vast region which had an abundance of powerful non-state actors: itinerant merchants, pillaging nomads, and now marauding jihadis.⁷⁶ Central Asian frontier zone remains a site where authority from multiple centers overlap in a "Great Game" and created un-governed space for the operation of these non-state actors be it drug smuggling, gunrunning, petty trading, or training jihadis. Nonetheless, Xinjiang's role as a frontier zone changed with it was incorporated into the Qing Empire. Now, China is continuing to project its power from the centre to expand its frontier zone across Eurasia through the SCO and the New Silk Road.

Thus practically, China's New Silk Road was driven by China's western development strategy to stabilize restive Xinjiang, which literally means "new frontier", and to continue extracting resources for its growing economy. Wei Jianguo, Vice Minister of Commerce, said in 2004 that development of the China section along the new Eurasian Continental Bridge was listed as a priority in the country's western development strategy.⁷⁷ In 2010, Wang Mengshu, member of Chinese Academy of Engineering and professor at Jiaotong University, said, "China's overseas high-speed rail projects serve two purposes. First, we need to develop the western regions. Secondly, we need natural resources."⁷⁸ As such, China is engaged in frenzied constructions of rail links, high-ways, and energy pipelines westwards across Eurasia. Indeed, today high-speed rail, gas and oil pipelines, high-ways and fiber optic cables (information superhighways) have replaced camel caravans on the Silk Road. Modern Chinese Navy (PLAN) has replaced Admiral Zheng He's treasure fleets in the Gulf of Aden, coast of Africa and Mediterranean Sea. Instead of trading silk, porcelain and collecting tributes such as exotic giraffes, pearls and spices, China is trading in rail technology, Huawei telecommunications technology, cars, and in return collecting tributes of equities in infrastructure projects such as seaports, airports, railways, roads, oil & gas fields, strategic minerals, and mines.

In September 2011, China launched the China-Eurasia Expo 2011 in Urumqi in order to increase trade along the New Silk Road between China, West Asia and Europe. This was based on the previous China Urumqi Foreign Economic Relations and Trade Fair that was re-launched as the China-Eurasia Expo in 2010 as an important

⁷⁴ Hasan H. Karrar, *The New Silk Road Diplomacy: The Making of China's Central Asian Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era* (University of British Columbia Press, 2009).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.8.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*.

⁷⁷ Fu Jing, "Re-building the ancient Silk Road", *China Daily*, September 1, 2004.

⁷⁸ "China to build Asia-Europe high-speed railway network", *Global Times*, March 8, 2010.



platform for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.⁷⁹ “The upgrading is overall and comprehensive”, said China’s Minister of Commerce Chen Deming, who said the Expo would serve as China’s platform to reach out to the entire Asia and Europe, instead of just central and south Asia.⁸⁰ An article in *Global Times* stated that Xinjiang and northern provinces of Pakistan would form the central plank in the emerging architecture for these new silk routes, since Pakistani territories of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan border the Kashgar prefecture in Xinjiang.⁸¹

This supports China’s view of the New Silk Road as based on a trilateral launching pad called the Pamir Group, named after the Pamir Mountains that link China with Afghanistan and Pakistan. Writing in the *Global Times*, Li Xijiang, a scholar on Pakistan from Tsinghua University wrote that China, Afghanistan and Pakistan should form a strategic trilateral partnership to revive the ancient Silk Road and revitalize Afghanistan for regional stability and prosperity.⁸² Integrating Kashgar’s special economic zone along with Pakistan’s northern territories and Afghanistan, China hopes to use this launching pad as a key node on its New Silk Road. China has already absorbed Gilgit-Baltistan region when in 2010, *New York Times* reported that Pakistan had handed *de facto* control of the region to 11,000 PLA troops who were building the Karakoram Highway, railways, dams, and other projects.⁸³ In Afghanistan, another resource-rich country that is politically vulnerable, China is now a top investor in its extractive industries. There is a weekly Ariana Flight 332 from Urumqi to Kabul where workers from Xinjiang fly into Afghanistan to settle and work on infrastructure projects such as telecom or the large Aynak copper mine.⁸⁴ Likewise, Afghans fly to Xinjiang for trade and agricultural training. China’s ambassador to Afghanistan Xu Feihong penned a recent article in Afghan newspaper *The Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, on similar stages of development and synergistic cooperation between Muslim Xinjiang and Afghanistan, and how 20 Afghan agricultural officials had just finished two months session of agricultural training session in Xinjiang.⁸⁵ Given deteriorating U.S-Pakistan relations and Pakistan urging Afghanistan to replace the U.S. with China as a strategic partner, the China-AfPak Pamir Group appears to be consolidating.

IV. Military Implications of New Silk Road ‘Infrastructures’ Strategy

Similar to America building the first transcontinental railroad in the 19th century and expanding its strategic frontiers to the Wild West, China’s own “Empire Express” of the Eurasian Land Bridges can not only project commercial but also military influence across Eurasia.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ “China upgrades Urumqi fair for Eurasia trade”, *China Daily*, September 6, 2010.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Masood Khan, “New Silk Road will bridge China and Pakistan”, *Global Times*, September 18, 2011.

⁸² Li Xiguang, “New Silk Road would revitalize war-torn Afghanistan”, *Global Times*, June 6, 2011; Christina Lin, “China’s Silk Road Strategy in AfPak: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization”, *Institut für Strategie- Politik- Sicherheits- und Wirtschaftsberatung, Berlin (ISPSW)/ ETH Zurich*, June 11, 2011.

⁸³ Selig Harrison, “China’s Discreet Hold on Pakistan’s Northern Borderlands”, *New York Times*, August 26, 2010; Randeep Ramesh, “What are Chinese troops doing in Kashmir?”, *The Guardian*, September 4, 2010.

⁸⁴ Zhou Xin, “Analysis—China seeks profit, shuns politics, in Afghanistan”, *Reuters*, October 4, 2011.

⁸⁵ Xu Feihong, “A unique Neighbor of Afghanistan: China in Xinjiang”, *The Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, August 17, 2011.

⁸⁶ David Haward Bain, *Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999).



Empire Express: Imperial Power Projection Via Strategic Transport Corridors

As discussed earlier, strategic frontiers expand or contract according to the center's ability to project power to the periphery. When Imperial Japan acquired rights of South Manchurian Railway after the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), Japan first deployed its railway garrison – the Kwantung Garrison – in 1906 to defend territory along the railway, which evolved into the Kwantung Army in Manchuria in 1919 and triggered the Manchurian Incident (1931) that led to the second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945).⁸⁷ According to Nakano Akira in "Korea's Railway Network the Key to Imperial Japan's Control," building railways was a key part of colonizing the Korean Peninsula.⁸⁸ Likewise, University of Seoul professor Chung Jae Jeong, author of *Japanese Imperialism and Korean Railroads*, argued that, "From Korea's point of view, the Imperial Japanese Army brought railways with it, beginning a period of deprivation and oppression. Japan thought the Korean Peninsula was strategically crucial to its military and laid railways as tools to control the peninsula. The Russo-Japanese War was, in a way, a war over railways."⁸⁹ Chung observed that great powers viewed railways as key to expanding their areas of influence because of the speed with which military personnel and goods could be transported in bulk.⁹⁰

In the Russo-Japanese War, battle was fought over railroads located in northeastern China and northern parts of the Korean Peninsula. After the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), Russia scrambled to expand its own rail networks, including obtaining right of passage from Qing Dynasty for Chinese Eastern Railway that traversed northeastern China almost to Valdivostok, and its South Manchurian branch line from Harbin to Lushun.⁹¹ Japan also focused on acquiring control of the Gyeongui Line and Gyeongbu Line that connected Seoul with Pusan at the southern tip of the country. Public records at the time documented Japanese government intentions – document from Foreign Minister Komura Jutarō submitted to Prime Minister Katsura Taro in 1902 for Cabinet approval includes the following: "If Japan constructs the Gyeongui Line on our own and connects to the Gyeongbu Line, all major railways will be in the hands of our empire, in effect keeping Korea under our influence."⁹²

After outbreak of Russo-Japanese War began in 1904, Japan deployed troops to occupy Korea and signed a protocol with Korea to expropriate militarily sensitive areas on as hoc basis. In only few years, Japan built railways that extended across the peninsula almost into northeastern China, and set up troop encampments along the railways. In 1910, Japan annexed Korea as a protectorate.

⁸⁷ Ikegami, "Neo-Imperial China", p.88. Mukden "Manchurian" Incident was a staged railway sabotage by Japanese *agent provocateurs* as pretext for invading Manchuria and setting up Manchukuo in 1931. Jonathan Fenby, *Chiang Kai Shek: China's Generalissimo and the Nation He Lost* (Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2003), p. 202; Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (University of California Press, 1999).

⁸⁸ Nakano Akira, "Korea's Railway Network the Key to Imperial Japan's Control", *Japan Focus*, September 29, 2007.

⁸⁹ Chung Jae Jeong, *Japanese Imperialism and Korean Railways* (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1999); Nakano Akira, *Ibid*; Felix Patrikeeff and Harold Shukman, *Railways and the Russo-Japanese War: Transporting War* (London: Routledge Military Studies, 2007).

⁹⁰ Nakano Akira, "Korea's Railway Network the Key to Imperial Japan's Control"; Chung Jae Jeong, *Japanese Imperialism and Korean Railways*.

⁹¹ Felix Patrikeeff and Harold Shukman, *Railways and the Russo-Japanese War*; John Westwood, *Railways at War* (London: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 1981); Edwin A. Pratt, *The Rise of Rail-Power in War and Conquest, 1833-1914* (London: P. S. King & Sons, Inc., 1915); Christian Wolmar, *Engines of War: How Wars Were Won & Lost On The Railways* (New York: Public Affairs, 2010).



Logistics for Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW)

China appears to have heeded lessons from Japan on strategic railways. On November 17, 2010, Chinese PLA took the Shanghai-Nanjing express train for the first time to return to their barracks after completing their security duty at the Shanghai World Expo 2010.⁹³ The Shanghai-Nanjing express railway is an inter-city railway that can run at a maximum speed of 350 km per hour, and Chinese military analysts touted this as a way for PLA to project troops and light equipment in military operations other than war (MOOTW).⁹⁴ China's high-speed trains have clocked speeds as high as 486.1km/h, and the PLA is aggressively upgrading its long-range combat capabilities by using rail as logistical support for its air force (PLAAF) and troop projection.⁹⁵ Moreover, military requirements are now part of China's rail development and the PLA actually participates in the design and planning of China's high-speed rails.⁹⁶ Chengdu Railway Bureau for example has 14 military officers taking lead positions in key departments at all major stations, tasked to coordinate railway planning, design, construction, timing of requirements and track implementation.⁹⁷ Likewise Shenyang Railway Bureau, which is in the strategic location of Liaoning Province next to North Korea, Inner Mongolia and the Yellow Sea, has also established a regional military transportation management mechanism with the PLA.⁹⁸ According to PLA's General Logistics Department (GLD), over 1,000 railway stations have been quipped with military transportation facilities, thereby establishing a complete railway support network that enhances the PLA's strategic projection capability.⁹⁹

China is steadily militarizing its railways. As Ikegami observed, after Qinghai-Tibet railway opened in 2006, there was an acceleration of mass settlement of Han Chinese into western ethnic minority regions but with greater military effectiveness.¹⁰⁰ The main purpose of this railway was to give PLA greater mobility to move heavy weaponry in response to military emergencies. Indeed, on August 3, 2010, *PLA Daily* reported a train loaded with important air combat readiness material of PLAAF arrived in Tibet via the railway.¹⁰¹ Funded by ADB, China is also building an international highway connecting Kunming in Yunnan Province, Yangon and Mandalay in Myanmar, and Bangkok, Thailand – this is based on the same strategic “Burma Road” which Allied forces constructed for logistic support to Chiang Kai-Shek's Kuomintang troops fighting against the Japanese since 1937.¹⁰² Ikegami noted that given China's close relationship with Burma's military junta in recent years, the highway could be converted into land route for transportation of troops and military supplies in case of a military dispute.¹⁰³

⁹² Nakona Akira, *Ibid.*

⁹³ Ji Zhong and Huang Hui, “PLA uses Shanghai-Nanjing express railway to transport troops for first time”, *China Army*, November 19, 2010; Christina Lin, “The PLA's Orient Express: Militarization of the Iron Silk Road”, *China Brief*, Vol. 11, Issue 5, March 25, 2011.

⁹⁴ *China Army*, November 19, 2010.

⁹⁵ Zhou Chenyuan, “Speed test of Huhang high speed rail sets new record 416.6 km/h”, *People's Daily*, September 28, 2010.

⁹⁶ “China High Speed Rail to Meet Military Requirement”, *Xinhua*, December 7, 2010.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Wang Tiande and Kang Jiang, “Shenyang Railway Bureau builds new regional military transportation management mechanism”, *Xinhua*, January 12, 2010.

⁹⁹ “PLA improves strategic projection capability,” *PLA Daily*, February 4, 2010; *Defense Professional*, February 4, 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Ikegami, “Neo-Imperialism China's Quasi-Manchukuo Policy towards North Korea, Mongolia and Myanmar”, p.88.

¹⁰¹ “China combat readiness materials transported to Tibet, exhausting India”, *People's Daily*, August 4, 2010; *PLA Daily*, August 3, 2010; “Tibet railway to boost logistical support”, *The Hindu*, August 6, 2010.

¹⁰² Ikegami, “Neo-Imperialism”, p.81.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*



Seaports As Military Railheads for Strategic Land Access

China is not only building railways across Eurasia, it is also acquiring controlling and operational stakes in various container ports across the Indian Ocean Littoral, Coast of East Africa, and the Mediterranean as it is bailing out *Eurozone* countries. These dual-use transport infrastructures are strategic for MOOTW to quell low-intensity conflicts, such as in Africa. A 2008 USAF Air University paper on USAFRICOM observed the importance of constructing these dual-use civil-military infrastructures for troop deployment in stabilizing Africa:

- Construction of secure, joint civil military use airfields with associated support facilities (hangars, terminals, fuel storage, etc) capable of supporting heavy lift aircraft (e.g., C-17, Boeing 777s etc.).
- Modernization of strategic port facilities, especially in central regions of both Africa's eastern and western coasts. Modernization projects should focus on increasing reliability and capacity of port operations.
- Modernization and construction of roads and railways leading from port facilities to inland population centers. Efforts should focus on not just material improvement, but also on increasing security along inland highways and railways.¹⁰⁴

This strategic significance is not lost on China. Around the Mediterranean, China is acquiring stakes in shipping and logistics companies and is expanding ports in Greece (Piraeus Port), France (Port of Marseille Fosx 4XL container terminal), Spain (El Prat pier in Barcelona Port), as well as rail, air terminals, and fiber optic networks in Portugal (Huawei and Portugal Telecom) and Italy (air terminal north of Rome).¹⁰⁵ In Israel it is cooperating with Ashdod port authorities and is interested in building a light rail from Tel Aviv to Eilat, and connecting Eilat port to Ashdod and Haifa ports.¹⁰⁶ In Egypt China's shipping company COSCO has 20%-share in Denmark's Maersk's container port in Port Said.¹⁰⁷ Elsewhere in North Africa, China is attempting to recoup and renegotiate its infrastructure contracts in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Jennifer L. Parenti, "USAF, "China-Africa Relations in the 21st Century: How USAFRICOM should respond to China's growing presence in Africa", (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air Command and Staff Collage, Air University, April 2008), p.26.

¹⁰⁵ Nasos Mihalakas, "Part II: Chinese Investments in Europe—A Year in Review", *Foreign Policy*, February 11, 2011; Peter Leach, "Hutchison Ports to Develop Fos Terminal", *Journal of Commerce Online*, March 19, 2010; "Chinese group Hutchison Whampoa increases participation in TerCat", *Sinalunya*, January 24, 2011; Silvia Marchetti, "Chinese investments in Italy increases", *Xinhua*, November 5, 2009; "Greece to become China's Mediterranean gateway", *Network 54*, August 1, 2006; "Barcelona hopes the Chinese landed", *Economics Newspaper*, July 7, 2011;

¹⁰⁶ Ofer Petersburg, "Chinese envoy: We admire Israel", *Ynet News*, September 28, 2010; "Ashdod port handled TEU 84,611 from China in 2008", *Port2port News Service*.

¹⁰⁷ Ben Leung, "China's Egypt, Africa Investments", *Bikyamasr*, August 10, 2010.

¹⁰⁸ In Africa, military infrastructure for space is another Chinese area of interest. This is significant for China's increasing weaponization of space and developing ASATS to blind U.S. satellites over command and control of military operations. Africa's vast equatorial regions are prime real estate for the world's burgeoning space requirements, because equatorial ground locations are ideal for satellite tracking and control. Moreover, Africa's east central coast is one of only three places in world where satellites can be launched directly into equatorial orbits that provide the best coverage for most satellite uses. It is the only way to achieve a geostationary satellite orbit, which provides 24-hour coverage over a single point on the Earth. Currently most countries launch satellites into non-equatorial orbits and then perform costly orbital transfers to achieve these desired positions. For more information see Jennifer L. Parenti, Major, USAF, "China-Africa Relations in the 21st Century: How USAFRICOM should respond to China's growing presence in Africa" (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air Command and Staff College, Air University, 2008), p. 27.



Across the Suez Canal in the Red Sea, China is already enlarging Port Sudan, which gives China the ability to deliver maritime shipments (whether civilian or military) to Sudan, East Africa and Horn of Africa region.¹⁰⁹ Near the Persian Gulf China is allegedly taking operational control of Pakistan's Gwadar Port, which it built.

A May *Reuters* article reported that Gwadar was always conceived to have a military role.¹¹⁰ During the 1971 war with India, the Pakistani navy moved its ships from Karachi to Gwadar to avoid destruction by the Indian navy, and according to the intelligence site *Night Watch*, Gwadar is one of three Indian Ocean ports with overland links to western and southwestern China to avoid the Malacca Dilemma. The other two ports are Chahbahar in Iran and Kyauk Phyu in Burma.¹¹¹ Thus, the specter of Chinese ships including perhaps the new aircraft carrier named *Shi Lang* (after the Ming Dynasty General who conquered Taiwan) and submarines operating from Gwa-dar is sure to feed insecurities in the region.¹¹² In fact, China's naval ambitions and aircraft carrier is fueling fear even in Great Britain, when in the aftermath of Chinese naval vessels having sailed to the Mediterranean to help evacuate its 36,000 citizens in Libya, a *Daily Mail* article was entitled "After Beijing sends a frigate to the Med, a leading author poses a chilling question...how long until a Chinese aircraft carrier sails up the Thames?"¹¹³

China's construction of civil-military sea-air-land transport corridors once again appears to be modeled on Imperial Japan's Manchukuo Policy. Imperial Japanese Army Railway and shipping Section in the logistics unit worked closely with Imperial Japanese Navy Shipping Services as well as local transport units of Kwantung Army Railway and Air Transport Units in Manchukuo. Seaports essentially serve as railheads from which to load and unload goods from inland. Given China's state-owned port operator Hutchison Whampoa and shipping company COSCO have close ties with the PLA, COSCO was originally established as an arm of the Chinese Navy in 1985 and "legitimized the use of navy ships for civilian shipping and thus provided a legal cover for the navy's smuggling" (James Mulvenon, *Soldiers of Fortune*, 2000), and China's General Logistics Department (GLD) is now actively participating in designs of railways to meet military requirements, this will facilitate China's expeditionary interventions for non-war operations (MOOTW) to protect its foreign interests. It will enable China to rapidly transport troops and equipments from seaports towards inland, or from railways to seaports onto ships that will then deploy to an offshore combat theater.¹¹⁴ On the offensive front, China is also building rails from Lop Nur in Xinjiang, home of its strategic force Second Artillery (2nd Arty). Lt. Col. Mark Stokes (USAF-ret) in February 2011 revealed that 2nd Arty normally build bases next to national infrastructure including high- speed

¹⁰⁹ Daniel Sayani, "Red China increases investments and influence in Sudan", *The New American*, January 31, 2011; "Sino-Sudanese partnership attains many gains in Red Sea State", *Forum of China and Africa Cooperation*, January 28, 2011, <http://www.focac.org>.

¹¹⁰ "In Pakistan's Gwadar port, Chinese whispers grow", *Reuters*, May 26, 2011.

¹¹¹ "NightWatch 20110524", *NightWatch*, May 24, 2011, http://www.kforcegov.com/Services/IS/NightWatch/nightWatch_11000111.aspx.

¹¹² Jens Kastner, "Ming Dynasty admiral spooks Taiwan", *Asia Times Online*, April 13, 2011; Brahma Chellaney, "China's deception by the boatload", *Project Syndicate*, June 17, 2011;

¹¹³ Ian Morris, "After Beijing sends a frigate to the Med, a leading author poses a chilling question...How long until a Chinese aircraft carrier sails up the Thames?" *Daily Mail*, March 5, 2011; Christopher P. Cavas, "Chinese warships tour the Mediterranean", *Defense News*, August 9, 2010; Gabe Collins and Andrew Erickson, "Implications of China's military evacuation of citizens from Libya", *China Brief*, Vol. 11, Issue 4, March 10, 2011; Jeremy Page, "Libyan Turmoil prompts Chinese Naval Firsts", *Wall Street Journal*, February 25, 2011.

¹¹⁴ James Mulvenon, *Soldiers of Fortune: The Rise and Fall of the Chinese Military-Business Complex, 1978-1998* (M.E. Sharpe, November 2000).



rails.¹¹⁵ As Jonathan Holslag noted in “Khaki and Commerce: The Military Implications of China’s Trade Ambitions”, China is aggressively upgrading its defense logistics in line with its evolving ‘non-interference principle.’¹¹⁶ In 2008 a *Liberation Army Daily* article stated that “mobility and flexibility are key for addressing new challenge” as Beijing its boosting strategic lift platforms, supported by Central Party School scholar’s assertion that ‘non-intervention’ principle needs to be revised in face of its overseas dependence for national development.¹¹⁷ Indeed, it appears a rising China and an increasingly proactive PLA are poised to carry out new “Historic Missions” on the New Silk Road in the 21st Century.

V. Conclusion

Thus we see a rising China appears to be expanding its western strategic frontiers across Eurasia via a quasi-Manchukuo policy. It is building a New Silk Road via its Eurasian Land Bridges and militarizing its transport corridors. Under SCO and ECO auspices, China is cooperating with Turkey, Iran and Pakistan to build railways across Central Asia and Afghanistan to link trains from Beijing to Istanbul and onto Europe. In Turkey, plans are already underway to lay rails under Sea of Marmara across the Bosphorus.¹¹⁸ It is important to note that in October 2010, China and Turkey conducted joint air combat exercises in the Mediterranean, whereby Turkey replaced Israel with China in its annual Anatolia Eagle exercise with other NATO members and partners. Pakistan and Iran participated as Chinese warplanes refueled in both countries en route to Turkey.¹¹⁹ Turkey, Pakistan and Iran are key nodes on China’s New Silk Road, with access to the Mediterranean Sea, Persian Gulf, and Indian Ocean as well as overland access to Western China.

Learning from Martin Van Creveld’s *magnum opus* on logistics (*Supplying War*, 2004), whereby he observed the importance of logistics in war and of having friendly nations host supply lines because “no logistic system of the time could sustain an army embarked on operations in enemy territory”, China is upgrading friendly ties with these key countries for its dual-use New Silk Road.¹²⁰ In 2009, Turkey and China seemed to be archenemies

¹¹⁵ Lt. Col. Mark Stokes (USAF-ret), remarks at *China Defense & Security 2011*, Jamestown Foundation, Washington, D.C., February 10, 2011; “China starts building railway into ‘sea of death’, *Xinhua*, March 4, 2010.

¹¹⁶ Jonathan Holslag, “Khaki and Commerce: The Military Implications of China’s Trade Ambitions”, *Issues and Studies* 45, No. 3, September 2009.

¹¹⁷ Wang Hongshu, “Jidongquan shi duoyanghua junshi renwu de hexin” (“Mobility is key for flexible military operations), *Jiefangjun bao* (Liberation Army Daily), June 4, 2008; Liu Congliang, “Duoyuanhua weixie yaoqiu Zongguo junren shuli xin guojia anquan guan” (“Chinese military to develop new national security concept to address the diversifying challenges”), *Jiefangjun bao* (Liberation Army Daily), June 15, 2008; Liu Lin, “Junshi lilian de fei zhanzheng yunyong” (The use of non-war military strength), *Jiefangjun bao*, January 24, 2007; Peng Xinting, “Cong ‘wajiao wei guo’ zouxiang ‘wajiao wei min’”, (From ‘state diplomacy’ to ‘people’s diplomacy’), *Nanfang dushibao* July 11, 2007.

¹¹⁸ Thomas Seibert, “Turkey Lays Track on ‘Iron Silk Road,’” *The National*, June 9, 2008, http://georgiandaily.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2976&Itemid=74. See also Ray LaHood, “World’s Transportation Planners Marvel as Turkey’s Marmaray Tunnel Nears Completion,” official blog of the U.S. secretary of transportation, July 6, 2010, <http://fastlane.dot.gov/2010/07/worlds-transportation-planners-marvel-as-turkeys-marmaray-tunnel-nears-completion.html>; “U.S. Secretary of Transportation Praises Istanbul’s Marmaray Project,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, June 30, 2010, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=us-secretary-of-transportation-eulogizes-marmaray-project-2010-06-30>; “Marmaray Railway Engineering Project, Istanbul, Turkey,” *Railway-Technology.com*, <http://www.railway-technology.com/projects/marmaray>.

¹¹⁹ “Chinese warplanes refueled in Iran en route to Turkey”, *Hurriyet Daily*, October 11, 2010; Christina Lin, *The New Silk Road: China’s Energy Strategy in the Greater Middle East*, Policy Focus #109, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 2011.

¹²⁰ Martin Van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton*, 2nd Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.7.



after Beijing's crackdown on Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang whereby Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan furiously called it "genocide."¹²¹ By October 2010 they had upgrade their relations "to strategic partnership" and conducted a joint NATO exercise.¹²² Seeing how NATO/ISAF supply lines suffered repeated attacks and cut off by Pakistan during times of disagreements, China understands the importance of controlling supply lines and of having allies in geo-strategic regions. Indeed, in an August article by a retired Pakistani brigadier entitled "The umbilical cord of NATO", Brig Said Nazir Mohamand quipped that, "amateurs discuss strategy while professionals talk logistics."¹²³

As the U.S. is proceeding to build its new Silk Road based on the western-sponsored Northern Distribution Network (NDN) to Afghanistan, China is also racing to build its own version. Observing this new contest between a current hegemonic power and a rising one, Aaron Friedberg from Princeton University recently published a book entitled *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia*.¹²⁴ However, it appears that he forgot to add "EUR" in front of Asia, because there is much afoot across the Eurasia heartland.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

About the Author of this Issue

Dr. Christina Lin is a Visiting Scholar at the Center for Transatlantic Relations at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Johns Hopkins University. Paper prepared for a lecture at the China Maritime Studies Institute, U.S. Naval War College, on October 27, 2011, Newport, Rhode Island.



Dr. Christina Lin

¹²¹ Ayla Jean Yackley, "Turkish leader calls Xinjiang killings 'genocide'", *Reuters*, July 10, 2001.

¹²² Delphine Strauss, "Wen hails 'strategic partnership' with Turkey", *Financial Times*, October 8, 2010.

¹²³ Brig Said Nazir Mohamand (ret), "The umbilical cord of NATO", *The Frontier Post*, August 5, 2011.

¹²⁴ Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (WW Norton & Company, August 2011).