

EDITORIAL

Belt and Road: Disrupting the Lines of Global Cooperation

As a worldwide plan of development, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) unveiled by Chinese President Xi Jinping in September 2013 has implicated the Global South in economic, political, socio-cultural, and discursive terms. The idea of the BRI generated critical, agreeable, and dispassionate conversations that disrupt the current politics of global development and cooperation in the postcolonial order.

The initiative has been seen as the Chinese response to an emerging geopolitical reality, wherein which China asserts itself as a geopolitical and economic power. Others see the BRI as a consequence of growing interconnectedness and consolidation but in ways that also countervail Western-led global cooperation and integration.

Narratives from China alluded to the BRI as the modern configuration of the ancient Silk Road that historically connected marginalised villages and towns, secondary cities and ports with the cultural and political centers across the Eurasian and African continents for nearly two millennia. This historical Silk Road engendered multi-cultural and inter-cultural encounters, migration and mobilities, and a sense of openness to sameness and differences in a cosmopolitan fashion. Along the Silk Road, peoples and communities exchanged and transmitted goods, philosophies, ideologies, religions, traits, art and other creative endeavors that considerably affected human affairs of the era and subsequent events in world history.

As it was during the old Silk Road, the contemporary imagination of the BRI disrupted and reconfigured notions of roads and corridors to variant chains and paradigms of cooperation in the contemporary world. South Asian, Middle Eastern, and African trading posts associated with the historical Silk Road are being re-

integrated into the broader East Asian and Southeast Asian regions through technical, investment, and knowledge exchanges. Business deals and memoranda of understanding between China and some Latin American and Caribbean nations were signed, subsequently expanding the reach of the BRI beyond the ancient and currently reimagined Eurasian and African Silk Road.

Furthermore, the BRI altered streams of development assistance from a unidirectional flow surging off from Western creditor governments to one that rolls out of China, a non-Western state. The Chinese-led streams of assistance in turn spur contrasting transnational development cooperation from countries that welcomed the potential benefits of the BRI and those that rejected it over fears of sovereignty violations. Openness and rejection, notwithstanding, the BRI altered the frames of cooperation beyond the North-South linkages. Furthermore, the BRI disrupted the philosophy of capacity building, self-reliance, and sustainable development that the United Nations promoted through the so-called South-South Cooperation and Triangulation with the financially dominant and technologically advanced nations primarily steering the trajectory of the partnerships.

In some ways, the BRI turns the politics of development cooperation upside down. It breaks the narrative that sets North American, Australian, Japanese, and European metropolises as the central actors in the making of global prosperity. It is altering the UN defined idea of sustainable development that is substantially disrupting Western dominance in defining multilateral cooperation. The BRI cracks into the touchstone of developmental multilateralism to other possibilities of cooperation but over which China plays more substantive roles.

Beyond institutional and state relations, the BRI is ushering other forms of connections that sweep communities, citizens, and institutions into other strands of cooperation through people-to-people connections. Professionals, educators, universities, and civic bodies have begun cruising their way into the network of new linkages that are explored with concerns and hopes for other possibilities.

These diverging lines of global cooperation are bound to, if it hasn't already, untangle existing relations of power within and among nations as they also build new parameters of international engagements. To some degree, the sense of influence and rejection

being generated by the BRI indicate in stark terms the shifting of geopolitical alignments in the twenty-first century over which China undeniably plays a role. The initiative is fragmenting contemporary global relations as it reconfigures existing state compacts and ushers in new associations, tensions, and conditions of interconnections.

This issue examines these new lines of cooperation and re-examines old forms of connections as experienced in the Philippines, a country where the vast majority of the population and popular media narrative come across as distrustful to Chinese global engagements. Aurora Roxas-Lim sets the discussion in perspective by interrogating the potentials and critical issues raised against the BRI—real, imagined, and speculated—with implications to the current Philippine government foreign policy of engaging with China in developmental, security, and geopolitical terms. Gilbert Jacob Que, drawing from a survey, breaks down the drivers of the persistently unfavorable Filipino sentiments to Chinese overtures toward the Philippines despite greater but ultimately shorthanded efforts in tapping the media and social media narrative of cooperation.

Jane Yugioksing tracks the rewarding encounters and socio-culturally rooted differences underpinning the experiences of Native Chinese teachers in teaching Mandarin and Chinese cultural life in Philippine international schools and universities. Finally, Czarina Saloma and Erik Akpedonu track how a Chinese government funded bridge in old Manila finds itself entangled in pre-existing local social and political tensions around the long-running question of heritage preservation of colonial and early Chinese built-up structures in the city.

This issue presents a fraction of cases that indicates the broader disruption of development cooperative engagements in rapidly shifting global order. The geopolitical, social, economic, and cultural underpinnings of these relations are rife subjects of discussion about the thinking on, of, in, and from the Global South.

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