

## BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE (BRI) AND THE STUDY OF 'FIELD CHINOLOGY'

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### Abstract

*Belt and Road (B&R) is the firsts Initiative for the world from China which has brought about economic and social changes in the global culture and society. It is an opportunity to strengthen the ties between China and other countries and enhance cooperation and mutual trust. It needs a professional cultural guide to the implementation of many engineering projects in the BRI. Field Chinology is a discipline concept. It is "a summative improvement on the research results of Chinese folk culture, minority culture and local culture in the past decades of Chinese Ethnology, Anthropology, Folklore, Local History, Archaeology and other disciplines". Its essence is "to study the culture and its traditions existing in the real life of Chinese people", and to develop from this special perspective and characteristic method of research. In a word, the study of peoples, societies, cultures and histories around the world with the method and perspective of Field Chinology can also be brought into this field and form the study of world peoples and their social cultures from this perspective and method. Its "down-to-earth" approach to cultural study and fieldwork can feedback the details and patterns of local culture into cooperation and mutual trust among different culture and nationalities/ethnic groups. Only cooperation based on mutual trust in cultures of countries & nationalities can be lasting. This paper argues that with the material realization of the BRI, Field Chinology will provide the World with such wisdom as cultural thinking and methods, cultural details and models, cultural education and cooperation, and cultural knowledge and basis.*

**Key Words:** Belt and Road; National Culture; Mutual Trust in Culture; Field Chinology

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## **Introduction**

On September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013, during his visit to Kazakhstan, Chinese President Xi had a speech at Nazarbayev University titled “*Promoting Friendship between People and Creating a Better Future*”, in which he proposed to jointly build “the Silk Road Economic Belt” and regard it as a great cause benefiting people from all countries along the route. During Visit to Indonesia on October 3<sup>rd</sup> of the same year, he proposed to jointly build the 21<sup>st</sup> century “Maritime Silk Road” to achieve common development and prosperity in his speech entitled “*Building a China-ASEAN Community of Common Destiny*” at National Assembly. Together they constitute the basic content of BRI.

### **I. Connotation and Practice of BRI**

On these two visits, it was put forward that the initiative of common construction on “Silk Road Economic Belt” and 21<sup>st</sup> century “Maritime Silk Road”. In the third plenary session of the 18<sup>th</sup> CPC (Communist Party of China) Central Committee, November 2013, it was said that “promote the construction on Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road, and form a new pattern of all-round opening”. Same year, the Central Economic Working Conference in December made further design for BRI, namely: Promoting the construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt, should “formulate strategic planning, and strengthen the construction of infrastructure interconnectivity”; building the 21<sup>st</sup> century Maritime Silk Road, should “strengthen the connectivity of maritime routes and strengthen the bond of mutual interests”. BRI officially became Initiative for the world from China. After that, national leaders strongly promoted BRI in their overseas visits and received positive responses.

#### **i . Historical Connection and Current Scope of B&R**

“Silk Road” is first used as an academic term in “*China. Findings of My Own Travels and Studies Based Thereon*”(1887), which is published by the German natural geography, geologists Mr *Ferdinand Von Richthofen* (1833-1925). In the first volume of this book, when mentioned the land transport route from China to Greece and Rome via the western region, it was the first time to

use the term “silk road”(die seidentrasse) (Ferdinand von: 1877), and on a map mentioned the concept of “Marine Silk Road”, but not as an interpretation. After that, French renowned sinologist, *Edouard Chavannes* (1865-1918), who was sent by French Far East Academy in 1904, led an investigation team to China. He proposed that there are two “Silk Roads” -- overland and maritime -- in *Documents Chinois sur Les Turcs Occidentaux*.(Qichen: 2003)

The UNESCO recognized that Silk Road was started on China’s Silk trade, had a huge impact and can cover physical and cultural communication between eastern and western countries, which is accepted by international scholars and adopted the naming. It is based on the international comprehensive research of a ten years planning large-scale projects, which is named “*Integral Study of the Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue*” in 1987-1997. On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1990, UNESCO launched the comprehensive survey of “*Maritime Silk Road*”, which started from the Port of Venice in Italy and passed through 22 port cities of 16 countries. Many activities and seminars on the Maritime Silk Road have been held since then. It can be said that these two Silk Roads have been recognized by authoritative international organization.

On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014, “the Silk Road: the Initial Section and the *Tianshan* Mountain Corridor Network,” jointly submitted by China, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, was inscribed on the World Heritage List at the 38<sup>th</sup> World Heritage Congress. Once again, the Silk Road became a cultural route.

The Silk Road has a history of thousands of years. It has traversed different empires, kingdoms, territories, nations and communities throughout history. It was an important trade route for merchants from all over the world for a long time. It has not only enriched many countries along the route in Asia, Africa and Europe, but also promoted frequent exchanges among different ethnic groups, religions, cultures and languages. According to today’s international situation, Silk Road and Maritime Silk Road

involve 65 countries,\* and the cultures, traditions and customs of all countries are closely linked by Silk Road.

There are three routes of “Silk Road Economic Belt”. Asia-Europe Continental Bridge as the north route (Beijing-Russia-Germany-Northern Europe), mainly Oil and Gas Pipeline as the center route (Beijing-Xi’an-Urumqi-Afghanistan-Kazakhstan-Hungary-Paris), and mainly with Multinational Roads as the south route (Beijing-Southern of Xinjiang-Pakistan-Iran-Iraq-Turkey-Italy-Spain). These routes are mainly linking China to Europe (the Baltic Sea) through Central Asia, Russia, linking China to the Mediterranean through Central Asia, Western Asia, the Persian Gulf, linking China to the Indian Ocean through Southeastern Asia, South Asia. They are forming some economic corridors, such as China-Pakistan, Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar, the New Eurasian Land Bridge and China-Mongolia-Russia. The 21<sup>st</sup> century “Maritime Silk Road” is started from coastal ports such as Quanzhou, across the Pacific Ocean, Indian Ocean, after the South China Sea, Malacca Strait, Bengal Bay, Arabian Sea, Aden Gulf, and Persian Gulf. It refers to countries of ASEAN, South Asia, Western Asia, Northeastern Africa. The key direction is from China’s coastal ports to the Indian Ocean and extend to Europe through the South China Sea, from China’s coastal ports across the South China Sea to the South Pacific.( <http://www.xinhuanet.com>)

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\* The Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road Economic Belt involve 65 countries and regions: including Mongolia in East Asia, 10 ASEAN countries (Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Brunei and the Philippines), 18 Western Asian countries (Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Greece, Cyprus and Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula), 8 South Asian countries (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Nepal and Bhutan), 5 Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan), 7 Commonwealth of Independent States (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova) and 16 countries in Central and Eastern Europe (Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, the Czech republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Macedonia).

## **ii. Connotation of B&R**

B&R (Belt and Road) is a shortened form of Silk Road Economic Belt and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road. It was closely associated with the history. It involves not only a single aspect of developing the economy and trade along B&R, but also various aspects such as the culture, politics, society, history and ecology of the countries along B&R. It attempts to connect the world from the perspective of itself or the Eastern, must enrich and explain the connotation of this initiative. Therefore, the author believes that the meaning of BRI is a comprehensive content covering politics, economy, culture, society, history, ecology and so on.

Among them, Ecology means to have a full understanding of the natural environment along B&R, which includes diverse terrestrial ecology and marine ecology. Politics refers to the research and understanding of the political situation of countries along B&R. Economy refers to the research on the economic and trade development of countries along B&R. History refers to the understanding of the historical origin and historical kindness/enmity among the countries along B&R. Culture is the cognition and research of material culture and spiritual culture of all nations along B&R. Society refers to the grasp of social status quo of countries along B&R. In these six elements, ecology is the base, politics is the guarantee, the economy is the way, history is the method, society is the platform and culture is the purpose. BRI aims to observe ethnic groups and countries along B&R from a Chinese perspective -- six in one -- to enhance cultural exchanges and mutual trust.

## **iii. Practice of B&R**

BRI has been put forward for seven years. Various social forces and groups have been actively involved in this initiative, participated in the various projects.

### **Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)**

Established on December 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015, it is an institution of inter-governmental multilateral development in Asia. Also, it is the first multilateral financial institution in the world which is

initiated by China. Currently, there are 100 member countries (regions). As of April 2019, the AIIB has launched 39 investment projects with a total loan amount of US\$ 8.5 billion, mainly involving energy, transportation and urban infrastructure.([www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn](http://www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn))

### **China-Arab States Cooperation Forum**

China and the 22 member states of the League of Arab States have held activities aimed at strengthening dialogue and cooperation, and promoting peace and development. By July 2018, the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum had held eight ministerial meetings, 14 senior officials' meetings and three high-level strategic and political dialogues. Other cooperation mechanisms are running in an orderly manner.([www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn](http://www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn))

### **International Cooperation on Production Capacity**

On December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014, In Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, Premier Li Keqiang reached important consensus with Kazakh President Nazarbayev and Prime Minister Massimov on strengthening production capacity cooperation between China and Kazakhstan in steel, cement, plate glass and equipment technology, marking the beginning of international production capacity cooperation. China has signed Framework Agreements or Memorandums of Understanding on production capacity cooperation with 15 countries on continents, including Kazakhstan, Brazil, Malaysia and Ethiopia, and is conducting consultations with 33 countries. ([www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn](http://www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn))

### **New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor**

In November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015, China and Singapore signed a cooperation agreement between the governments and start a new strategic connectivity (Chongqing) demonstration project. To January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019, eight western provinces in Chongqing signed the framework agreement on Land-Sea Trade Corridor which is a cooperation to build new connectivity project, and it will work together to promote “Land-Sea New Channel” construction.([www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn](http://www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn))

In addition, there is Ice Silk Road (across the Arctic Circle, the connection of shipping lanes in the three major economic center in North America, East Asia and Western Europe), Central Europe Trains (fixed train number, route, schedule, and all the time running, international train running in China - Europe and neighborhood countries along B&R for transporting containers), six International Economic Cooperation Corridor (*New Asia-Europe Continental Bridge, China-Mongolia-Russia, China-Central Asia-West Asia, China-Indochina, China-Pakistan* (Chawla: 2017), *Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar*) and other large projects.

In 2017, B&R Forum for International Cooperation was held in Beijing, which is the highest-level international event under the framework of BRI. It is an important symbol of China's significant rise in international status and influence. Through the Summit Forum, these countries have formed a list of outcomes with 76 large items and more than 270 items in five categories. ([www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn](http://www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn)) The second B&R Forum for International Cooperation was held in Beijing in 2019. The forum reached a list of 283 items outcomes in six categories. (<http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019>)

For the implementation of BRI, the Chinese government did a number of cooperation with the states and worldwide or regional international organizations. We found that the cooperation is more organized, institutional, actually the function of these organization or mechanism to be carried out need to accompany with the understanding of countries along the route, especially, for the managers and workers who work in the front line in the projects. In the process of contacting and getting along with the local people, there will inevitably be "cultural shock" caused by cultural differences, which will affect the progress of the project and, in some serious cases, cause international disputes. Therefore, compared with the research which involved by many disciplines in BRI, we maintain that this research based on the perspective and method of Field Chinology can be the most down-to-earth, and can best provide working methods and worldly wisdom for front-line staffs.

## **II. Characteristics of Field Chinology**

The concept or term of “Field Chinology” (Biyou: 2013) is put forward by Professor Tan Biyou in 2013. Field Chinology is a discipline concept, which is put forward based on the introduction of Western studies (such as Political Science, Law, Philosophy, History, Sociology, Economics, Anthropology, Linguistics, Ethnology, etc.) by Chinese intellectuals after their defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War of 1891-1894 in the late Qing Dynasty, and the examination of the gains and losses of academic practice over a hundred years. It is “a summative improvement on the research results of Chinese folk culture, minority culture and local culture in the past decades of Chinese Ethnology, Anthropology, Folklore, Local History, Archaeology and other disciplines”. Its essence is “to study the culture and its traditions existing in the real life of Chinese people”, and to develop from this special perspective and characteristic method of research. In a word, the study of peoples, societies, cultures and histories around the world with the method and perspective of Field Chinology can also be brought into this field and form the study of world peoples and their social cultures from this perspective and method.

### **i. Field Chinology is the Study of Culture in the Field**

Field Chinology maintains that its research object is culture and its traditions, but these cultures and traditions exist in the field, which includes both the field of China and the field outside of China, that is, the culture and its traditions of the whole human being in the field. Such as existing in people’s real-life with the forms of folk custom, oral tradition, life style and part of characters’ documents/archives, it is a living culture. This “culture” refers to “an umbrella term which encompasses the social behavior and norms found in human societies, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities, and habits of the individuals in these groups” (Tylor: 1871). It is obvious that we should also include material culture in Taylor’s concept of culture. Therefore, the culture studied in the Field Chinology is a broad sense of culture, from the perspective of time, it includes the past, the present and even the future; from

the perspective of space, it includes domestic, foreign, local, non-local; from the main body, it includes self-nationality, other nationality, majority nationality, minority nationality, large groups, small groups; from the levels, it includes the ruling elite culture (great tradition), the common people culture (little tradition); from the contents, it includes politics, economy, ecology, system, custom, thought, morality, technology and so on.

## **ii. Field Chinology is based on the Method of Fieldwork**

Because the culture of Field Chinology studies is a living reality, they do not have a complete written expression in books, so researchers must carry out a solid field investigation of the research objects. Fieldwork requires researchers to enter the social life of the culture they want to understand. The goal of this method is to describe the culture and tradition based on what the observer has seen and heard of in a state of nature. Such as Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski's saying, the fieldwork is to "understand aboriginal views and their relation to life, and understand their vision of the world", so to fully immersed by research groups, using core technology -- participant observation to participate in the life of research objects, to know their cultural logic and cultural reality by researchers using "themselves" as type device. As Zhuang Kongshao said, "Fieldwork...It is not only a method of obtaining cultural understanding on the spot, but also a means of research techniques and tools. It also contains a kind of epistemology and methodology of cultural practice."(Zhuang : 2013). Fieldwork method focuses on researchers' use of their own knowledge and methods to discover, understand and present culture in the life of research objects.

## **iii. Field Chinology presents Culture with Process Results and Target Results**

Zhuang Kongshao once mentioned "Anthropology of no waste", that is, the use of poetry, prose, video and other methods to show the research results of Anthropology and push it into the academic world, so that Anthropology research from cultural interpretation to application and social practice, make Anthropology more interesting, more "down-to-earth", more

understood by the public. This proposition of Zhuang's is a pluralistic presentation of the achievements of anthropologists in field research. We hold that the research results of Field Chinology in the field can be classified into Process Results and Target Results according to their production process, and each should undertake its different functions. Process Results are all kinds of results produced in the field investigation process. They are the basis for the formation of Target Results, but to a certain extent, they are independent of Target Results. Process Results is the writing manuscript, by researcher, which is produced in the process of fieldwork and has relation to the research target. Due to thinking, and at the same time of doing the fieldwork and writing, it is not the final results, but in the process of the fieldwork, it can serve as independent results all through the media platform as well as the traditional print media (body) published in order to realize its value and influence. Target Results are the final results formed by the researcher based on the research goal. Most of the results are presented in the form of academic papers, research reports and treatises. In this way, the research of Field Chinology will present the whole process from the beginning to the end of the research and form its influence. These achievements can serve different audiences, so as to expand the influence of the cultural research results of Field Chinology in the society, and share the diversified cultures of the whole world appropriately in front of each audience.

#### **iv. Field Chinology is based on the Theory of Cultural Energy**

“Cultures are relative, ethics interchangeable; History is special and humanity is universal.” (Zhuang: 2002) It can be thought of as an anthropological description of human nature and cultural understanding. In the process of development, each nation or ethnic group creates and practices its own culture, which exists in the form of energy and releases its influence on its own nation or ethnic group and other nations or ethnic groups through different ways. Anthropological theory of cultural function emphasizes that culture is produced by meeting human needs. The theory of cultural energy transcends the theory of cultural function, emphasizing that the culture of one nation or ethnic group is released in the form of energy and has a large or

small impact on the development of other nations or ethnic groups. Field Chinology is based on the study of the various living cultures in the life of all nationalities or ethnic groups in the world, and the release of their cultural energy through certain ways for the benefit of the culture holders and their society. The study of Field Chinology is the goal of knowledge innovation and practical application. It is helpful that exploring the way of releasing cultural energy through field method and pursuing the cultural goal of benefiting people with cultural energy to promote cultural mutual trust between different cultures and their holders.

These four characteristics cover the research object, research method, research results and research aims, which are not only the thinking of academic research, but also the reference for participating in social and cultural construction and guiding practice.

### **III. Value of Field Chinology in Implementation of BRI**

It has been more than seven years since BRI was put into practice. Although worldwide, this initiative attracted many approval and participation from many countries along the route, but we also see some influential powers in the world also opposed and put forward some strategies to hamper, such as the Indian-Pacific strategy of United States, Spices-Democracy Road of Japan and India, etc. Of course, there is a global strategic interest game among major countries, but it also reminds us that the implementation of BRI will not be smooth sailing. Therefore, it is needed that in-depth research on the culture and society of the countries along the route. Such research cannot be done from book to book, but must involve solid fieldwork based on China's vision and methods. Field Chinology research can participate in the practice of BRI.

#### **i. Providing Cultural Thinking and Methods**

BRI is based on economic cooperation and construction, with emphasis on strengthening infrastructure construction and investment in countries along B&R. However, we know that the construction and development of these projects are in the countries along the route (target countries), most of the workers

involved in the construction are also local people, and how to deal with the relationship between the two sides is a very important issue. Because of Cultural differences, the local study of Field Chinology can provide local cultural details and perception of life. The details related to the daily life of each individual, if the Chinese managers understand and grasp the local culture, so they will be on the “Emic” position to think the problem when they push in engineering construction and the communication between the foreign employees. The foreign employees will actively cooperate with them, and make the project smoothly. Of course, due to the engineering project, it may be difficult for managers to master the local culture of many places. For this reason, the project can hire researchers of relevant regional culture as the consultant of the engineering project, and it is feasible to ask them to provide sufficient guidance of local culture before, during and after the implementation of the project.

Cultural thinking and methods based on cultural knowing, cultural understanding, cultural trust and cultural cooperation between the two sides are the fundamental ways to help BRI go deeper. Economic benefits are temporary, but the cultural foundation based on cultural trust will last for a long time.

## **ii. Providing Cultural Details and Models**

*The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* by Ruth Benedict, an American anthropologist, is a famous study of Japanese culture and national character, which guided the American government to deal with the postwar issue of Japan. *Cultural Patterns* is a theoretical work written on the basis of a series of ethnographies by summarizing and comparing. These two works accurately describe and refine the cultural details and patterns of the Japanese people, which is the wisdom contributed by anthropology to the successful settlement of Japan’s problems after WWII. Similarly, the ethnic groups and their cultures of the countries along BRI are important factors in the implementation of these projects. Currently, we have not seen detailed fieldwork reports or research results on these ethnic groups and their cultures, which shows that this is a major deficiency in the

implementation of the initiative. The managers and technicians involved in the project are not familiar with the culture of the target place, and there are obstacles to effective project construction. Therefore, there is an urgent need for Field Chinology scholars to conduct meaningful fieldwork in these countries and nations, so as to form the process results and target results that guide the implementation of the initiative, and then extract the cultural model of this nation, so as to lay a foundation for its release of cultural energy.

### **iii. Providing Cultural Education and Cooperation**

Most countries along BRI are developing countries, its education funds is relatively limited, so Chinese government can encourage domestic colleges and universities to carry out the education cooperation with colleges and universities of countries along B&R, especially cooperation in the field of humanities and social science. Make the real strategy or the initiative into the analytical thinking of the global history and culture with a global vision and perspective.( Ding and, Cai: 2015.) Taking each other's culture and traditional research as the starting point for the cooperation, it can promote the Sino-foreign cultural exchanges, and also can provide a relatively easy way for domestic scholars to study outside. For example, the Field Chinology scholars to do fieldwork, it will be more helpful for a researcher to further study of local culture and life if there are one or more colleges and universities to locate in. At the same time, exchanges and cooperation in schools at all levels are also exchanges among youth from different countries, laying a foundation for long-term cooperation and development for generations. We will develop educational cooperation on cultural equality to lay the foundation for closer people-to-people ties.

### **iv. Providing Cultural Knowledge and Basis**

It is an effective way to understand and know the local culture that solid fieldwork and expression of Field Chinology. Because the study of Field Chinology is a series of research results obtained after relatively objective observation and analysis by the scholars with professional training who have been together with the research objects for a long time. These results are based

on the study of current people's life as a culture, and this kind of life logic often affects people's decisions and behaviors. Many different ethnic groups are living along B&R. They all have their own rich and colorful cultures, among which cultural differences and inclusiveness are also the guarantee of economic reciprocity.( Zhao: 2017) Researchers of Field Chinology should be duty-bound to take the lead in the cause of "Belt and Road", carry out detailed fieldwork on countries and nationalities along the route, and describe and form the culture and traditional knowledge of these nationalities, to provide knowledge reserve for relevant readers and accumulate data basis for studying their cultural models.

### **Conclusion**

Since BRI was put into practice, some achievements have been made and many difficulties have been encountered. This is largely due to our lack of in-depth cultural understanding of relevant countries and peoples. The benefits of BRI will be undermined if it is seen as merely an economic aid to construction. The starting point of BRI is the economic cooperation and construction, but the completion of these projects will necessarily involving deep cultural factors. Different ethnic groups, especially differences in the field of culture between China and countries along B&R, these differences are not simply healing, but need to build mutual trust in culture between each other. In the construction of cultural trust and energy release, Field Chinology will play its role of "down-to-earth" and the energy of fieldwork.

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