

ANALYZING AMERICAN VALUES IN BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE (BRI)

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Abstract

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was initiated by Xi Jinping after being elected as the president of China in 2012. BRI connects Asia, Africa, and Europe based on shared-destiny to create trade routes that integrate main centers of economic vitality. This project gave benefit for all participating countries, such as providing help for poorer regions. Even China created a financial system that supports this project, called The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and The New Development Bank (NDB). China's efforts to expand its influence in the world are similar to US efforts in the 19th century, known as Manifest Destiny. Americans believed that the US is destined to expand the territories westward approaching Pacific Ocean and spreading democracy. This effort is also highly related to their belief that the US is a City upon a Hill. There was some belief that the US becomes a great country that leads other nations in the world. The focus of this paper is two American beliefs in the context of China's effort to increase its economic and military power in the world by reactivating the Silk route. The author uses the concept of Tianxia as City upon a Hill and Manifest Destiny in Chinese version in analyzing China's measures to increase its strength on an international level. The author will further analyze how these beliefs being adopted by Chinese government in realizing its dream of regaining the glory of managing silk-road, making it the new silk-road.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), New Silk Route, Manifest Destiny, City upon a Hill, Tianxia

1. INTRODUCTION

The 2010s is unpredictable decade for countries which have relations with the case of South China Sea. There was a top report that said at its current growth rate, China would have replaced the US' position as the number one top economy within a decade (Guo & Yang, 2016, p. 1). The Belt and Road Initiative which was initiated by Xi Jinping has become hotly-debated issue in recent years. Considering the history, China The term "silk road" was first used by German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen in the 19th century because mostly commodities traded from China contained silk. The silk-road connects three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe. The silk-road is divided into two routes: the north route and the south route. The north route lays Bulgar-Kipchak to the Eastern Europe and the Crimea Peninsula, and then it leads to the Black Sea, the Marmara Sea, and the Balkans to Venice. While the south route lies from Turkestan-Khorasan headed for Mesopotamia and Anatolia, and then to Antioch in Southern Anatolia headed to the Mediterranean Sea or via the Levant to Egypt and North Africa. This shows that China has ever controlled the old silk-road about 2,000 years ago.

Alek Chance in his writing entitled “American Perspective on the Belt and Road Initiative” stated: (Chance, 2016, p. 4)

Through BRI, China aims to deepen and expand the surface, sea, and air linkages across the Eurasian landmass and Indo-Pacific peripherals, further integrate its main centers of economic vitality, and provide development assistance to its poorer regions - in effect establishing a modern-day Silk Road.

It implies that China embraces all participating countries to have win-win cooperation without the threat of increasing its influence, the relations rather based on the shared-destiny.

In this discussion paper, the author wants to show that BRI's ideas are inspired by American values particularly City upon a Hill and Manifest Destiny. Although Xi Jinping denies the statement that by BRI, China is in attempt of becoming a hegemon country just like the US. However, China's measures lead to that goal. BRI is considered to be a seriously pursued initiative with the potential to significantly impact the economic and political future of Eurasia (Chance, 2016, p. 1). Although the steps taken by China are not exactly the same as the US, but, by giving many loans to other countries, China has become a savior of the economies of these countries. In which, in a long term those countries will be discursively dependent to China. This paper will analyze how the American values are implementing through the ambitious project Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

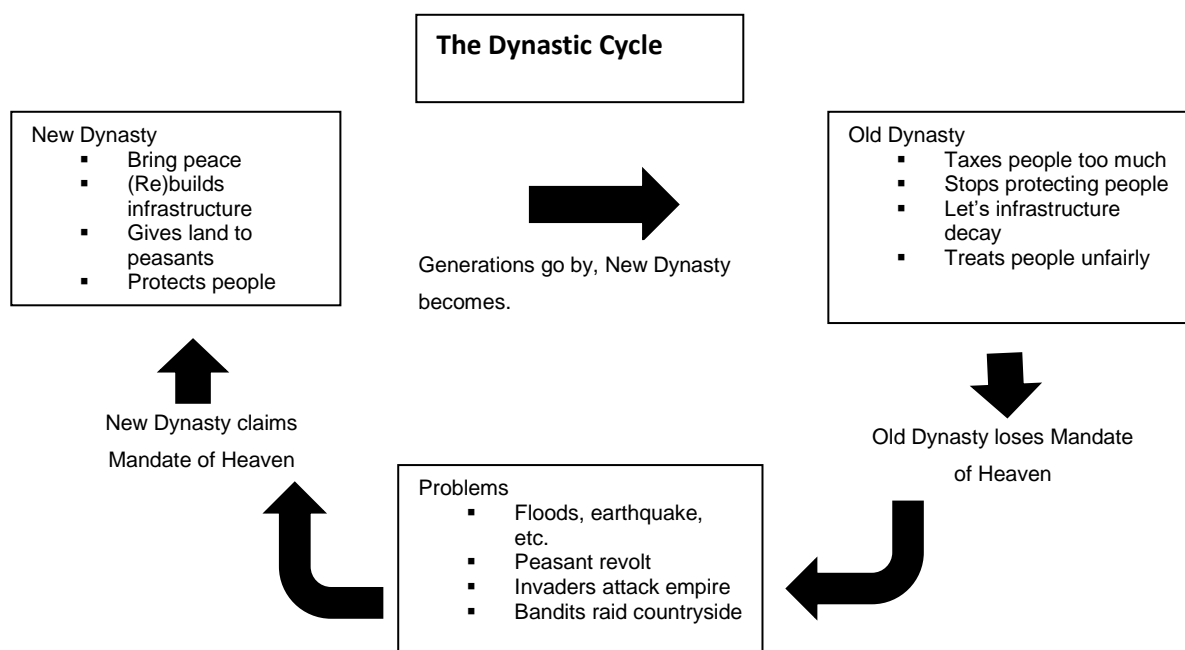
2. RESEARCH QUESTION

How the concept of City upon a Hill and Manifest Destiny realized in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)?

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Concept being used in this discussion paper was Tianxia (All under Heaven). It is Chinese philosophy to see the world. Tianxia is an ancient Chinese concept which in English can be translated as 'all under heaven'. In ancient China, Tianxia stands for the lands, space and area divinely appointed for the Emperor by universal principles of order. The core of this world view was not circumscribed in nature, and outer groups, such as ethnic minorities and foreigners who acquired the mandate of the Chinese Emperor were themselves accepted and included into the Chinese Tianxia. In ancient Chinese political thought, the "Son of Heaven" having received the Mandate of Heaven would be the ruler of the entire world. Although in practice there would be areas in the world which best known not under the control of the Emperor. In Chinese political theory, the rulers of those areas obtained their power from the Emperor. The Figure 1 below best describes the mandate of heaven:

Figure 1. The Dynastic Cycle



This concept has existed since 3,000 years ago, but has not been widely owned in the western world. Tian can literally interpreted as heaven, sky, or what is above. Whereas xia is a term means below, lower, or subordinate. Therefore, it can be concluded that Tianxia means everything under the sky. This concept was

not developed significantly in ancient China (Yaqing, 2007).

Tingyang, a professor of the Philosophy Institute in Beijing stated that 'all under heaven' is an open concept that allows for a world system (Tingyang, 2009). Tingyang argued that 'all under heaven' is the best philosophy for world governance. This concept is more focused on 'wordless' rather than 'internationality.' This concept also forms a global perspective that conflicts with local or national perspectives.

Laozi Daodejing in Tingyang (2009, 9-10), argued:

The best way to understand everything is to view a person from the viewpoint of a person, a family from the viewpoint of a family, a village from the viewpoint of a village, a state from the viewpoint of a state, and 'all under heaven' from the viewpoint of 'all under heaven'.

The sentence above means a unit level must be seen from the level of the unit, not the level of other units. In other words, it can be said that 'all under heaven' is the right level of unit to see the world. Tingyang also said that Tianxia is the right solution for Westphalia's shortcomings. In this context, it is said that world chaos occurs because of the use of an improper perspective. Tingyang in Callahan, stated that the world order in use today, which is based on the Westphalia system, directs us to conflict because it is based on the interests of each different country (Callahan, 2008). Tingyang means that we have to see the world with global perspective, not countries perspective. In this context, various world problems cannot be solved or overcome by country, region, or international organization, but rather require global interaction with the use of an appropriate international perspective: Tianxia. Further explanation, Tingyang stated that to have a world order we need to measure the world according to world standards, not according to the national interests of a country (Callahan, 2008).

In addition to 'all under heaven', Tianxia also has philosophy 'all the people'. It means that Tianxia does not consider external parties either geographically or ethically. Because Tianxia's magnanimous though does not deny the existence of other parties. Western countries divide the world based on racial differences, while Chinese thought unites them through the cultural ethical logic because the purpose of the Tianxia system is transformation. If politics in general distinguishes between enemies and friends, Tianxia tries to turn enemies into friends, trying to attract people rather than conquer them (Callahan, 2008). This is one of the reasons why Tianxia is very relevant to analyze BRI. Because as Xi Jinping said that BRI is not an exclusive development, BRI rather an inclusive development for all participating countries through the economic corridors. In brief, the criterion for assessing people's hearts is not freedom, but order (Tianxia) is the highest order (Callahan, 2008). In fact, democracy does not make people prosper. Democracy is defined as individual desires that are manipulated in elections and surveys.

Tianxia as 'the world institution' means that the world order needs to be built and maintained through a world institution, Tianxia. Because Tianxia is the largest order, its structure as a world institution has fundamental legitimacy. BRI is the real embodiment of this idea. To finance the project, it creates some world financial institutions that are able to manage the economic distribution. China initiated the Asian Infrastructure Investment bank (AIIB). AIIB is a multilateral development bank that aims at aiding infrastructure development in the Asia-Pacific since it was proposed by Xi Jinping in 2013 and then started its first operation in January 2016. New Development Bank is also one of an infrastructure development banks that buttresses OBOR initiative. This bank was first established in the middle of 2014 by BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) to finance infrastructure and sustainable development projects within BRICS. Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia stated that on 2017, NDB approved the second term of investment project worth \$2.5 - \$3 billion in total. Putin also stated that their implementation does not only be a boost to their economy, but also promotes integration among countries.

Tianxia further explained that despite being in the European Union and the United Nations as a region and world institution, they are related to worldviews based on the perspective of the nation-state. The western world regulates political life on three levels, namely individuals, communities, and nation-states, while Chinese political thought looks at the level of Tianxia, state, and family. In addition to that, China's ethical system (domestic and international) has been destroyed by the nation-state's selfishness in the Westphalia world system. Therefore, Tingyang proposes Tianxia as a solution to the world's problems (Callahan, 2008, p. 752).

By understanding Tianxia, it is obvious that China is challenging Westphalia system that has been rooted in international relations, a system which is based on the realist perspective. Tianxia rather focus on the global system, not compartmentalize the nation state. If China succeeds in becoming the world hegemon country in the future, it is possible for China to change the international order according to Tianxia perspective. Even though China has different perspective in seeing the world, however, China and the US have the same interest to increase its influence in the region. China explicitly, using an American value that has been rooted

in City upon a Hill and Manifest Destiny.

In regard to BRI, China will take the role as 'the spoiler' because it does not feel satisfied with the low status (subordinate status) in the current world order (Pu, 2016, p. 119). In other word, China wants to de-legitimize the existing international order. Moreover, Pu states '*through the implementation of BRI/OBOR, China would attempt to create a China-centered world order that will replace the existing order.*' This statement clearly suggests that China is trying to replace the world order through the implementation of BRI. While Xian Lanxin defines BRI as '*an avenue to a 'post-Westphalian world', in a sense of a true 21st century geo-economic integration of Eurasia acted out by Asian nations.*' (Belt & Road News, 2019). This definition clearly implies that BRI is an instrument of the future when the nation-state system (Westphalia) ends, it will be replaced by a system (Tianxia) which is controlled by China or Asian countries in general.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

4.1 City upon a Hill

The term "City upon a Hill" expressed in March 1630 when John Winthrop vowed that America as a nation will become the model and the leader in the world (Minderop, 2006, p. 35). Here's a direct quote from Winthrop's speech:

"We must for we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world. [...] But if our hearts shall turn away, so that we will not obey, but shall be seduced, and worship other Gods, our pleasure and profits, and serve them; it is propounded unto us this day, we shall surely perish out of the good land whither we pass over this vast sea to possess it."

The meaning of this expression is that America is on top and becomes a great nation that is able to lead other countries in the world because America can solve various problems (Tyndall, 1984, p. 61). This belief becomes the basis in the formulation of US foreign policies as well as in international relations. It has been conducted in various aspects such as economy, security and cultural aspects. The philosophy of City upon a Hill in US foreign policy is outlined in American exceptionalism in which the US is not only a unique country but is superior to other nations.

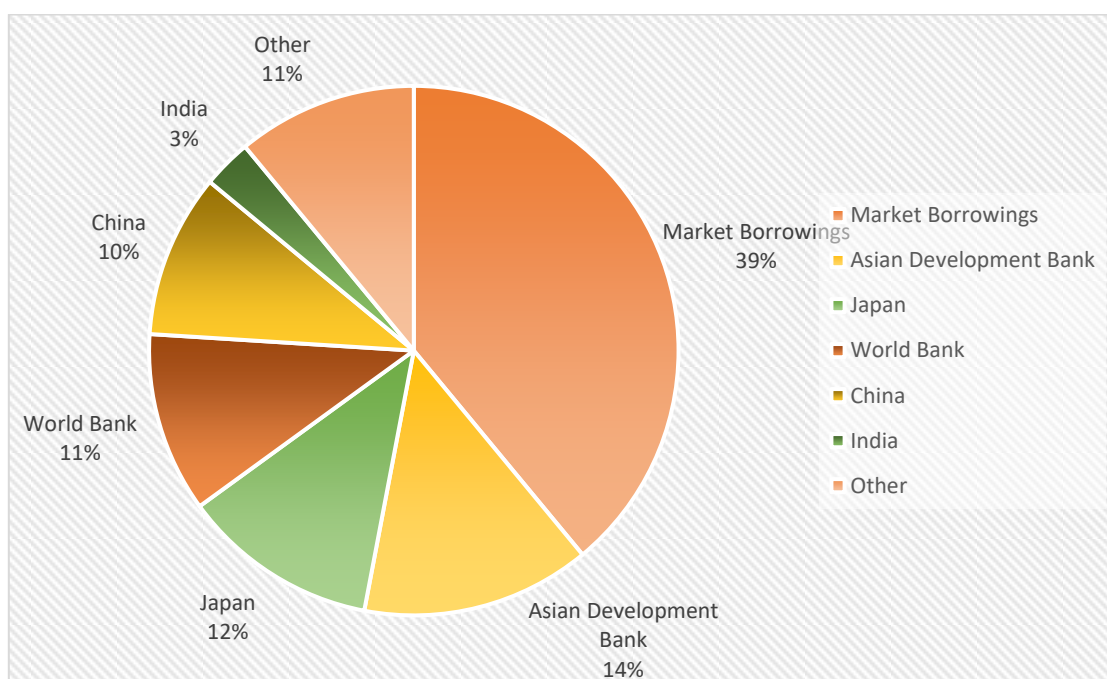
4.2 Manifest Destiny

The manifest destiny was originally coined by John O'Sullivan in his essay entitled Great Nation of Futurity published in the United States Magazine and Democratic Review in 1839 (Minderop, 2006, p. 39). The essential manifestation is that the US must defend their nation and what they do according to God's will because the US is destined to become a big country.

4.3 City upon a Hill and Manifest Destiny in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

In the American Manifest Destiny, America tries to expand its territory. One well-known effort was when the US bought Louisiana. The American Destiny Manifest was also used to justify slavery in Texas. There was never as set of principles defining manifest destiny; however it was a general idea rather than a specific policy. Manifest destiny was an expression of faith in the morality and value of expansionism which complemented other popular ideas in that era, including American exceptionalism and Romantic nationalism. Manifest Destiny refers to the territorial expansion of the US from 1812 to 1860. This era was at the end of the War of 1812 and the beginning of American Civil War. During this time, the US expanded its territory to the Pacific Ocean. American Manifest Destiny in a way uses violent ways to conquer a territory, however, in BRI context, BRI is a new imperialism, not involving direct confrontation rather uses a subtle way.

Expertise say that this subtle way will lead to a "debt-trap" in which countries that want to joint this project with limited source of money can be lent some funds by China to build infrastructure. With the agreement that if the debt cannot be paid off within a certain period, then the infrastructure will be controlled and operated by China. In Sri Lanka, China lent about \$ 1.5 billion for a new deep-water harbor. It is a key stop of the maritime silk-road. But in 2017, it was clear Sri Lanka could not pay back the loan. So, instead Sri Lanka gave China control over the harbor and Sri Lanka got leeway to pay China back within 99 years. Sri Lanka is widely cited as a clear example of getting trapped in Chinese debt and being forced to hand over assets with national and strategic importance to China (Moramudali, 2019). However, Sri Lanka is in a complex economic problem which should not add loan from other countries. Sri Lanka's debt problem goes well beyond China. It is related to a change in foreign debt composition as stated below.

Chart 1. Sri Lankan Debt Stock by Lender (2017)

Source: Ministry of Finance, Sri Lanka, 2017

What the author wants to highlight is the measures taken by China which prove that China is not merely an economic motive in this project, it rather an expansion of territory in which at the long term to increase its influence in international politics. The most prominent feature is that China glances at countries that are politically weak but geographically strategic. In addition, China is also very keen to invite countries of the former Russian fraction to cooperate. In other words, China is attracting "less democratic" countries such as Kazhaktan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus and Tajikistan.

In addition, China also chose Pakistan which is economically weak, conflicted, and has a high level of corruption. Pakistan is also a country that investors rarely see. In 2011, China offered to build a new port in the small town of Gwadar and in 2018, construction of ports, roads, railways, worth \$ 62 billion in BRI. This is the meeting point where land routes meet maritime routes. Although from an economic standpoint, the project benefits both sides and Pakistan shows the highest GDP growth in 8 years and establishes close relations with one of the world powers. But Pakistan is the key for China to ship the oil from the Middle East. Therefore, it is not surprising that Pakistan is prospected to establish good bilateral relations with China. It is because China thinking about long-term benefits.

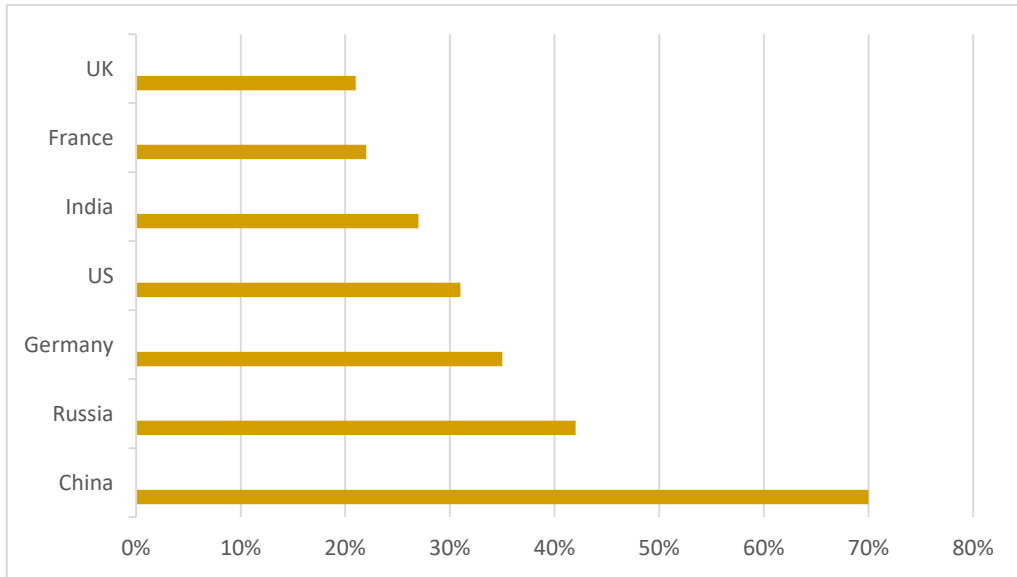
China provides loans to countries that according to economic performance do not have the capacity to pay the debts. These are top 8 debt risk countries: Montenegro, Djibouti, Maldives, Laos, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyztan, and Mongolia. But why does China keep giving those loans? That is because the motives of China are not only economic motives. In Sri Lanka, China lent about \$ 1.5 million, to build a new deep water port. That is the key stop lane of the maritime silk lane. But in 2017, clearly Sri Lanka could not pay. Instead, China is given control over infrastructure that has been built with a 99-year contract. We never know what might happen for 99 years. In Pakistan, China controls a strategic port with a 40-year contract. That's only two countries, what if the key countries in Asia are controlled by China. It cannot be denied that those infrastructures in the future will turn into military bases. Like the naval base that China built in Djibouti.

In Bangladesh, China has focused on the establishment of the deep-sea port in Chittagong. The plan included connecting the port with China's western region via rail and road links. It provides an access to its landlocked western province of Yunan. The overall aid package has been estimated to be \$8.7 billion (Marantidou, 2014, p. 6). Not less interesting is the China's infestation at Myanmar. Kyaukphyu harbor in Rakhine State is assumed to have a prominent position in China's investment plans (Marantidou, 2014, p. 6). Even though, Sittwe had figured conspicuously in the 'string of pearls' discourse in defiance of the development by India.

The efforts made by China have been successful. A data from Pew Research Center shows that a global median of 70% say China plays a more prominent role in the world than it did 10 years ago (Devlin, 2018).

The Chart 2 below shows 72% believe China is more important now than it was a decade ago and only 8% of those surveyed say China plays a less important role than it did a decade ago.

Chart 2. Consensus that China plays a bigger role in the world today

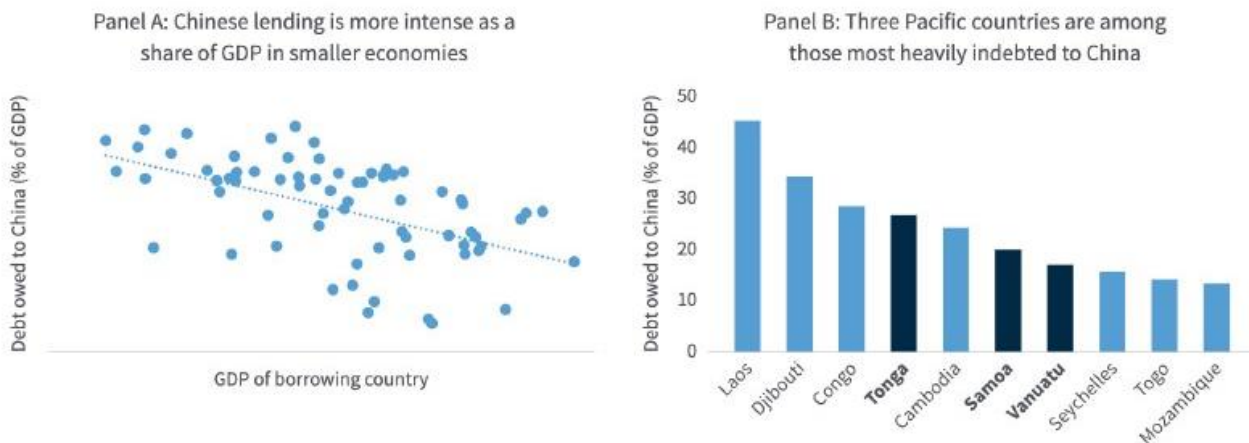


Note: Percentages are medians based on 25 countries.

Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. Q31 & Q32-a-f.

One of China's way in increasing power is by lending loans to other countries, most notably known as "debt diplomacy". Pacific countries are among the most liable countries in the world to potential debt sustainable problems and in a long-term possible turn into 'debt trap'. The most vulnerable countries to be in debt problems from BRI are smaller economies with unsteady institutions, even if the majority of Chinese financing goes to larger countries with a greater capability to absorb such debt. On the basis of proof, China's overseas lending as a share of GDP emerges to be much larger in smaller countries. That can be seen in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Pacific Countries are among those most vulnerable to BRI-related debt problems



Source: Government documents and IMF for Pacific countries; for all other countries, Eugenio Cerutti and Haonan Zhou, "The Chinese Banking System: Much More than a Domestic Giant", VoxEU.org, 9 February 2018, <https://voxeu.org/article/chinese-banking-system>

Source: Lowy Institute, October 2019

Three small Pacific economies (Tonga, Samoa, and Vanuatu) appear to be among those most densely indebted to China anywhere in the world.

4.4 Tianxia and China's Attempt to be Superpower

In this part, the author will explain more on how China will become the superpower country. William Fox in his book *The Superpowers: The United States, Britain and the Soviet Union – Their Responsibility for Peace* explained the global reach of a super-empowered nation (Buzan & Foot, 2004). As the Cold War became more rooted, which distinguish a nuclear superpower from 19th century? It creates a new definition, a country with 'great power' is the one in possession of ultimate destruction and strategic doctrine deterrence emerged from it. As Cold War ended, the emerge of globalization characterized that 'great power' needs more than just nuclear capability. It needs to broaden out to some attributes such as maintaining sufficient economic, diplomatic, and military reseources for preserving the international order in which great powers assume themselves to be the main actors (Bull, 1977). In addition to being 'great' and 'super', they must also be 'global' and reap transnational competencies which permit interaction with non-state actors, regional organizations and the instruments and institutions of global governance. In summary, 21st century superpowers need to be: 1) a great power in the traditional sense; 2) an outstanding military position; 3) a transnational performer.

Now, the author will describe further whether China fulfills the requirements to become superpower. *First*, China plays its role to pursue multilateral ways in solving the conflict in the region. The real example of this is in the case of South China Sea Dispute. Multilateralism is proven in China's eagerness since 1995 to discuss the contested Sparty territorial issue with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a group rather than pursuing on bilateral discussions. It resulted on the signing a code of conduct (the Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea) in November 202 that all the signatory countries will not use force to resolve the issue.

China also creates ASEAN+3 (China, Japan, and South Korea). Besides, China also initiated Shangai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which as the development of 'Shanghai Five' (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan). China also hosted the 'six-party talk' (North Korea, South Korea, the US, PRC, Japan, and Russia) in 2003-2005 discussing North Korea nuclear issue. Those attempts show China's direction in multilateralism. At its peak, BRI is considered as the biggest multilaterals direction to unite countries from three different continents. It relates to BRI priorities described in the table below:

Table 1. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Main Priorities

No.	Priority	Explanation
1	Policy Coordination	Promoting inter-governmental cooperation, multilevel inter-governmental macro policy exchange and communication mechanism. Advocating mutual political trust, shared destiny, and new cooperation consensus.
2	Facility Connectivity	Improving infrastructure along the BRI routes particularly traditional linkages such as highways, railways, postal services, aviation, shipping, pipeline and electricity, custom, border-defense, quality inspection, and planning. BRI also has roles in promoting green infrastructure and low carbon construction.
3	Unimpeded Trade	Improving investment and trade facilitation, enhancing customs cooperation, enhancing trade areas, developing modern service trade, and cross border e-commerce. Promoting the removal of investment barriers, fostering cooperation in newly emerged industry, and expanding mutual investment areas.
4	Financial Integration	Emphasizing the importance of further deepening financial cooperation, establishing a stable currency, establishing a regional financial risk easily warning system, and issuing Renminbi bonds.
5	People-to-people Bond	Promoting friendly cooperation in cultural exchange among students. Expanding scale of tourism by simplifying visa application procedures along the BRI countries. Furthermore, strengthening cooperation in science and technology and encouraging research collaborations.

Source: Hong Kong Trade Development Council, <http://china-trade-research.hktdc.com/business-news/article/The-Belt-and-Road-Initiative/The-Belt-and-Road-Initiative/obor/en/1/1X000000/1X0A36B7.htm>

Second, looking at China's economic and military in global scale. China is a country that is predicted to survive with the need for oil for decades. China has been importing oil since 1993 and China's oils reserves is estimated that it's proven will be depleted by 2018 (Wright, 2004). While the needs of oil in 2025 will be quadruple (The Economist, 2004). Furthermore, China is dependent on oil to Middle East and Africa (Huang & Ke, 2004). From total oil, 80% is imported from Middle East and 60% from Africa. China overly wants to win the Spartyly contestation because the oil transportation passes Malacca Strait which is located in the South China Sea. However, for economic and security reason China tries all efforts to win it. In relations to BRI, China cooperates with countries that have strategic harbor location to ensure the oil transfer goes well.

The China National Offshore Oil Corporation has actively been looking for attainment of oil and gas companies around the world. China has entered into agreement of more than 160 companies internationally, and its foreign production accounts for more than fifth of its total production (Radio Broadcast Summary of China, 2003). This is China's 'Going Out' policy of seeking for energy supplies overseas.

From those two aspects, China China has taken half the journey to become a superpower country. Analyzing the Tianxia concept which emphasize on 1) all under heaven; 2) all the people; 3) the world institution, China shares the same values as Manifest Destiny that it shall become a great country which leads other nations as the philosophy of a City upon a Hill. Thus, China still emphasize on the inclusive developments by pursuing economic corridors that will benefit all parties. Further analysis, China sees the world with a global perspective. It is proven by the establishment of BRI which connects three prominent continents for trade interest.

The current progress of the BRI shows positive responses from participating countries. After successfully holding its first meeting in 2017 attended by 29 head of states, in 29 April 2019 Xi Jinping held the second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF) attended by 40 head of states. On that comprehensive meeting, all head of states were involved in exchanging views such as advancing connectivity, strenghtening policy synergy and promoting green and sustainable development, reached broad consensus and adopted a joint communique (Belt and Road Forum, 2019).

5. CONCLUSION

Belt and Road Initiative which initiated by President Xi Jinping is the implementation of Tianxia which shares the same values as City upon a Hill and Manifest Destiny to expand territories and influence in the region. Tianxia concept which rooted on 1) all under heaven; 2) all the people; 3) the world institution has convinced the BRI participating countries to reach common interest in increasing economic development through vital economic corridors. 'all under heaven' realized by the belief that China is given mandate by God to be a leading country in the world. 'all the people' embodied on promoting inclusive development for all countries on the globe. While Tianxia as 'the world institution' realized through the global governance that becomes the main goal of the BRI. By the latest report that 60 countries already signed the BRI, China is proven to succefully conduct advance diplomacy which characterize that China can become a global-scale leader.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research and conference is financially supported by Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan (LPDP), Ministry of Finance, Indonesia.

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