

THE NEW SILK ROAD: WHAT'S IN IT FOR XI JINPING?

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ABSTRACT

Despite the magnitude of China's New Silk Road and its long-term ramifications for the world, most adults know nothing about it. These new land, sea, and space-based infrastructure systems will serve as the backbone of global commerce, digital telecommunications, and finance for decades to come. How did it happen under the nose of the rest of the world? The answer is Xi Jinping, the person behind the New Silk Road since its launch in 2013. In his triple roles as Communist Party General Secretary, Chair of the Central Military Commission, and President of the People's Republic of China, Xi has led a vast infrastructural rehaul in the Eastern and Western Hemispheres with 150 partnering nations to date. This paper is Xi Jinping's brief and vital story.

Keywords: China's Silk Road; Xi Jinping; zhongguo meng; yidaiyilu; One Belt, One Road

I. INTRODUCTION

Since 2013, China has been busy building the New Silk Road, which is a rejuvenation of the ancient Silk Road begun 2,200 years ago. The initiative demonstrates China's ability to build, fund, and operate a sophisticated iron grid across the seven continents comprised of electric bullet trains; airports for standard and eVTOL aircrafts; robotic dry docks that serve as backups for overcrowded maritime port storage systems; space and satellite stations that transmit enormous quantities of data each millisecond; deep seaports that connect a string of Chinese run ports to facilitate seamless global supply chains; super apps that link e-commerce, digital wallets, assistance with daily living, and much more.

The New Silk Road is the biggest thing happening in global capitalism today or its antecedents.

Yet, despite the magnitude of this endeavor and its long-term ramifications for the world, most adults know nothing about it, including fellow researchers, friends, and university colleagues. I believe people are ignoring it at their own peril. These land-based, sea-based, and space-based infrastructure systems created under the aegis of the New Silk Road will serve as the backbone of global commerce, digital telecommunications, finance, and geoeconomics for decades to come.

How did it happen under the nose of the rest of the world without notice? The answer is Xí Jinping, the person behind the New Silk Road since its launch in 2013. In his triple roles as the Communist Party General Secretary, Chair of the Central Military Commission, and President of the People's Republic of China, Xí has led a vast infrastructural rehaul in the Eastern and Western Hemispheres with 150 partnering nations to date.

This paper is Xí Jinping's brief and vital story. Section II describes China's encompassing dream (*zhongguo meng*) to rejuvenate the ancient Silk Road begun during the Han (207 BCE–220 CE) and Tang (618–907 CE) dynasties. What are the initiative's constituent parts? Where are the land, sea, and space-based routes? How are the parts connected to the whole?

Section III examines Xí Jinping's rise to power and his resolute focus as an engineer, lawyer, and politician to create what the Chinese call the *yidaiyilu* in Mandarin (tr. One Belt, One Road). How did Xí Jinping successfully consolidate power during his first three terms in office as party-state leader, laying the political foundation to implement the *yidaiyilu* initiative?

Section IV delves into Xí Jinping's ideology that drives his political, economic, and societal ambitions, including his fervent desire to one day become *Chair* of the Chinese Communist Party, a title that has only been bestowed upon Mao Zedong. What is "Xí Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," now mandatory reading for Chinese students, government officials, Communist Party members, and partners on the New Silk Road? What is Xí's long-term vision? What does it mean when Xí says that his dream is to move the world toward *mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation*?

Section V considers the reality of China's New Silk Road under Xí Jinping at the start of the second quarter of the 21st century and his end game to be assessed at the PRC's centennial celebration in 2049. What lessons can we take away from Xí Jinping's work putting China on the map?

No one can profess to having solid answers to such questions, thus, the boldness of this paper. However, we can learn much from Xí Jinping's direct decisions and actions, the Chinese literature, and insights from Sino specialists about the key person behind the New Silk Road

endeavor to envision what may lie ahead. The findings are but a piece of a discussion that will likely intrigue globalists from here to eternity.

II. LAUNCHING THE NEW SILK ROAD

The New Silk Road reflects China's dream to rejuvenate the ancient Silk Road begun during the Han dynasty (207 BCE-220 CE) and Tang dynasty (618-907 CE). In Mandarin, this encompassing ideological framework is dubbed *zhongguo meng*.¹

China's dream was first rolled out in 2013 by Xi Jinping shortly after becoming supreme leader in his triple roles as the Communist Party General Secretary, Chair of the Central Military Commission, and President of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Xi Jinping commands a country of 1.4 billion people, a \$19.4 trillion domestic economy, and a 100-million-member party that elected him for an unprecedented third year term as president in 2023.

While Xi Jinping was unifying the party-state and solidifying power, he successfully launched an initiative to rejuvenate the ancient Silk Road during his first three terms as core leader. China and its partners have invested trillions of renminbi since 2013 to build four distinct routes: (i) the land-based *Silk Road Economic Belt*, (ii) the sea-based *21st Century Maritime Silk Road*, (iii) an Arctic-based *Silk Road on Ice*, and (iv) a space-based *Digital Silk Road*. Together, the New Silk Road is described by Xi Jinping as "the project of the century."

Silk Road Economic Belt



The first route is the *Silk Road Economic Belt*, connecting China with Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Newly elected President Xi Jinping traveled to Astana, Kazakhstan in September 2013 to unveil his plans for this land-based route. He spoke passionately to a group of academics, politicians, and students at Nursultan University, named after the long-standing leader of Kazakhstan since 1989, Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan's first (and until 2019) president. Xi needed Nazarbayev to convince the five Central Asian nations to sign onto the plan (i.e., Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan), a neighboring region rich in minerals and water.

Xí recounted to the audience that during the ancient Silk Road days, Central Asia was home to some of the biggest trading hubs used by merchants and pilgrims traveling from China to Europe. “I *can* almost *hear* the *ring* of the *camel bells* and the wisps of smoke in the desert,” Xí recited poetically, harkening back to days of yore (NDRC, 2015:2). He wanted listeners to understand that his vision was to build a “community of common destiny” for the benefit of all partners, a recurring theme ever since.

To be successful, Xí had to convince the nations across the Eurasian landmass from China, through Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe to become official partners on the Silk Road Economic Belt. As of this writing, Xí has been wildly successful, not only bringing in Central Asian and Middle Eastern nations, but also Iran (which signed a 25-year strategic partnership with China in 2021), Syria (2022), Afghanistan (2023), and Nepal (2024). The partners were convinced that economic success could be found through China’s land-based infrastructure plans, the terrestrial “belts.”

21st Century Maritime Silk Road

The second route is China’s southern *21st Century Maritime Silk Road*, which connects the South China Sea, Bay of Bengal, Indian Ocean, Gulf, Arabian Sea, Red Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Atlantic Ocean, and Pacific Ocean. President Xí first rolled out this route on October 3, 2013. While the *Silk Road Economic Belt*’s announcement took place in the historical Silk Road location of Kazakhstan, the Maritime Silk Road was announced in Indonesia, a nation where China aimed to expand its purview.

To date, the PRC has built, re-built, operates, and/or owns some 110 deep-sea nautical ports along the *21st Century Maritime Silk Road*. Major shippers are accustomed to using these Chinese-built ports to ensure seamless supply chain mobilization across the now-expanded Eastern and Western Hemispheres.

The latest Port of Chancay in Peru, which opened in 2024, is a breakthrough for the Silk Road expansion into Latin America. In June 2025, Xí Jinping and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva agreed to conduct a feasibility study for the construction of a 3,000-kilometer Bi-Oceanic Corridor that would connect by rail Brazil’s Atlantic-facing Ilhéus Port to Peru’s Pacific-facing Port of Chancay. Some 22 of the 33 nations in Latin America are now partners on China’s New Silk Road.

Silk Road on Ice

The third route—the *Silk Road on Ice*—was added in 2019, when Russia became an official partner on the One Belt, One Road.ⁱⁱ The aim is to facilitate commerce from the eastern coast of China, north to Russia, west through the Arctic Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean.

Escalating climate chaos provides an opening for China whereby traders anticipate a longer ice-free shipping window each year. The Chinese want to capitalize on this expectation by working with the Russians on a Silk Road on Ice equipped with nuclear floating ice breakers and sophisticated LNG (liquefied natural gas) facilities along the Northern Sea Route in the Arctic (Flynn, 2020).

Digital Silk Road

The *Digital Silk Road* represents the fourth major route on China's Belt and Road to wirelessly connect all the Silk Road routes. China envisions a system that will facilitate seamless global communications connectivity, data reconnaissance via satellites, and swift transfers of commercial and financial data through cross-border undersea and terrestrial fiber optic cables and other communication trunk line networks, powered by China's *BěiDǒu* global geolocation satellite network completed in 2020. A second satellite network, *Qiānfān* (Thousand Sails Constellation), launched its first satellites in August 2024 to further expand China's space coverage.

The Digital Silk Road serves multiple functions. Domestically, the system allows for central tracking of China's expansive internal transit systems. Second, the system surveils the population, be it the Uyghurs in Xinjiang or pedestrians crossing the busy streets of Shanghai.

The foundation of the Digital Silk Road was installed during President Xí Jinping's first term in office (2013-2018). In 2026, Xí announced a major overhaul of its domestic digital system through the addition of AI-enabled cameras and software that run on more powerful semiconductors. The changes will allow for predictive policing to "interpret scenes, identify patterns of behaviour and retrieve footage . . . sharply reducing the need for manual police review" (Financial Times, 3 June 2026). Hikvision and Huawei are taking the lead in the surveillance upgrades both inside the PRC and in dozens of official partnering nations that have purchased surveillance systems from the Chinese.

A third function of the Digital Silk Road is the collection of tolls along the Silk Road's transportation infrastructure. (e.g., trucks using new expressways, rail cars on high-speed rail lines, ships entering China-run ports, and so on). Toll payments will be transmitted to Beijing's

digital wallet and, in some cases, cleared through China's Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS), denominated in renminbi.

Silicon Valley is acutely aware of the ambitions behind China's Digital Silk Road and tracks it closely. In May 2026, Nvidia founder, Jen-Hsun Huang, agreed to join the exclusive advisory board of Tsinghua University School of Economics and Management, which ranked third in the 2026 Financial Times Masters in Finance programs globally. Huang will join other Silicon Valley digital platform captains of industry on the Tsinghua board, including Apple's Tim Cook, Alphabet's Satya Nadella, Meta's Mark Zuckerberg, Dell's Michael Dell, and SpaceX's Elon Musk. Wall Street tycoons are well-represented on Tsinghua University's board by JPMorgan's Jamie Dimon, BlackRock's Larry Fink, and Citigroup's Jane Fraser.

Ultimately, China may dominate the world's Information and Communication Technologies industry comprised of robotic devices, computerized data centers, network transmission, fiber optic cable routes, and satellites. It will enable significant advances in (a) the Internet of Things (IoT) in which microchips placed on electronics, clothes, homes, cars, railways, bicycles, ships, appliances, and humans that are trackable in real time and (b) hyperscale data centers to house and process an enormity of data that powers the New Silk Road system (Chan, 2022; Flynn, 2023a; Kokas, 2023; Subramanian, 2025).

Yidaiyilu (One Belt, One Road)

The enormity of China's *yidaiyilu* (One Belt, One Road) is mind-blowing, along with the speed and acuity with which the PRC is building a modern-day grid across—and around—planet Earth. 2025 proved to be a banner year with investments in Silk Road projects reaching new highs (Wang, 2026; AidData 2026). Tracking the developments from continent to continent, region to region, and state to state is all consuming.

Because I am a specialist in global capitalism, I want to know about the construction of each bridge, tunnel, airport, nautical port, subsea fiber optic data cable, floating nuclear power plant, rail line, low-earth orbit satellite, ground-based space station, rare earth metal mine and processing facility, methane gas line, crude oil pipeline, hyper-scale data center, port-park-city, and so on. I am aided in this quest by undergraduate students taking a course I designed and have taught since 2018 titled "China's New Silk Road." The students' intense curiosity and level of engagement are notable. As a result, I invite my students to embrace the option of working on Silk Road projects around the world to gain insights, experience, money, and a competitive advantage in the labor market.

The geographic topography upon which the infrastructure is being constructed is daunting, from vast deserts to the highest mountains and deepest bodies of water. The skilled labor and public-private coordinating mechanisms required for such an endeavor are notable.

Chinese diplomats have learned to successfully negotiate with 150 countries, each with unique languages, traditions, histories, political systems, constitutions, ethnic-religious constituents, and incoming leaders who may or may not honor previous Sino negotiations. The Chinese have managed to finance world-crossing infrastructure construction, drawing from a mix of its tremendous public savings, sovereign wealth funds, traditional multilateral financial institutions, and new funding entities created by the PRC with partnering nations specifically to finance the New Silk Road (AidData, 2026).

How is all of this possible? One man: Xí Jinping.

III. XÍ JINPING'S RISE TO POWER

First Term as President (2013-2018)

When the door opened for Xí Jinping to become Secretary General of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Chair of the Central Military Commission on November 15, 2012, he was ready. Swiftly, Xí used his political acumen to consolidate power and place himself as a core leader of the CCP to enact new national policies and build a foundation that would place the People's Republic of China (PRC) closer to the center of the world order.

People were amazed at Xí's swift ascent and focus, described by Sinologist Kai Strittmatter as follows:

The amazement is warranted. Viewed from a distance, the sheer speed, the tactical skill, and the force with which this man has ascended to the emperor's throne is incredible. It couldn't have been foreseen in 2012, when the Party, in desperate need of a savior, elected a bland apparatchik by the name of Xi Jinping. And it certainly can't have been what all sections of the ruling kleptocracy wanted . . . Xi Jinping surprised them all. He proved to be a superb power strategist (Strittmatter, 2018:136).

Xí determined that his first public appearance as the Party's General Secretary would be a photo op at the Chinese National Museum on Tiananmen Square, housing an impressive collection of ancient relics. On November 29, 2012, Xí stood in front of a dark exhibit called "The Road to Rejuvenation" (*fuxing*) that remembers China's 100 years of subjugation beginning in 1840 by foreign forces:

The Road to Rejuvenation is a permanent exhibition showcasing the explorations made by the Chinese people from all walks of life who, after being reduced to semi-colonial, semi-feudal society since the Opium War of 1840, rose in resistance against humiliation and misery, and tried in every way possible to rejuvenate the nation. The exhibition also highlights the glorious history of China under the leadership of the Communist Party of China in which all the ethnic groups joined forces to achieve national independence and liberation and strove to build a strong and prosperous country for the well-being of the people. The exhibition clearly demonstrates the historical course of the Chinese people of choosing Marxism, the CCP, the socialist road, the reform and opening-up policy, and China's firm determination in building socialism with Chinese characteristics, through adherence to this great banner, this special road, and this theoretical system (<https://chinachange.org/2012/05/11/the-road-to-rejuvenation-the-full-text-of-chinas-party-approved-history/>).

The century of humiliation lasted from 1840 until 1949, when Mao Zedong came into power. Xi's message at the Chinese National Museum in 2012 to the people of China was that the century of humiliation was over and would not be forgotten. He called upon the nation to once again rise up, be strong, and bring back the country's dignity and self-respect under his leadership.

At the museum event, Xi first introduced the term *zhongguo meng* (China's Dream) that encapsulates his vision to rejuvenate the ancient Silk Road developed under the Han and Tang dynasties. Initially this guiding philosophy was a domestic vision of prosperity for an ancient civilization. Ultimately, it transformed into a road map for China to retake its place as a world power. To do so, Xi explained, China would build a modern-day grid from East to West, reclaiming a Sino-centric world order. His vision was bold and uplifting for his people.

Within a month of becoming General Secretary in 2012, Xi began to consolidate power by reducing the size of the Communist Party's Politburo Standing Committee from nine to seven members. He further signaled that the Party and the State were working as one on his rejuvenation strategy.

On March 14, 2013, Xi was elected President of the People's Republic of China (PRC) by the National People's Congress. Politburo members were instructed to report directly to Xi for the first time in CCP history, thus, diminishing the power of the head of China's government, Premier Li Keqiang, who ultimately lost his position in 2023. From the start, Xi installed his own loyalists at the provincial ministerial levels, section-level cadres, and foot soldiers, leaving untouched those who helped Xi rise to power.

Near the end of Xi's first five-year term, in October 2017, he took the bold step of adding "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" to the Constitution of the Communist Party to solidify his thinking nationwide and to guide public policy (Xinhua, 2017). Xi was taking a cue from Mao Zedong, who had formally codified his own ideology into the party's constitution for all to read and follow. Mao and Xi are the only two Chinese leaders to enshrine into the constitution an eponymous ideology.

In 2022, Xi started issuing his own "little red books" with quotes from Xi Jinping's speeches, again imitating Mao, who published his first *Little Red Book* in 1964. Xi continues to be an equally prolific writer, now gifting visiting state leaders with a complementary five-volume copy of his writings and speeches (Xi, 2025).

Positioned as a great party-state leader, Xi was re-elected for a second term on March 17, 2018, but not before removing the constitutional 10-year maximum presidential term limit six days prior. Xi was so confident in his power by 2018 that he proposed hanging his photo in Tiananmen Square alongside Mao's image and renaming the nation's top educational institution, Tsinghua University, as Xi Jinping University.

Second Term (2018-2023)

Xi Jinping continued to lead during his second term as President by embracing traditionalism. He allowed open thinking and religious practice, *as long as it serves the Communist Party*. He strengthened China's Great Firewall to restrict access to foreign websites while allowing private enterprises to develop new digital platforms and compete with Silicon Valley using modern surveillance technologies. He cracked down on corruption in government and business. He muzzled bloggers, online activists, and journalists. He mandated that all Party members and school children read "Xi Jinping Thought." His model is one of authoritarianism, assertiveness, strength, ambition, and fierce nationalism.

When the Chinese Communist Party celebrated its centenary founding in 2021, the nation lauded Xi for saving the Party in China. The hand-picked members in the CCP reached 98 million by the end of Xi's second presidential term in 2023. The Party and the State are now inseparable. As Xi had promised, "It doesn't matter whether it is the government, the military, the people, or the schools; East, West, North, or South, the Party leads everything" (19th Party Congress of the CCP, October 18, 2017).

Third Term (2023-present)

Xi Jinping was elected by the National People's Congress for a third Presidential term in March 2023, leading the nation forward under a new self-made catch phrase, *guozhidazhe*, which means

“the main affairs of state” or “national priorities.” One of the primary mechanisms to advance such priorities is the New Silk Road, which in Mandarin is referred to as the *yidaiyilu* (One Belt, One Road).

The One Belt, One Road is bolstered by three other key public policy programs: China’s 2021 Global Development Initiative (tied to the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), the 2022 Global Security Initiative, and the 2023 Global Civilization Initiative. Collectively, these efforts promote the PRC’s common values of peace, development, equity, justice, democracy, and freedom.

China seeks global buy-in for its principle of noninterference, shunning the Western international rules-based order, established in the late 1940s. At the 14th Session of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference held on March 6, 2023, Xi Jinping cautioned that the:

external environment has changed dramatically . . . uncertainty and unpredictable factors have increased significantly . . . The United States-led Western countries have implemented a full range of containment and suppression, bringing unprecedented and serious challenges to our development (http://en.cppcc.gov.cn/2023-03/12/c_868650.htm).

Xi called upon the nation to remain united, respond to the external environment calmly, and continue to promote China’s new journey. This message was reinforced in President Xi’s New Year message for 2025 in which he professed that China is “making deeper and more substantive advances in high-quality Belt and Road cooperation” and “actively promoting global governance reform and deepening solidarity and cooperation among the Global South” (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, December 31, 2024).

China’s internal discipline, long-range planning, and impact are notable. President Xi intends to expand its dominance even further heading into the second quarter of the 21st century:

Chinese culture shines with even greater brilliance . . . Our economic strength, scientific and technological capacity, national defense capability and overall national power have risen to new heights . . . China’s economy has advanced under pressure, shifting towards new and higher-quality growth, demonstrating strong resilience and vitality (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

Silk Road investments for the year 2025 reached new highs with an expansion of partnerships in Latin America, new land- and sea-based infrastructure projects, a heightened focus on high-end R&D and manufacturing, procurement of critical minerals and rare earth minerals to fuel the

Digital Silk Road, an expansion of its low- and middle-Earth satellite systems, and a greater dependence of partners on China's currency and financial clearing house system.

China is moving forward with its dream of rejuvenation with or without the West on board. Heading into the 2026 Lunar Year of the fire horse, Xi announced the following:

The world today is undergoing both changes and turbulence, and some regions are still engulfed in war. China always stands on the right side of history and is ready to work with all countries to advance world peace and development and build a community with a shared future for humanity . . . The dream lofty, the journey long—bold strides will get us there. Let us charge ahead like horses with courage, vitality, and energy, fight for our dreams and our happiness, and turn our great vision into beautiful realities (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, December 31, 2025).

IV. XÍ JINPING'S IDEOLOGY

Since becoming China's core leader, Xí Jinping has used his power and position to skillfully guide the New Silk Road forward and position the PRC as a geopolitical, economic, digital, and financial powerhouse.

How does Xí Jinping keep up with it all from his perch as the PRC's sovereign leader, party leader, and military leader? Surely, his formal education as an engineer and attorney is valuable. He must be driven by his devotion to the Communist Party, to which he applied for membership 10 times to the age of 20 before being accepted on the condition that he renounce his father who betrayed an alliance with Mao Zedong while serving as Mao's Minister of Propaganda. Xí Jinping wants to see the Party grow and fortify, which he acknowledged in his New Year address for 2026 declaring, "only a strong Communist Party of China can make our country strong" (PRC, December 31, 2025).

One could imagine Xí Jinping has an ego and internal constitution that conforms with dominance, leadership, and unwavering determination. He is organized. He plans. He thinks before speaking. He is disciplined and strategic, embodying the *Art of War* teachings of General Sun Tze. He is playing the long game with Chinese characteristics.

The first dozen years building the new Silk Road yielded a vast infrastructural rehaul in the Eastern Hemisphere plus initial steps in the Western Hemisphere. China began construction of a modern-day physical infrastructure to facilitate trade between continents, to extract valuable minerals, to offshore Chinese private for-profit manufacturing facilities in special economic zones, and to strengthen geopolitical power.

The PRC is not interested in acculturating partnering nations, nor taking over their governments. Xi Jinping's relationships with its 150 partnering nations on the One Belt, One Road are primarily transactional to enhance China's economic prosperity and ensure its security.

A More Just International Order

Now aged 73, what might Xi Jinping envision for his *zhongguo meng* (China Dream) when assessed in 2049, the centenary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China under Mao Zedong? The evidence suggests there is more to this than economics and national security. Repeatedly, Xi tells the world that his aim is to move the world toward *mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, win-win cooperation, and a shared future for humanity*.

Fundamentally, Xi Jinping believes that his dream will make the world a better place. He is dismayed with the state of the West. He openly criticizes powerful, wealthy Western nations, who, in his eyes, have lost their way. The drive to build a "more just international order" helps explain Xi Jinping's modus operandi:

Xi is a calculated, albeit not a reckless, risk taker. His critical skill is to identify a political or policy vacuum and to fill it before others do. He is a master tactician in building political momentum across the cumbersome internal machinery of the CCP by deploying key personnel to critical positions; mobilizing the party's propaganda apparatus; and anchoring his worldview in a single, all-encompassing ideological framework in order to convince the party and the country that they are critical parts of a historical, righteous, and "correct" cause. Xi is also his own master class in internal party politics possessing a ruthlessness not seen since Mao in dealing with political opponents. For these reasons, there is no credible competitor of comparable political stature left standing in the inner sanctums of Chinese party politics—or, at least, none that we know of (Rudd, 2022a:308).

Xi's interests are rooted in Party history, political ideology, and grand strategy. He is not necessarily into the fine details of finance and economic management. Policy debates about the role of the state and the economy are more ideological, whereby he adroitly pulls together Leninist politics (i.e., dictatorial) with Marxist economics (i.e., redistribution of wealth) and a bracing form of nationalism (i.e., assertiveness abroad).

China Sets the New Rules of the Game

China's comprehensive approach offers the world an alternative to the Washington Consensus's free market and democratic governance model in place since the end of World War II.

China has demonstrated its ability to successfully compete in the global neoclassical market system over the past 40 years. But in so doing, the PRC challenges traditional thinking. Specifically, according to the Chinese, the rules of the game should not solely be set by the established order in Washington and Brussels, but also by Beijing. A new calibration between the countervailing powers of government and private for-profit business is emerging along with new institutions from which policies are set (Flynn, 2025).

The boldness of Xi's approach is grounded in a deep study of history and geoeconomics. China lost confidence in the neoclassical market system following the Wall Street financial meltdown from 2007 to 2009 and its fallout in Europe from 2010 to 2012. These financial crises prompted Beijing to discard its position as the student of the U.S. when it comes to economic governance.

Beijing rose to the occasion and started doing things *with Chinese characteristics*, a phrase that is integral to Xi's leadership model. China reversed Western liberalism by cracking down on its own citizens in Hong Kong, expanding its sprawling surveillance state, shunning global concerns about the internment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, aggressively defending maritime claims, and ramping up the People's Liberation Army's Navy.

Knowing of Russia's position vis-à-vis winning World War II, in a 2026 meeting with Vladimir Putin, Xi referred to China and Russia as "responsible major countries and permanent members of the UN Security Council [that must] promote adherence to fairness and justice . . . [we must] firmly defend the achievements of the victory in world war II and work together to safeguard global strategic stability" (Financial Times, February 5, 2026).

While trying to bring along fellow nations in the East, the PRC is boldly focused on rejuvenating the great Chinese nation. The aim is to become a "mid-level developed country" by 2035 (Xinhua, 2025) and the preeminent Asian and global power by 2049, even more buoyant and strong than under imperial rule. The national greatness that Deng Xiaoping believed would take hundreds of years, Xi Jinping believes is imminent.

And time appears to be on Xi Jinping's side. We are reminded that Xi's Mother turned 99 on November 3, 2025, and his father lived to be 89 years old. Longevity is in Xi Jinping's DNA.

Organization-Intensive Surveillance System

In order for Xi Jinping's ideology to become a sustaining reality, surveillance will likely continue to be an integral part of society, rolled out through the Digital Silk Road, the fourth route of the New Silk Road.

Minxin Pei, a specialist in Chinese domestic politics, presents the term *juguo tizh* to sum up China's approach to surveillance in his book titled, *The Sentinel State: Surveillance and the Survival of Dictatorship in China* (2024).

The literal translation of *juguo tizh* is “the whole-of government and the whole-of-society method of mobilization.” Pei describes how China's surveillance state is a multilayered structure that involves a host of government agencies and decentralized neighborhood spies that penetrate every part of society. The system dates back to Imperial China and Mao Zedong's era when a Leninist-driven institutional apparatus was introduced. Such a structure allows today's party-state to mobilize resources quickly when accompanied by effective supervision, coordination across agencies, and a well-trained workforce. Without this kind of institutional capacity, new computational hardware and software to surveil society (e.g., cameras, videos, facial recognition, gait recognition, license plate readers, super apps, generative and agentic AI, and other real-time monitoring devices) would not be as effective.

The implication is that if society chafes at increasing repression, the party-state's surveillance technologies will allow Xí to control dissent in ways Mao and Stalin could hardly have imagined. The result, according to Pei, is that China can use the tools of global capitalism to increase its wealth—as it has done over the past three decades—without sacrificing its key political and economic institutions or socialist ideology. In other words, China can avoid becoming a democracy while holding onto its newfound economic and geopolitical power.

Other authoritarian regimes that purchase sophisticated surveillance equipment from the PRC do not have a long-standing surveillance apparatus in place upon which to build a modern-day surveillance state. Thus, the equipment is not as effective as in the PRC. Nonetheless, Silk Road official partners ruled by dictators (e.g., United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Hungary, and Iran) are eager to sign onto the Digital Silk Road in the hope of reigning in resistance to autocracy by their own citizens.

V. LEARNING FROM CHINA

China is ready to work with the major international economic organizations to practice multilateralism, promote international cooperation, and support the development of Global South countries, so as to advance an equal and orderly multipolar world and a universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization, and build a just world of common development.

— Xi Jinping, December 10, 2024, “1+10” Dialogue in Beijing, China.

It is hard to avoid hearing repeated criticisms about China today in the U.S. Whether it is in the realm of economics, finance, education, consumption, debt, demographics, or security, U.S. government officials disparage China at every turn.

Yet, the critiques are not always grounded in a fundamental or even basic understanding of China's strategy, culture, and success implementing its *zhongguo meng* (China's Dream) to rejuvenate the ancient Silk Road, the biggest thing happening in global capitalism today. The ignorance is curious.

Think, for example, of the sighting of a large white balloon floating over Montana in the last week of January 2023. To those of us who track the New Silk Road, we were excited to see in real time an element of the Digital Silk Road, usually off-limits to foreigners. Why was the PRC allowing us to see this piece of equipment? No one who studies the Silk Road thought it was an off-course object.

The balloon sighting could have been a moment of scientific discovery, an opportunity for scientists in the U.S. to learn more about the sophisticated technologies embedded in China's Digital Silk Road. But instead, the U.S. military shot down the smoking gun, and the U.S. Secretary of State cancelled his long-planned trip to China that was to have happened just days after the sighting. What a missed opportunity for dialogue and mutual understanding (Flynn, 2023b).

At this moment in history an opportunity presents itself for the West to delve into Xi Jinping's vision for the future. In March 2026, the National People's Congress authorized the *2026-2030 Plan for Economic and Social Development* to guide the nation forward (CPPCC, 2025). The major objectives are seven-fold: significant advancements in high-quality development; substantial improvements in scientific and technological self-reliance and strength; breakthroughs in further deepening reform; notable cultural and ethical progress across society; further improvements in quality of life; major strides in advancing the Beautiful China Initiative; and advances in strengthening the national security shield.

General Secretary/President Xi articulated his vision as follows:

The year 2026 marks the beginning of the 15th Five-Year Plan. A successful venture should start with a good plan and with clear goals set. We should focus on our goals and tasks, boost confidence, and build momentum to press ahead. We should take solid steps to promote high-quality development, further deepen reform and opening up across the board, deliver prosperity for all, and write a new chapter in the story of China's miracle (PRC, 2025).

China's New Silk Road land-based, sea-based, and space-based infrastructure and investments will enable the PRC to reach many of its objectives by 2030. Xi Jinping appears poised to double down on his priorities and continue to strengthen China's domestic economy, financial foundations, and digital self-reliance, building on its unparalleled industrial and transportation infrastructure domestically and globally.

There is value in understanding Xi Jinping's aspirations and priorities, as global geopolitical and economic power shifts from West to East.

The world can learn much from China based on its long history and the first dozen years building the modern-day Silk Road. China has demonstrated that it indeed can build and operate an iron grid across the planet with sophisticated electric bullet trains; eVTOL aircrafts; robotic autonomous dry docks; space and satellite stations; deep seaports that connect Chinese-run ports across the world; alternative power plants running on batteries, sun and wind; quantum computing capabilities, super apps that link e-commerce, digital wallets; and much more.

Reshaping the general public's understanding of China will require dispelling unhelpful stereotypes with deep roots in an Orientalist epistemology that dates back 800 years. The problem with an Orientalist perspective, writes Ho-fung Hung, is that "Orientalists always tried to project from a specific interpretation of a particular aspect of an Asian civilization valid in a particular time to construct a highly generalized reading of the civilization's totality. . . the result was competition and a shift between the polarized construction of China and the failure to accommodate any complexities of reality" (Hung, 2026:245).

Hung's term "complexities of reality" is key today whereby the New Silk Road invites us to re-think our orientation toward the Chinese people and perhaps appreciate the nuance and complexity facing the world today through the lens of "Xi Jinping Thought."

I am not, however, encouraging another drastic swing from disdain to idealization of China. My observations are grounded in global capitalism in its current form (i.e., the PRC's economy being the second largest in the world). I am suggesting that the U.S. not remain stuck in an historical, reductionist, racist Sinology that precludes a greater understanding of and perhaps respect for what China is bringing to 150 countries in seven continents through its building a New Silk Road today.

Researching Xi and China's Silk Road is a day-to-day affair, as fast as this is happening. A fresh perspective would open the door to greater cross-cultural engagement, deeper geopolitical understanding, and perhaps a more integrated global system in its full complexity and dynamism. This requires letting go of stereotypes and examining the ever-changing aspects of Chinese civilization with Xi Jinping at the epicenter.

What might coexistence and mutual benefit look like as the world order changes? Without a broader focus on pluralism, human progress, peace, and prosperity, multilateral relations could deteriorate and eventually bring catastrophe. It is time for the world to embrace China's *zhongguo meng* and take seriously this phenomenon called the New Silk Road or at least recognize its existence and potential.

ENDNOTE

¹ Professor Wang Huning is recognized as the chief thinker, academic, and sloganeer for the Chinese Communist Party since 1989. He coined the terms “*zhongguo meng*” (China’s Dream) and “*yidaiyilu*” (One Belt, One Road) that Xí Jinping uses to describe the New Silk Road initiative. Dr. Wang currently chairs the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and is a member of the CCP’s Politburo Standing Committee. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang_Huning.

The term “Belt and Road Initiative” was introduced by propaganda offices of the CCP three years after the launch of the New Silk Road to directly assuage concerns about China’s outsized ambitions in Western, English-speaking countries. The Chinese do not use the term Belt and Road Initiative, but rather the One Belt, One Road (*yidaiyilu*) terminology.

² Across the world, becoming an official Silk Road partner is loosely defined. It is generally understood that a partnering nation (a) agrees to the *yidaiyilu* principles of win-win, mutual benefit, and cooperation, (b) has signed memoranda of understanding with China for specific infrastructure projects, and (c) believes that Taiwan is not a sovereign nation but, rather, a part of the People’s Republic in China.

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