

# TANULMÁNYOK / STUDIES

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## *BRI and the changing world order*

*China celebrating the 10 anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative what was born as an economical cooperation, but after 10 years we can realize that the BRI is more than that. Capitalizing on their political and economic achievements in the 21st century, Asian countries are calling for a new world order. We are witnessing the emergence of a new multipolar and multicultural world order, but little has been said about the structure of this new system. China can offer many countries a new alternative for cooperation, thanks to the success of the Belt and Road Initiative, which can be seen as a framework for a new world order. In my study, through an analysis of China's vision of world order and a look beyond Western thinking, I examine whether the Belt and Road can indeed be the foundation of a new world order.*

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### **1. Introduction**

In recent years, we have heard from Chinese and Russian leaders on many platforms that the world needs a harmonious, multipolar world order that should not be run by one country or a single small community. Asian countries reject hegemony and constantly promote peaceful dialogue and joint cooperation. Although it is only in the last few years that we have often read in Western media about Chinese and Russian leaders' statements to this effect, in fact, the discourse in Asian countries has covered this for decades; however, until now there has been no economically and politically strong country or community that could adequately represent this idea on international platforms. So why do we hear about it only in the recent years?

At the beginning of the 21st century, a new world order is emerging as Asian countries gain economic strength and rise. The last 500 years have been characterised by Western dominance, with the United States of America, after World War II, being the only country to emerge from the conflict unscathed in terms of territory, and at the time producing 60% of the world's GNP. It defined its leadership role on the basis of its own domestic political experience. After the Cold War, as the first and only global power, it was even more dominant when it came to shaping the new world order. The US was a leader in four crucial areas of global power: military, economic, technological and cultural. It was present in different parts of the world through its dominance of these four areas, extending its influence to parts of Asia that had hitherto been independent thereof. Part of the American system are global organisations such as the IMF or the World Bank, which represent global interests, and which were in fact created at the initiative of the United States following the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944, and which are - in reality - under American influence. So the world's affairs are decided in Washington, "and that is where the power game has to be played, and played according to America's domestic rules" (Brzeziński, 2017, p. 48).

Today, however, "in the favourite phrases of historians, 'the expansion of the West' ended and 'the revolt against the West' began [...] Western power declined relative to the power of other civilisations [...] the international system expanded beyond the West and became

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multicivilisational" (Huntington, 2019, p. 71). The 500-year Atlantic era of Western dominance is coming to an end, culminating in unipolar, hegemonic ruling following the Cold War.

In the 21st century, China's economic rise helped it become the second largest economy in the world, and it launched the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, based on mutual benefits, peaceful coexistence and respect for each other. In the past 10 years, more than 151 countries and 32 international organisations have joined the Chinese initiative, bringing a new kind of connectivity and cooperation to international politics, which could even serve as the framework for the new world order that is currently taking shape.

In this study, I examine China's vision of world order, the emergence of the Belt and Road Initiative and its place and role in the new world order.

## 2. World order

In 1877, the notion of the Western world order was articulated eloquently by János Arany as below:

In the past the warring nations  
Did not follow any precept:  
The strong plundered what he could, and  
Everything he looted, he kept.

That has changed now, as the world has  
A more legalistic flavour:  
When the strong now do some mischief  
They confer and – vote in favour.

We can see, in the past 150 years there is no change in the world order, the superpowers are deciding about the world order. But what is world order exactly?

In international politics, and even today, the phrase world order is frequently used, with no general definition and with many different interpretations and uses, taking the meaning of world order as evidence. According to *The Encyclopaedia of Diplomacy* (Bába, 2018), world order is defined differently from different perspectives:

1. "world order is identified with norms that regulate relations between states on a global scale, norms that are largely absent or not respected";
2. "other approaches emphasise the subordination of global processes to physical, natural laws, spiritual and moral values, and the interests of power".
3. "The representatives of the legal-normative approach seek ways and means to create a just and regulated world order that does not yet exist,
4. according to the descriptive, pragmatic approach of economic and political science, world order is – at any given time – an interdependent set of world economic, political and ecological systems, ideas and cultures operating in a given period."

In addition to these approaches, the encyclopaedia also distinguishes between unipolar, bipolar and multipolar world orders, which give new meaning to the term.

There is no single definition of world order in international literature, but Henry Kissinger's *World Order*, in which he explores and discusses the ideas of world order over 430 pages, is certainly outstanding. According to Kissinger (2015), the world order we usually talk about is in fact the system established in the context of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Kissinger, however, could not provide an exact formulation of world order, and this paper does not attempt to do so either.

Defining world order is not easy, because looking at world history, it is only by the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century that we can say that the world has become fully globalised – in Marshall McLuhan's (2001, p. 45) words, a "global village". Throughout world history, some civilisations, or even continents, have built up separate systems independent of one another, and regional "world orders" have emerged. In fact, the Peace of Westphalia also

became the set of rules of the world's great powers at the time, and not all civilisations and regions across the globe took part in the 30-year war.

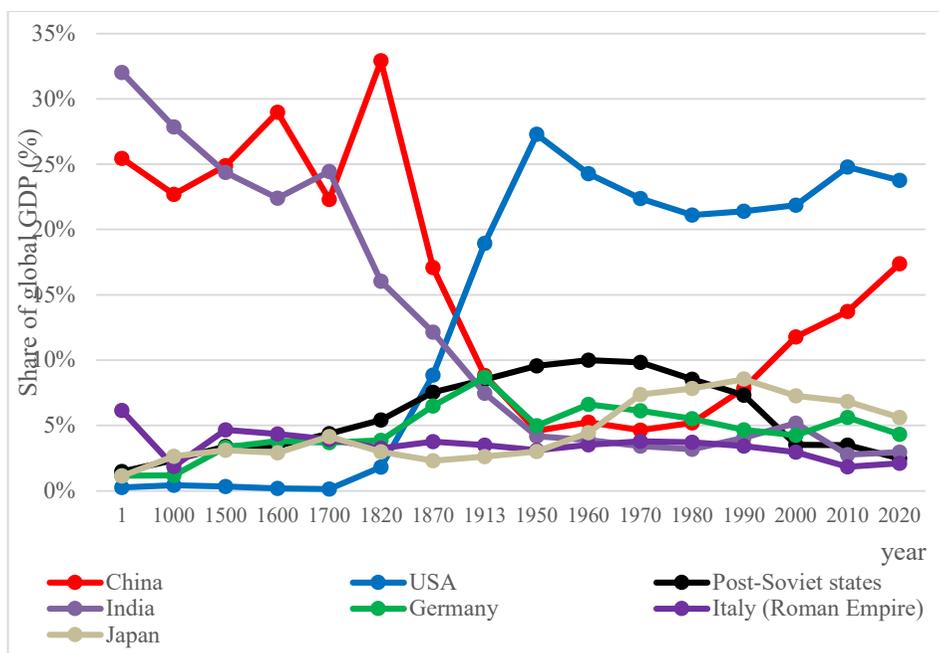
As I mentioned above, there is no single concept of world order, thus it is worth examining what notions of and ideas around world order have developed in other regions and civilisations, and how they view them. Given the relevance of the study – and the volume of constraints – I will present the Chinese definition of world order.

### **3. China and the world order**

In the course of world history, various civilisations were initially completely separated in space and time, then around 1500 BC, neighbouring civilisations began to “meet”, but even in the 10th century AD, it took hundreds of years for ideas and technology to move from civilisation to civilisation (Huntington, 2019, pp. 63-64). Throughout its 5,000-year history, China developed “far away” from other civilisations, isolated by natural borders. The Chinese Empire saw the people beyond its borders as “barbarians”, as it was economically, politically and socially more advanced and more organised. Unlike Western civilisation, China had no colonial intentions. Chinese naval fleets led by Chinese admiral Zheng He had already sailed across Southeast Asia in the early 1400s, reaching as far as Africa. But the Chinese ships did not sail the seas with colonial intentions, China did not make territorial claims on foreign countries, but proclaimed a China-centred world, and foreign people had to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Chinese emperor (Kissinger, 2017, p. 27). Throughout history, until its “encounter” with Western civilisation in the 19th century, China saw itself as the centre of the world. Its Chinese name (Zhong Guo - 中国 – Middle Country) is the origin of the name Middle Kingdom. China also expected the surrounding people and countries to regard China as the centre of the world and the emperor as the Son of Heaven (Ye, 1998, p. 4).

China’s 150 years of humiliation, which Brzeziński (2017) called a historical aberration in his book *The Grand Chessboard*, began after the violent emergence of the West. The blame for these 150 years of humiliation is borne by Great Britain because of the Opium War; Japan because of the predatory wars in the late 19th and mid-20th centuries; Russia because of protracted encroachment on Chinese territories in the North and the Soviet-Chinese estrangement; and, lastly, America because, through its Asian presence and support of Japan, it stood in the way of China's external aspirations (Brzeziński, 2017, p. 223). The four great powers showed China that there is another world order, one of global scale, beyond the China-centred world order, whose rules are based on Western culture (Horváth, 2022).

By the 1940s, China had achieved reunification with a strong central power, foreign powers had been ousted and, in 1949, the People's Republic of China was established, which then regained its rightful place in the world under the policies of the “Chinese Dream” and the “Chinese Renaissance”, since from 0 AD until the advent of the West, China accounted for 20-30% of the world economy (Figure 1).



**Figure 1** The development of the world economy from 0 AD to present day

Source: own editing based on Angus Maddison's *The World Economy - Historical Statistics* and the World Bank database

By the 21st century, as can be seen in Figure 1, China had become the second largest economy in the world. According to Justin Yifu Lin (林毅夫, 1952-), Chinese economist and former World Bank Vice President, China has an increasing role and responsibility in the world economy, but the rules of the game of the current US-dominated world order were laid down after World War II. From the perspective of Beijing, China is entitled to a much greater say in shaping the world order than it currently has, given its economic achievements and global economic responsibilities, which is why China has launched the One Belt, One Road initiative (Li et al., 2020, pp. 3-5). In addition, of course, there were and are a number of macroeconomic factors that have contributed to China's emergence as a globalisation leader.

As China's economic and political strength grows, its voice is also becoming more audible in the international political arena. Unlike in the past, Chinese diplomats are increasingly speaking out in defence of their country, but without interfering in the internal politics of other countries, and as a result they are often labelled "aggressive" or "war wolves" in Western media, even though this is a far cry from the Western diplomats' statements that we have become accustomed to in recent decades.

While China's vision for the world and a new multipolar world order has been increasingly heard on international platforms in recent years, it is not in fact a "recent" development. Looking at Chinese and Western archival footage and writings, we can see that since the founding of the People's Republic of China, there have been continuous proposals for a new world order, the framework for which has already been outlined. These are presented below.

#### 4. Chinese world order

In his book *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, German sociologist Max Weber (1915) defined Confucian rationalism as a rational adaptation to the world – in contrast to the Western concept of rational control of the world.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, China's international relations have also been constantly changing, depending on the international situation. According to Wang (2019),

it can be seen as going through four phases: initially, it moved from a policy of "leaning to one side" towards independence, then it gained a more serious role for itself by becoming a nuclear power, the third phase is when it returned to the UN, by which time it had become a political and military superpower, and finally, thanks to the success of the "reform and opening-up" policy, it became one of the leaders in economic terms, thus becoming a real superpower (Wang, 2019, p. 16). Throughout this time, however, the position of the People's Republic of China has remained unchanged: a new world order must be established. The framework for this had been set over the past 70 years.

#### ***4.1. "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence"***

In 1949, the foreign policy guidelines promulgated by Mao Zedong at the founding of the People's Republic already included peaceful coexistence, but it was on 31 December 1953 that Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai first elaborated on peaceful coexistence in the form of five principles at a reception for an Indian delegation, and then signed a joint declaration of agreement on the five principles with India on 28 June 1954 and with Myanmar on 29 June 1954 (MFA, 2023):

1. mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty;
2. mutual non-aggression;
3. mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs;
4. equality and cooperation for mutual benefit; and
5. peaceful coexistence.

Peaceful coexistence actually originated in Chinese culture, and if we look at Chinese history, we can see that although these five principles were not stated at the time, they were also preached by ancient Chinese strategists and philosophers. The works of Laozi, Confucius, Mozi and many other Chinese sages have a strong anti-war and pro-peace stance. In his work *Tao Te Ching*, Laozi writes explicitly about peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and harmonious relations (Horváth, 2022).

Although the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" initially applied to Sino-Indian relations, China later extended these to its foreign relations with other countries, and in 1955 they were presented at the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung.

On the 60th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (28 June 2014), Chinese President Xi Jinping highlighted in his speech that having been tested by the evolution of international relations over the past six decades, "the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence", as open and inclusive principles of international law, embody the values of sovereignty, justice, democracy and rule of law (PRC, 2014).

#### ***4.2. The Bandung Conference***

On 18 April 1955, the Afro-Asian conference, co-convened by India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, began in Bandung, Indonesia. The conference was attended by 29 Asian and African countries that were not part of either of the post-World War II Cold War or bipolar world order blocs and were fighting for their own independence. It was the first international Afro-Asian conference without the participation of a colonising country.

A year before the conference, China had separately proclaimed the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" with India and Myanmar, the two founding countries of the Bandung Conference, and China was, therefore, invited to the conference, represented by Premier Zhou Enlai. The Western bloc tried to prevent Chinese participation, with an unsuccessful bomb attack on the Chinese prime minister (Zhang, 2015).

A 10-point declaration was issued at the conference, in which the signatories reaffirmed the ideas contained in the UN Charter: respect for the sovereignty of nations, respect for the rules of international law, non-violent and peaceful resolution of conflicts, respect for human rights, the elimination of racial discrimination, cooperation based on mutual benefit, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, etc., i.e. building on China's "Five Principles of Peaceful

Coexistence”, an expanded 10-point set of principles for international relations was established, thus proclaiming a framework for a new world order.

#### **4.3. “Three worlds” theory**

Mao Zedong's “three worlds” theory was presented by Deng Xiaoping at the 1974 UN General Assembly, and divided the world into three parts, as follows (Deng, 1974):

- The "first world" comprises the two superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union, which want to gain hegemonic power, control the developing countries of Asia, South America and Africa and intimidate less developed countries.
- The "second world" means the developed countries.
- And the "third world" includes developing countries in Asia, South America and Africa.

In fact, with the "three worlds" theory, China hoped to establish a new system of relations in which it positioned itself as the leader of the third world. Deng also argued that the main threat to international peace and security is posed by the hegemonic ambitions of the great powers (Bartha-Rigó, 2018, p. 67).

#### **4.4. Policy of “reform and opening-up”**

In the context of the "reform and opening-up" policy announced by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, Deng addressed the idea of a new world order in several speeches. On 4 March 1985, he told a gathering of foreign leaders that "the outstanding issue in the world today, the global strategic issue, is peace and development. The question of peace is an East-West issue, while the question of development is a North-South issue. This can all be summed up in the four words: East, West, North, South. The North-South problem is the central issue" (Deng, 1993, p. 105). Deng believed that the economic gap between the North and the South was the source of the unrest, and that it was all based on an "inadequate world order", and that a new world order must be established based on the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" (Deng, 1993, p. 93).

#### **4.5. "Harmonious world"**

In April 2005, Chinese Head of State Hu Jintao announced the concept of a "harmonious world" in his speech at the Jakarta Afro-Asian Conference and in September 2005 at the UN Headquarters, where he said that countries should "promote peaceful coexistence, equal dialogue, development and prosperity among different cultures, and jointly build a harmonious world together".

On 1 July 2005, during Hu Jintao's visit to Russia, he and Putin issued a joint declaration on the international system for the 21st century, which already included the "harmonious world" that the two countries would work together with other countries to establish.

### **5. The Belt and Road Initiative**

In 2013, China launched the One Belt, One Road (initially called One Belt, One Road (OBOR), later renamed BRI) initiative, which is based on a Chinese vision of a common, peaceful, win-win cooperation.

Prior to the announcement of the BRI, President Xi Jinping had already been advocating a new world order on various platforms: "One must not cling to the Cold War mentality or zero-sum<sup>2</sup> game thinking since the times have changed. We must keep pace with new trends in the 21st century" (Xi, 2017, p. 305).

In his speeches following his inauguration, President Xi Jinping spoke of peaceful development, mutually beneficial cooperation, harmony, close cooperation among nations, win-win situations, the equality and independence of nations and the new world order, laying the foundation for his speech entitled *"Promote Friendship between Our People and Work Together to Build a Bright Future"* (弘扬人民友谊 共创美好未来) given on 7 September 2013 at Nazarbayev University during his official visit to Kazakhstan. It was the first time that the Chinese head of state had spoken about the Silk Road Economic Belt concept: "To forge closer economic ties, deepen

<sup>2</sup> Zero-sum, meaning that as much as one wins, the other loses.

cooperation and expand development space in the Eurasian region, we should take an innovative approach and jointly build an ‘economic belt along the Silk Road’” (Xi, 2017, p. 324).

At the time, President Xi Jinping even outlined the five pillars of the future One Belt, One Road initiative:

- *"First, we need to step up policy communication.*  
Countries should have full discussions on development strategies and policy response, work out plans and measures for advancing regional cooperation through consultation in the spirit of seeking common ground while reserving differences, and give the policy and legal ‘green light’ to regional economic integration" (Xi, 2017, p. 324).
- *"Second, we need to improve road connectivity.*  
[...] We will actively discuss the best way to improve cross-border transportation infrastructure and work towards a transportation network connecting East Asia, West Asia and South Asia to facilitate economic development and travel in the region" (Xi, 2017, p. 324).
- *"Third, we need to promote unimpeded trade.*  
The proposed ‘economic belt along the Silk Road’ is inhabited by close to 3 billion people and represents the biggest market in the world with unparalleled potential. The potential for trade and investment cooperation between the relevant countries is enormous. We should discuss a proper arrangement for trade and investment facilitation, remove trade barriers, reduce trade and investment costs, increase the speed and quality of regional economic flows and achieve win--win progress in the region" (Xi, 2017, pp. 324-325).
- *"Fourth, we need to enhance monetary circulation.*  
If our region can realise local currency convertibility and settlement under current and capital accounts, it will significantly lower circulation costs, increase our ability to fend off financial risks and make our region more economically competitive throughout the world" (Xi, 2015, p. 325).
- *"Fifth, we need to increase understanding between our people"* (Xi, 2017, p. 324).  
"Amity between the people holds the key to good relations between states. To have productive cooperation in the above--mentioned areas, we need the support of our people. We should encourage more friendly exchanges between our people to enhance mutual understanding and traditional friendship and build strong public support and a solid social foundation for regional cooperation" (Xi, 2017, p. 325).

One month later, on 3 October 2013, President Xi Jinping paid an official visit to Indonesia to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting. He also outlined the concept of the Maritime Silk Road in his speech to the People’s Representative Council of Indonesia on *Building a China-ASEAN Shared Future Together* (携手建设中国-东盟命运共同体): "Southeast Asia has since ancient times been an important hub along the ancient Maritime Silk Road. China will strengthen maritime cooperation with ASEAN countries to make good use of the China-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation Fund set up by the Chinese government and vigorously develop maritime partnership in a joint effort to build the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st century." He also proposed the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Bank (Xi, 2017, pp. 327-328).

In November 2013, the 3rd Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), elected at the 18th Congress of the CPC, adopted the *Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform*, which, among many other important decisions, stated that it would support and strengthen the construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road infrastructure. At the annual Central Economic Work Conference in December, Premier Xi Jinping again called for support for the two concepts and urged the preparation of strategic plans. In March 2014, Prime Minister Li Keqiang highlighted in his

summary of the government's annual work that one of the government's most important tasks is to plan silk road programmes (CICIR, 2018, p. 4).

## 6. Belt and Road Initiative and a new world order

The Belt and Road Initiative, also known as the New Silk Road, was based on the ancient Silk Road, which in fact also changed the world order of the time. At that time, civilisations lived in isolation, but with the advent of silk roads, trade between countries began, and cultural and religious ideas and beliefs were “on the move”. Thus, the interconnection of the separate “world islands”, their merging into one world, began.

The launch of the Belt and Road Initiative has also had a major impact in connecting the Eurasian countries. Eurasian connectivity has been initiated by other countries in the past, and the idea of building an infrastructure system is not far removed from the ideas of European countries, as the Trans-Asian Railway, a single freight rail network linking Europe and Asia over 14,000 kilometres, was established in 1960. The EU then launched the TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe, Caucasus, Asia) project in 1995, which serves to link the EU with China by bypassing Russia. TRACECA is a multilateral programme with 12 countries in addition to the EU Member States, and has five working groups dealing with maritime transport, air transport, road and rail, transport security and transport infrastructure.

However, as China has embarked on the largest economic multilateral cooperation of the 21st century with the One Belt, One Road initiative, it is seen in Western eyes as a very serious, aggressive geopolitical aspiration, because in Western geopolitical thinking – as the “father” of geopolitics, Mackinder, put it in his 1904 lecture – the political consolidation of the Eurasian continent (*continental consolidation*), i.e. the unification of the “core area” under the control of one power and the acquisition of control over the world's resources, is a threat (Gaddis, 2018). The BRI, in the eyes of the West, is precisely the kind of “continental consolidation” that could challenge the Atlantic era, dominated by the maritime powers of the past 500 years.

The United States does not support or participate in the Chinese initiative for geopolitical reasons, as Eurasia is the main geopolitical space for the US, and its global primacy directly depends on how it can maintain its dominance in Eurasia as a whole (Brzeziński, 2017, p. 51). The concern of the United States is that China, by building its infrastructure network abroad, could gain geopolitical power in Eurasia similar to that held by the United States in North America vis-à-vis Canada and Mexico. China's geopolitical isolation from the mainland is disappearing. Moreover, in the second half of the 20th century, the motivation for US infrastructure investments was the construction of military bases, meaning that the US believes that China is preparing to gain geopolitical power and build military bases (Péti, 2017, pp. 23-24). Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary, described this attitude in his 2023 Tusványos speech, as follows: “Experience shows that the dominant great power tends to see itself as more benevolent and better-intentioned than it really is, and attributes malice to its challenger more often than is – or should be – justified. Consequently, the starting point for each opposing party is not the intentions of the counterpart, but its capabilities: not what the counterpart wants to do, but what it is capable of doing.”

By the 21st century, China has become the second strongest economy in the world, and as a result, it has established economic ties with almost every country in the world, and Chinese capital and trade are everywhere, similar to other major economic powers. However, with the Belt and Road Initiative, China has introduced a new *win-win* mentality into international politics, instead of the Western zero-sum mentality.

In addition, the Belt and Road Initiative contains the ideas of former leaders of the People's Republic of China on world order, such as the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”, “harmonious world”, etc. The five pillars of the Chinese initiative also present a framework for the development of a new international order, different from the current Western-dominated world order:

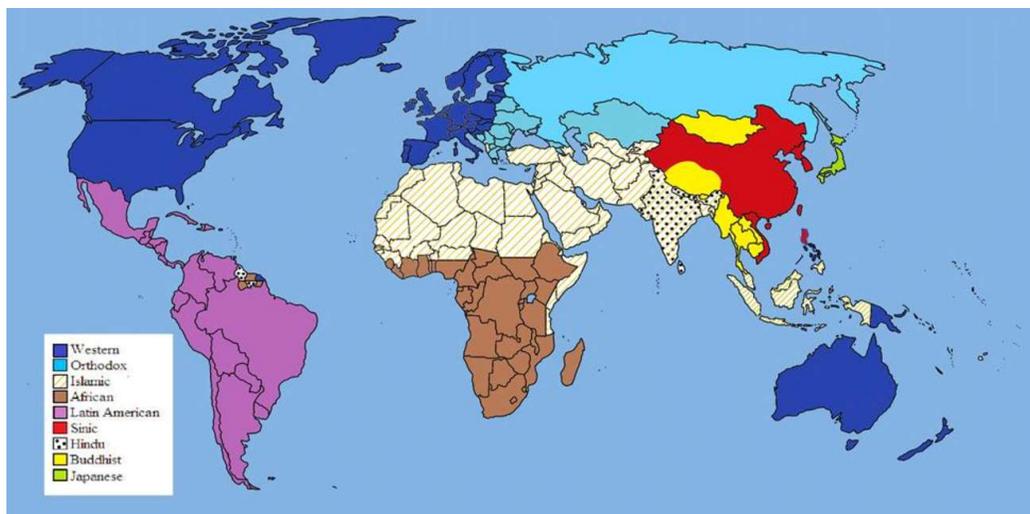
- **Political relations.** With the Belt and Road Initiative, the Chinese state did not create a unilateral Chinese policy, but a common platform where participating states can discuss and negotiate as equals on the future development of countries, regions and the world. To make this even more clear, a BRI Forum has also been held every two years since 2017, welcoming heads of state from participating countries to discuss opportunities together. China is also engaged in a number of multilateral and bilateral negotiations on cooperation with different countries and regions.  
According to official Chinese rhetoric, China does not want to impose a world order of its own devising and design on other countries, but rather a system based on common discussion, *win-win* cooperation and common development.
- **Infrastructural connectivity.** Throughout world history, we have often seen that building adequate infrastructure is the basis of trade and other economic cooperation. Ancient cities flourished with the development of trade routes, and likewise disappeared with the decline thereof. The railways and ports built during the industrial revolution also gave a big boost to globalisation. In today's globalised world, it is even more striking that developed cities are located along trade routes. However, these routes were created at sea, and 90% of trade is still carried by sea. The Chinese initiative also involves the mainland countries of the Eurasian region in trade through new rail, highway and other infrastructure investments, thus supporting and assisting in their economic strengthening and development.
- **Trade relations.** Free trade is one of the foundations of globalisation, with trade and investment being two of the most important elements of economic growth for countries. Free trade removes barriers to trade. In addition, investment in foreign countries also supports job creation for local populations, and trade also serves to raise living standards for people. Throughout history, there are many Western examples of free-trade cooperation, the usefulness of which David Ricardo wrote about in his book *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* as early as the beginning of the 19th century. Thus, the Western world is already familiar with and supports the idea.
- **Financial integrity.** Strong financial cooperation between countries is needed to create a stable financial environment, to support international trade by reducing costs and to deal with emerging economic crises. History has seen many examples of financial cooperation and the creation of international financial institutions, including the IMF, World Bank, EBRD, Asian Development Bank, among others, reflecting the importance of financial cooperation between countries. The European Union reached the highest level of financial integration in 1999 when it created a monetary union with a single currency, the euro. The Belt and Road Initiative has also created a new international financial institution, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), to support infrastructure investment and connectivity under the Chinese initiative.
- **Cultural connectivity.** The basis of good international cooperation is that the countries involved in cooperation understand each other's culture, way of thinking and value system. Without these, the parties cannot be expected to agree or compromise on certain issues. In diplomacy, too, more emphasis must be placed on cultural events and cultural diplomacy, through which international relations and international trade can be strengthened. Furthermore, the idea of a "harmonious world", which is about cooperation and mutual respect between civilisations, is also reflected in the pillar of "cultural connectivity".

## 7. Summary

Although at the end of the 20th century the Western world urged China to accept and adapt to the rules of the international order, today, with China's rise to power, China's rise is viewed differently, the Belt and Road Initiative is perceived as a colonialist military operation and China's other multilateral relationships are seen as a threat.

China as the Middle Kingdom in Western thinking is understood as China's desire to be the hegemonic ruler of the world. Moreover, the Western mindset is that Chinese foreign economic and foreign policy actions are very similar to the instruments of past Western colonialism. Moreover, in Western tradition, especially in its left-wing, post-Marxist tendency, hierarchy is in itself an immoral and harmful feature. According to the radical egalitarian view, which is often a feature of critical disciplines, hierarchies of all kinds are sharply opposed to equality, which has a positive and absolute value. In other words, in this view, hierarchical international relations, whether stable, peaceful, harmonious or beneficial to many, are inherently illegitimate because of their hierarchical nature. By contrast, international relations based on equality, whatever their flaws in practice, are inherently legitimate because of their egalitarian underpinnings. The West judges Chinese thinking based on its own historical, social and political development. However, this is not necessarily the right approach, as the Asian country has developed in a completely different environment over the past 5,000 years, and Western terminology cannot be applied to Chinese thinking one-to-one. To understand Chinese geopolitical thinking, we also need to understand China's historical, cultural and social development.

If we abandon the mindset of the past 500 years of the Atlantic era and look at the relations between civilisations from "above, from a distance", if we look at the foreign and domestic policies of different regions in perspective, if we leave the "Western glasses" through which we look at international politics, we can see, that, in addition to Western civilisation, there are at least seven and, according to some researchers, as many as 13 other civilisations in the world, each with a history, social and cultural development and religion completely different to that of the West, and each with a different vision of international relations, ideologies and world order. The West, as the current leading civilisation, naturally insists on its autocracy; it cannot and will not give up its primacy. Other civilisations, however, have become economically empowered, have, in Huntington's words, "rebelled" and are calling for a new multipolar world order. The knowledge and study of civilisations is also important because, if we look at which countries could be the dominant players in the new multipolar world order (China, Russia, India, Iran, Brazil, etc.), we can see that each has a different civilisation (Figure 2).



**Figure 2** Civilisations of the world

Source: Huntington (2019)

So far, we have only read about proposals from different countries for a new world order, but not about the framework for a new world order itself. This is where China took a step forward by launching the Belt and Road Initiative 10 years ago in 2013, which could be the framework for a new world order. As we have seen in the study, it introduced alternative foreign-policy

thinking to that of the West, based on the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence". In addition, Western zero-sum cooperation has been replaced by cooperation based on mutual benefits. Demonstrating long-term Chinese thinking, a lengthy strategy has been used to build China's international relations, consolidated in the current Belt and Road Initiative. Although the Chinese initiative does not have specific targets – how many investments, of what amount, how much trade, etc. should be achieved within the programme – it can provide a framework alternative for an appropriate world order for the world, but especially for non-Western civilisations or non-aligned countries. In international politics, we see with increasing frequency that the Chinese initiative, unlike the Western one, is better received by the various countries: an increasing number of nations are joining the BRICS cooperation, the Belt and Road Initiative, and an increasing number of countries are saying that they do not want to take sides, they want to have good relations with both Western and Chinese countries. This thinking is supported by the Chinese initiative, but rejected by the West, which is pushing for blocks. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative, which is being established against a strong Western headwind – US-China trade war, sanctions, etc. It has already made great strides in the past 10 years, but it will take many years or decades to determine whether or not it will actually be the framework for a new world order, because the transformation of the world order requires more than a year or two. In any case, it can be concluded that the Belt and Road Initiative can offer a suitable alternative to the framework of a new multipolar world order.

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