



Perspectives on the Intercultural Communication Strategy between China and Islamic Countries along Belt and Road Initiative

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Abstract

This paper addresses China's aspiration of common destinies and the promotion of shared values with countries along the 'Belt and Road Initiative'. The central focus will be on intercultural communication between Sinic and Muslim worlds where this Belt and Road Initiative promises to bring a new process of civilization from east to west. To gain greater insight, the role of Gwadar as a gateway to this era of new world order along BRI will be discussed in detail.

Keywords: Belt and road initiative; Intercultural communication; Muslim world; China

Introduction

We live in a globalized world; it has become crucial to communicate efficiently with business partners around the globe. Therefore, there is a need to understand foreign cultures on different levels. Besides, this has become a crucial research paradigm across which many academic fields intersect. Clearly, in terms of global politics, economics and communication studies, intercultural communication with Islamic countries have entered a highly scholarly period. The first requirement is to understand the idea of communication, particularly non-verbal communication and its components for imparting a message when it occurs between various societies (diverse non-verbal communication). It is essential to know, how culture influences indicate elements and social contrasts as parameters becomes the second point. What can obstruct or even stop the correspondence procedure when moving from and between dialects. Are there crucial elements in any discussion on intercultural communication? Key to success is having a vivid idea about what culture is and how cultural differences are navigated between different societies. Since the 19th century, a society's culture has been closely connected to a sense of nationality. In a sense, this is an organic idea of culture in the shape of a Durkheimian

understanding of solidarity. It does, however, allow us to muster a more solid foundation of a cultural function.

This paper aims to outline the strategic measures that China is taking to strengthen the bilateral ties with the Muslim world through the inter-communication tools and people to people contacts [1]. This is done through a series of perspectives. The next sections begin these perspectives with intercultural communication. Following this historic, expert, theoretical and critical perspectives, this paper hopes to give a more profound and clear understanding of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Literature Review

Cultural communication is an integral part of convergence among civilizations and culture has become a widely recognized international management topic. Since the 1980s, when global business gained unprecedented popularity, ideas of mass culture also became prominent [2]. According to Ibn Battuta, in the past, the business between east and west was characterized mainly by economic interactions between the Christian world (the US and EU), Buddhist and atheist civilizations. Buddhists are generally accommodating of other religions, while atheists tend to welcome materialistic gain and business success, which is music to the ears of foreign investors [3].

However, many belt and road countries are home to Islamic communities, and such experiences from previous east/west trading rarely apply. The major difference here is religion. Like all religion, Islam offers ideas that can influence working values, time management and communications, as well as the type of products being offered. For instance, Hong Kong is keen to develop Islamic finance products, but the success has so far been limited. Product design requires cautious planning. While the concerned authorities from Islamic states may give the green light for market entry, it is just as important that domestic customers embrace these new foreign products [4].

Although the Islamic religion is an essential element of culture, mirroring the assorted qualities of cultural life found inside the Arab world. While the predominant religion is Islam, the area incorporates a large number of other religions. The

Middle East is the origin of the three monotheistic religions, which through the course of history competed for strength and influence. The Crusades are a prime example of such competition where Christianity attempted to reestablish its predominance [5]. Today there is extensive Christian populace to be found throughout Palestine, Lebanon and Syria. Lebanon maintains nearly twenty diverse religions within its borders. Another example is the Coptic Christians, who, are found in Egypt. Similarly, there are also groups of Arab Jews living in Morocco, Yemen and Iraq [6].

Mertens and De Smaele, (2016) Representations of Islam in the News

Intercultural (Communication, Globalization, and Cultural Identity) analysis opined that the representation of Islam is verifiably a basic test for contrasting journalistic detailing crosswise over nations and societies. This book sets the scene that the Islamic religion weighs terms of global announcing (characterizing what we named "remote Islam"), however, it is likewise the religion of numerically vital minority groups living in Europe ("national Islam") [7]. Three other sections explore by giving examples of the representation of Islam as distinguished by different writers and studies required with Islam representation in Europe. Section two, examines by contrasting a few nations and six media frameworks in Western Europe: the Dutch-talking some portion of Belgium (Flanders), the French-talking a portion of Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Germany, and the U.K. Section three of this book presents subjective and quantitative perspective. Similarly as the greater part of consideration goes to Western Europe, is the augmentation towards the representation of Muslims and Islam outside Western Europe. Section four of the book is committed to the representation of Islam in a portion of the purported BRICs-nations: Russia, China, and India [8]. Given the proceeded with the politicization of religion and the prohibition of Muslims in numerous European nations and past, contemplating media representations of Islam is of extraordinary significance. Breaking down the media talks in Europe, this volume offers a watchful record of the examples and disagreements in news scope identifying with Islam. In this manner, the creators embrace a diverse approach. In a profoundly modern manner, they pass on comprehension of speaking to Islam as a transcultural marvel in Europe.

Cultural diversity within the BRI region is far more sophisticated than it used to be. The nuances of different religions, language barriers and the influence left behind former Soviet Union states have all become intertwined, adding further complexities to an already complex situation [9]. According to the former Pakistan Ambassador to China, Riaz Mohammad Khan, "the last decade has seen a major redistribution of world economic power. China's rise as an economic power has invoked two parallel responses. On the one hand, there are deep trade and investment linkages between China and the West, especially with the United States. [For example] in 2008, China played a positive role during the world financial crisis. China now plays an important

role in the development plans of emerging economies". He further said that "China Pakistan Economic Corridor is an example of such engagement by China. Investments in developing countries of East Asia, Africa, and South America, as well as BRI, are manifestations of its commitment. On the other hand, the USA seems to be strengthening old alliances with the rest of East Asia. America's 'pivot to Asia' is a sign of discomfort with China's emergence as a major world power".

History of Islam in China

It is pertinent to mention here the relationship between the Muslims and the Chinese in terms of history. This will help our understanding and give greater context to the current relationship dynamics between the Islamic world and China [10]. The spread of Islam throughout the Middle East (from Mecca going in all directions) in the latter part of the eighth century also meant that Islam spread through what became known as the "Silk Road". This Silk Road was a trading route between the Middle East and China [11]. Muslims visited China for trade reasons and indeed the Chinese always encouraged the trading relationship. Muslims first visited cities such as "Guangzhou" (today, one of the largest cities in the world). China has always been a large country, where trade is seen as an integral part of Chinese Culture. These trading relationships remain today, mainly because Muslims were key trading partners [12]. For many Chinese, Muslims are more trustworthy and loyal partners in trade. For a time in world history, this growth in trade along the Silk Road allowed the nomadic people of Central Asia to become important figures [13]. Moreover, not only trade but technology, agricultural knowledge and also ideas were exchanged. In an interview, the Former Federal Minister of Planning and Development Mr Ahsan Iqbal stated that "the history of China and Pakistan is a deep 'all-weather' friendship based on political and historical alliance spread over generations, but the corridor marks a new phase in this relationship by putting economic cooperation and connectivity squarely at the centre of the bilateral agenda. It is a strategic economic partnership that will transform Pakistan into a Geo-economic hub linking China, South Asia, the Middle East and Central Asia offering great opportunities for investors from all over the world".

He further said that "today, history has offered another opportunity. Forging an equilibrium between stability, reform and delivery are the keys to any country's success. Shakespeare said, "There is a tide in the affairs of man, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; quitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and miseries. On such a full sea are we now afloat, and we must take the currents when it serves, Or lose our ventures." We cannot afford to miss this tide. At this historic juncture let's resolve to stand together as a nation in warmly welcoming our Chinese counterparts and creating an enabling environment for the China Pakistan Economic Corridor to fulfil our ambition of making it one of 21st Century's most transformational projects". It can be argued that these statements by (the above-named man) mirror how the world and various civilizations are overlapping and co-existing simultaneously.

After 1975, China embraced a much faster pace in development and globalization. This embracement is currently cumulating in China's BRI, and maybe be seen as a process of convergence within a clash of civilization [14]. With the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a flagship approach within this convergence, many other countries and institutions such as Russia, the European Union and Africa have all become interested [15]. CPEC at its heart has this multi-civilization context. BRI is about interdependence. Likewise, it is a cross-hatch for the different civilizations to meet and shape the world in the future. This project is designed to bring about a change and a better future to improve relations with other countries. Looking back into Chinese history, there have been some conflicts among Taoists, Muslims and Buddhists [16]. However, China's history gives us a greater lesson that Chinese people of different religions can co-exist which in turns lead us to an understanding that BRI countries and Chinese leadership can also co-exist and cooperate [17].

Communicating BRI perspectives

In this globalized and interdependent world, institutions, countries, continents, and regions have to be interconnected with each other. The Muslim world and China have taken the lead in this regard, and under the BRI project, the hope is that it will bring them even closer. As an initiative, it has made headlines across the globe. In terms of its media perception, BRI is seen as being very positive. Since 2013 the Chinese government has given time and funding to both planning and propaganda to this mega project. Different perspectives on what China ambitious are, have been the subject of much debate, in the fields of International Relations, Politics and Governance. But officially according to a vision document issued by the Chinese government in early March 2015, BRI has four keys objectives. (1) Policy coordination among Asian countries. In the context of the so-called China model then policy coordination may assume a different name. China model is actually in opposition to the so-called Washington consensus. The China model is counter to the western model which is based on free trade, stronger market, free market, regular institutions. This does not, however, mean that China is not in favour of free trade. It has already signed free trade agreements with various countries. (2) Trade globalization is another objective. Building physical infrastructure particularly roads, railways and ports facilities for the Maritime Silk Roads project will be on the top of the agenda. China is interested in free trade agreements especially countries that are the part of BRI that require infrastructure investment and construction. Here China sees the possibility of selling raw materials for this infrastructure and also lending sums of money as an investment. Sources within the Chinese government have said that so far, 60 countries have signed up and agreed to take part in BRI.

Although BRI is not an organization, where it does not have any constitution or mandate, through this platform China has invited a large number of countries to join, from Asia, Africa and Europe. Hence the third objective is financial integration. Financial funding for the development and infrastructure projects that will form the part of the BRI are key to its

success. The Chinese government outlined that through Silk Road, 40 billion dollars have been subsidized as part of this fund. It has established the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and China's so-called policy banks like China's Development Bank will also be major contributors to the BRI project. (4) Connectivity is at the heart of this global initiative where funding is seemingly allocated for this mega project and will be used to build roads, highways, and railways. It is hoped that this will replicate the infrastructure growth in China. 15 years ago, China did not have a single mile of the high-speed railway but today China has the largest and longest high-speed railway network. China is also offering its technology to bootstrap developing countries. So connectivity is a critical part and according to the Chinese government with the physical development of these infrastructures (roads and railway projects) will allow people to travel more frequently and goods to be transported with speed. The Chinese government also hopes that such structural development will improve people to people interaction and linkages. This alone portrays China's "Soft Power" within this global initiative. Additionally, it will physically connect China and its people to the Muslim world, cementing relationships of trade and culture. It is not only economically lucrative but also be useful for peace, stability and fostering mutual understanding [18].

South Asian experts perspectives

The Former Ambassador of Pakistan in China, "Riaz Mohammad Khan" in the interview said that "The CPEC is the flagship of the Chinese vision of Belt and Road Initiative. He believed that important features of the two Silk Roads proposed by the Chinese leadership are openness and beneficial cooperation. Thus, it enables all countries and regions to share the bounties of economic development based on win-win cooperation". Furthermore "for both China and Pakistan, CPEC would instil greater vitality and a stronger economic content to the all-weather strategic partnership. He emphasized that CPEC should not be viewed in the prism of regional power dynamics, old-style alliance formation or zero-sum relationship between different countries. "The spirit of CPEC is cooperation and not confrontation, collaboration and not competition. It is a win-win project for everybody in the region and beyond. CPEC contributes towards a regional and an international order based on shared prosperity, mutual benefits and economic convergence".

Today the Islamic countries are yet to become the key area for Chinese foreign policy. China needs to make the Islamic world as the key foreign policy. China should take a proactive role to prevent crises in countries like Iraq, Libya and Syria rather than just following other powers [19]. People foresee China's rise and a global leader in the future. However China's rise cannot be materializing without a thorough knowledge of the Muslim world. China has historically benefitted from the rise of the Islamic world. For Instance, the Chinese and Mughal Empire never fought. In this sense, BRI will help to achieve Islam and Chin's dream together, bringing these historical and great civilizations into one family under the heaven".

According to Dr. Pradeep Taneja (who is the expert of India-China relations and currently serving as a professor at the University of Melbourne) India's response to China's ambitious plan, BRI will reshape its immediate neighbourhood as well as the Indian Ocean region. He examined that President Xi Jinping has promoted this initiative as a win-win solution to some of the key challenges facing the world and many states have welcomed the initiative, attracted by the prospect of billions of dollars of Chinese investment in Infrastructure energy. He said the concept not just envisages connectivity to China but also enables countries in the surrounding regions to achieve connectivity.

Annotated theoretical perspectives

Confronted by the dramatic changes in the post-cold war era, both policymakers and social scientists have searched for new paradigms of world politics and suggested different theoretical frameworks to make sense of the emerging order.

Samuel P. Huntington criticized Fukuyama's argument as suffering from a "single alternative fallacy" rooted in the Cold War perception that the demise of communism would inevitably lead to a victory of liberal democracy [20]. Huntington believes that many religious alternatives exist outside the world of secular ideologies and that fundamental divisions of humanity in terms of ethnicity, religions, and civilization remain vivid and will spawn new conflicts. According to him, the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation-states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future [21]. Huntington believes that the question of identity is assuming greater significance with the revival of religions and culture. He argues that the future of politics will be determined by the conflictual interaction among seven or eight civilizations, differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and most important, by religion [22]. There is a basic incompatibility of values between the west and non-west, because the western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, and the market economy have little resonance within non-western civilizations. Since there is little likelihood of the emergence of a universal civilization, the west should be cognizant of this threat, act to protect itself, and try to maintain its position in the world. The immediate threat to the west arises from the nexus between the Confucian and Islamic civilizations, while other civilizations may present long-term threats [23].

Critical perspectives

Not all reactions to BRI have been enthusiastic. Former World Trade Organization chief, Supachai Panitchpakdi, has stated that the BRI and, specifically, its projects along the Mekong River, all serve China's interests [24]. On the economic

front, China has been criticized for using its massive financial assets to dominate smaller economies through long-term control of infrastructure, natural resources and associated land assets, and through offering less than desirable credit terms for infrastructure loans. Further, the 'production capacity cooperation', which China lauds as an integral aspect of this project, often involves the simple transfer of Chinese-owned production capacity to countries where production is cheaper and markets are closed. Such processes can also result in China exerting some control over local markets, labour and export policies.

Despite the claimed economic nature of the BRI agenda, critics see the initiative as being simultaneously a strategic program. China portrays this mega project as both being premised on and further validating China's claims to the islands of the South China Sea, while on the other side of the Indian Ocean, Djibouti is providing China with both a trade port as well as its first overseas military base. It has been repeatedly noted in China that BRI is also intended as a regional security mechanism and the future role of the People's Liberation Army in protecting China's BRI facilities abroad has been widely discussed. The two 'economic corridors now being developed provide China with direct access to the Indian Ocean.

Broader concerns relate to the longer-term aims of China, with the possibility that the BRI agenda is aimed at creating a Eurasia-wide, China-led bloc to counter the US [25]. At the June 2016 Shangri-la Dialogue in Singapore, Professor Xiang Lanxin, director of the Centre of Belt and Road Initiative Studies at the China National Institute for SCO International Exchange and Judicial Cooperation, spoke of this initiative as being an avenue to a 'post-Westphalian world'. As such, some see this plan as a profound challenge to the current global political and economic status quo.

China's wielding of this economic statecraft strategy derives from several collocations. On the political front, since late 2012, President Xi has been promoting the 'Chinese dream' involving the 'great revival of the Chinese nation'. Such revival requires a restored global position and identity for China. Earlier iterations of this initiative involved the catch-phrases 'common development' and 'win-win cooperation' to characterize the relations between China's development and that of its neighbours. China also promoted a 'China-ASEAN community of shared destiny. However these smaller initiatives have burgeoned into the Eurasia-wide BRI, bringing into play the PRC's massive capital reserves-both state and private-achieved through 40 years of rapid economic growth, and offering an outlet for the vast excess production capacities which exist today in China [26].

Regardless of the credence, which one assigns to the various interpretations of this initiative, progress thus far makes it clear that as Australia becomes increasingly tied economically with China, there is a need to maintain a close watch on the progress of this project globally. It also suggests that Australia needs to adopt a more economically and strategically prudent attitude in determining how the Australia-China economic relationship is to further develop.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that China's 'Belt and Road Initiative' mainly and constructively promotes economic development in the Muslim world, while the western countries are trying very much to export their religious ideology. BRI is more about geopolitics, allowing China to gain greater influence. As China embraces this strategy, it is not only the revival of the old economic concepts of the Silk Road but it also incorporates a Buddhist based idea of regionalism which has far-reaching implications. According to Buddhism, philosophical normative powers are applied for better understanding of how the new (Buddhist) Silk Roads are advancing the spiritual conduits of regional cooperation. The result presented that the cultural differences between China and Islamic countries are multiple and reflected in every area of life. However, with correct attitudes and proper action, barriers can be reduced and better intercultural communication can be achieved.

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