



ONE BELT ONE ROAD (OBOR) AND NEO-EURASIANISM: AN OVERVIEW

Humera Yaseen*

Abstract

This article analyses the costs and benefits of China's initiative One Belt One Road (OBOR) for Europe and Asia in the spectrum of Neo-Eurasianism theory. The OBOR has a broader prospect of commercial and economic cooperation between China to Europe via Central Asia. Therefore, some long-term repercussions that may occur due to the concerns of regional and extra regional players in this regard are also examined. The objective of this study is to initiate a theoretical debate on geo-political impacts caused by OBOR. This article focuses on the theory of new great game and the concepts of rim land and heartland to evaluate the role of Silk Road project in the fast-changing strategic position of the Central Asia. It is important to find out that the Russian response towards Chinese policy of mass connectivity fulfills an idea of Eurasianism, which is originally a Russian-centered concept but the involvement of emerging power like China would enhance the geopolitical importance of Central Asia.

Key Words: Eurasianism, Mediterranean, Trans-Eurasian belt, Tribal Zones, Rimland

Introduction

One Belt One Road (OBOR) also Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is adopted by the Chinese government in 2013, as a development cooperation strategy to expand Chinese trade ties to seventy countries across Asia, Africa, Europe and Oceania. It has containing infrastructure build up and investments in different sectors of OBOR to enhance the economic activities among

* Humera Yaseen is a Ph.D Student at the Area Study Centre for Europe, University of Karachi. Email: humera_y@yahoo.com.

various regions of the world. The idea was conceived by Chinese President Xi Jinping who was inspired by the old Silk Road route, constructed in the Han Dynasty thousands of years ago. It was channel of the ancient trade route, which connected China to the Middle East and Europe through the Mediterranean Sea. A trade of Silk to West, and wool, gold and silver to China was the primary reason. The present BRI designed to revive old land-trade routes connecting a number of sea ports via special economic corridors. For instance, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which is connecting the port of Gwadar to the Xinjiang province. (figure 3).

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) expanded to sea and land networks which links China with three continents, Asia, Europe and Africa by advancing commercial and economic growth. One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative is considered as a bid to enhance regional connectivity, acquiring a lot of geopolitical consideration and attention of other countries to join in. This ground breaking initiative prioritizes five major political facts such as policy coordination, promoting connectivity, unconditional economic unification by executing a new chain of connection among the people of different continents. Trans Eurasian belt¹ lies at the center of OBOR (figure 2). The BRI links the states on the Silk Road, via Central Asia, West Asia, the Middle East and Europe, (figure 1 and 3), following the sea routes that cover most of the Asian sea ports and linking the African coastline with Greek port passing through the Suez Canal. OBOR sea route ends by entering into the Mediterranean, and its land route begins further from Central Europe and Russia (figure 1).

¹ According to a March 23, 2015 report in *The Siberian Times*, Russian Railways president Vladimir Yakunin has proposed a plan for a massive trans-Siberian highway that would link his country's eastern border with the U.S. state of Alaska, crossing a narrow stretch of the Bering Sea that separates Asia and North America. The scheme was unveiled at a meeting of the Moscow-based Russian Academy of Science. Dubbed the Trans-Eurasian Belt Development (TEPR), the project calls for a major roadway to be constructed alongside the existing Trans-Siberian Railway, along with a new train network and oil and gas pipelines. Read more visit at <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/trans-siberian-road/index.html>.

Figure 1: OBOR runs through Europe and Asia

Source: <https://www.quora.com/What-is-Russias-position-on-OBOR>

Figure 2: Trans-Eurasian Belt Development (TEPR)

Source: <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/trans-siberian-road/index.html>

Figure 3: Ancient silk route and HAN dynasty

Source: <https://slideplayer.com/slide/10427794/>

President Xi Jinping stated that 21st century Maritime Silk Road will increase economic collaboration to a large extent, fundamentally, through infrastructure investments, amongst the participant countries which are

along their planned routes. This project targets to set more advanced market-based industrial transformation and economic diversification.

The initiative now encompasses about 65% of the world's population and about one-third of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).² It is reported that almost \$1 trillion has already been invested in OBOR programmes, and trillions more are due to be invested over the next decade.³ Apart from progress, this project also carries significant security risks, particularly, more than 13,000 Pakistani troops have already been positioned to safeguard the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which runs through the region's fractious tribal zones. It is widely opined that this project will put the interests of major powers in the region to another test particularly the US and Europe. It was presumptuously believed that these maritime schemes of China might be hurt shipping businesses of most of the European and other big companies, including Singapore's, which is a key hub port in Asia. China's ambition is to change the face of global trade through sea. Number of ports in Asia, Africa and Europe became geo-strategically significant for China. For instance, the Greek port of Piraeus, has now considered as the Dragon head of China, one of the key maritime hubs for transportation of Chinese goods in the eastern Mediterranean.⁴

Yiwu, well known small-goods market in Chinese province Zhejiang and Zhengzhou in Henan province was an ancient trading route that lasted for thousands of years and used to connect trade to Europe, Africa and rest of Asia. These trade passages were also known as the Silk Route. BRI designed schemes to revive the old Silk Routes spreading through the region commonly recognized as Eurasian land. Trans-Eurasia railway terminals are being constructed for the purpose.⁵ Chinese state media has reported that international recognition of BRI has gained tremendous approval in last few

² Visit at <https://www.ebrd.com/what-we-do/belt-and-road/overview.html>.

³ Ibid.

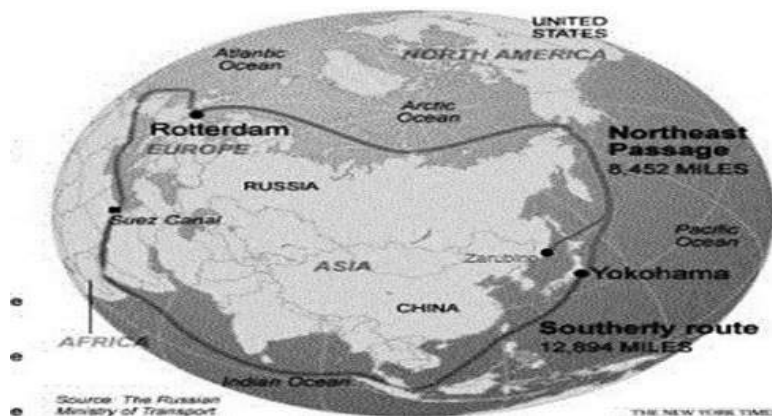
⁴ How a Greek Port Became a Chinese 'Dragon Head', (April 2016). Available at <https://thediplomat.com/2016/04/how-a-greek-port-became-a-chinese-dragon-head/>.

⁵ Direct cargo trains between China and Europe are no longer a logistical novelty but are a core strategy for many companies to get products across Eurasia in less than half the time it takes to ship by sea for less than half the cost of air. Over 1,700 trains have now crossed this continental expanse in as little as 10.5 days, with upwards of 35 routes in operation between dozens of cities in China, Europe, and the Middle East. Read more at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/wadeshepard/2016/06/29/the-story-of-how-those-china-europe-silk-road-trains-first-began/#1645e35f1734> (accessed on October 9, 2018).

years.⁶ Under this project, China connected with the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Serbia, Macedonia, Greece, Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan through roads and rails. Port of Rotterdam, a major hub for global freight flows (figure 1), is one of the key gateways for the transportation of goods from Europe, via Małaszewicze. It is a Polish village which borders between Poland and Belarus, a station from where freight trains with postal services from China, began in November 2018, to reach throughout the European states.⁷

Thus, construction of the New Silk Road in Europe is widely seen as an opportunity for the region. In Greece, port of Piraeus has now become one of the main ports for sea traffic from China to the Eastern Mediterranean region where Chinese company COSCO became the main shareholder of this port in 2016.⁸

Figure 4: Shortcut trade route for china across the world



Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/only-constant-change-even-works-centuries-changed-remy-lim>

Many countries linking with the new Silk Roads are projecting its related projects as integral part of its national development strategies, especially Caucasus and Central Asian states. Creation of a new corridor linking Central Asia to Europe illustrates the importance of trade between China, Central Asia and Europe.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Visit at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-11/21/c_137621764.htm.

⁸ Ibid.

TRACECA is an internationally recognized programme aimed at strengthening of economic relations, trade and transport communication in the regions of the Black Sea basin, South Caucasus and Central Asia owing to active work based on political will and common aspirations of all member-states. Broadening of cooperation in the field of transport and trade between the thirteen TRACECA countries and China is of common interest in view of increased economic and social potential, trade and tourism growth, strengthening peace and stability, as well as growth of prosperity in the region. In this context, new silk road can be considered as a renewed model of cooperation within the Eurasian region which will favour the development of the economy not only of Central Asia region, but of all countries situated along the axis China-Europe. Transport corridors from Asia to Europe including the ITC TRACECA should rank as prospective investment generator which will bring Central Asia nearer to the Old World.⁹

Theoretical interpretations

Land routes of OBOR pass through the Central Asia to reach Europe. Central Asia is the custodian of various religions, civilizations, traditions and cultures. The region also experienced a diverse socio-political environment that had evolved through the passage of time. It can be geographically expressed from the Caspian Sea in the west, to borders of the states linking China in the east. Former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan compose Central Asia.¹⁰

The Caucasus states, Russia, Turkey and east European states perceivably constitute a Eurasian landmass where almost all cultural, religious and ethnic diversities coexist for centuries. This region has had a great deal of geostrategic importance over the centuries. Likewise, geographically, 90% of Eurasia lies in Asia, whereas 10% of its terrain is in European soil. By realizing its geo-political and geo-economic importance, President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev has stated his understanding of Eurasianism in 1994 on political ground. He took lead in introducing a systematic series of projects for regional integration including the creation

⁹ Visit at http://www.traceca-org.org/en/countries/iran/news-detail/n/memorandum_of_understanding_between_psigc_traceca_and_srcic_new_platform_for_cooperation_within_si/.

¹⁰ Visit at <https://www.encyclopedia.com/reference/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/central-asian-republics> (accessed on September 25, 2018).

of a Eurasian Economic Union, which established on January 1, 2015.¹¹ The country's perception of Eurasian unification is considered officially a national strategy. More interestingly, the concept of Eurasianism is equally a shared idea and a policy preference of the President Putin in the terms of geo economic and geostrategic domains.

The basis of the "Heart Land" theory which was conferred by a renowned geo-strategist Helford Mackinder in 1904 is fully activated.¹² He has asserted the geo-strategic friction between the then two empires, Russia and the Great Britain by coining a term "The Great Game". The notion of the Great Game re-emerged in 1990s, after the demise of Soviet Union with the term of "New Great Game". Arthur Connolly used it for the first time in 1835. Originally it was used by R. Kipling, a British novelist in 1865-1936. It distinguishes the struggle between British and Russia to establish supremacy in the Central Asia in the early 19th century. So the notion of the "Great Game" is not a contemporary one actually it date back to 18th century.

Russia and China are the key competitor of New Great Game but China due to it borders position with Central Asia, connecting to the world through the Silk Road is on advantageous position. Many of the Chinese tribes originally belong to the Caucuses and Central Asia. Caspian Sea region is the center of economic activities for every nation since long and thus, now possess a strategic pull for China to pursue its Eurasian dream, simultaneously the energy resources of the region are integral part of Chinese energy strategy so re-building the old silk routes is very specific in this connection.

It is therefore, besides modern theories of geo-politics, the traditional concepts of "pivot", "heartland" and "rim land" are part of the research. Samuel P. Huntington in 1992, argued that, in the new millennium, culture, or religious status and identities will become the root causes of violent clashes rather than clashes between countries. He asserted that Western

¹¹ Golam Mostafa, "The Concept of 'Eurasia': Kazakhstan's Eurasian Policy and its Implications", *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 4, no. 2 (2013): 160-170. Visit at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S187936651300016X> (accessed on September 25, 2018).

¹² The definition of geostrategist in the dictionary is *one who studies, or is an expert in, global strategy*. Read more at <https://educalingo.com/en/dic-en/geostrategist>.

influence over Asia and Africa is fading. Huntington also visualized an ongoing situation of economic stagnancy of Europe in his thesis, which compelled them to seek economic opportunities and partners from Asia and Africa as well. Russia has entered into a closer commitment with China not just because of its adverse relations with the West but to attain its regional goals through amicable relations with China.¹³ Moreover, South Asian and African countries which are already short of capital, resting on western aid and loans find Beijing an alternative source of economic and commercial development.¹⁴ In all this connection, presence of President Vladimir Putin at the first Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2017 in Beijing, proves Huntington's prediction that western dominancy is fading.¹⁵

According to Huntington's predictions, there would be two major civilization might be clashing between the Northern, North-Western and Eastern and South-Eastern hemisphere of the world i.e. the Orthodox Christian civilizations vs. Muslim, Buddhists and Confucius world.

Furthermore, Importance of this region can also be understood by the "soft power" theory, coined by one of the modern thinkers Joseph Nye in the late 80s. According to Nye, soft power is the ability of a country to persuade other nations to do without coercion or using force. Soft power is therefore now extensively used in foreign policy debates. He states that soft power theory is an extension of the traditional hard power ideology, and a return to classical Realism and Neo-Realism. He proclaims that culture, ideology and international policy, are the main factors of soft power theory and each nation has diverse sources of soft power.¹⁶ Soft power is assisting Beijing in alteration of its geopolitical alliances in ways that will give China a rise as a global power.¹⁷ OBOR fits into this soft power

¹³ Nadege Rolland, "A China-Russia Condominium over Eurasia", in *Survival* 1, vol.61 (February-March 2019): 9.

¹⁴ Arun k singh, "Why the West is Responsible for China's OBOR Project", *Hindustan Time*, May 18, 2017, at https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/why-the-west-is-responsible-for-china-s-obor-project/story-sBeTCR_SWdJzUUP6uO2KwVK.html (accessed on September 27, 2018).

¹⁵ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/theworldpost/wp/2018/02/08/putin-china/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.f8cf6db58690 (accessed on October 10, 2018).

¹⁶ Joseph S. Nye, "The Rise of China's Soft Power", *Wall Street Journal Asia* 29 (2005): 6-8.

¹⁷ Huang, Yanzhong, and Sheng Ding, "Dragon's Underbelly: An Analysis of China's Soft Power", *East Asia* 23, no. 4 (2006): 22-44.

influence in many respects. In recent years, China has increased the use of its soft power in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia, and also among other regions of the world.

Eurasianism

Eurasianism as a concept more likely re-emerged as the resistance to Russian foreign policy in the 1990s. Neo-Eurasianism gained momentum in Russia under Boris Yeltsin's administration, particularly since 1993.¹⁸ According to the doctrine of Eurasianism, by supporting the geopolitical capability and structuring the united Slav-Turkish community, Russia can regain status of great-power and can emerge as a center of opposition to American unilateralism¹⁹ in the world politics. Russia is a distinctive and unique ethnic fusion of primarily Slavic²⁰ and Turkic people, hence due to this geopolitical association, it holds a natural tendency towards mostly Turkic Central Asia.²¹ Alexander Dugin, a renowned proponent of Eurasianism, believes in the restoration of Russian influence in the region, and the reintroduction of geo-political tensions between Russia and other regional powers to gain influence in the shared neighbourhood states, as in the cases of Ukraine and Georgia appeared.²² He also stated that the notion

¹⁸ Emre Erşen, "Neo-Eurasianism and Putin's 'Multipolarism' in Russian Foreign Policy", *Perspectives* 32, no. 3 (1998): 317.

¹⁹ Unilateralism has had a long history in the United States. In his famous and influential Farewell Address, George Washington warned that the United States should "steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world". Many years later, this approach was labeled (by its opponents) as "isolationism", Unilateralism is any doctrine or agenda that supports one-sided action. Such action may be in disregard for other parties, or as an expression of a commitment toward a direction which other parties may find disagreeable. Read more at Patrick, Stewart, and Shepard Forman (eds.), *Multilateralism and US Foreign Policy: Ambivalent Engagement* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002).

²⁰ Slav, member of the most numerous ethnic and linguistic body of peoples in Europe, residing chiefly in eastern and southeastern Europe but extending also across northern Asia to the Pacific Ocean. Slavic languages belong to the Indo-European family. Customarily, Slavs are subdivided into East Slavs (chiefly Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians), West Slavs (chiefly Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, and Wends, or Sorbs), and South Slavs (chiefly Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, Slovenes, Macedonians, and Montenegrins). Bulgarians, though of mixed origin like the Hungarians, speak a Slavic language and are often designated as South Slavs. Read more at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Slav>.

²¹ Dmitry Shlapentokh, "Dugin, Eurasianism, and Central Asia", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 40, no. 2 (2007): 143-156. Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240410970_Dugin_Eurasianism_and_Central_Asia (accessed on September 25, 2018).

²² Ibid.

of the national sovereignty among the states would rise to strengthen their existence free from bloc politics. The Contemporary rift between Russia and the West indicates Moscow's growing ties with Asia particularly Middle East and China. Russia has been following a more revisionist approach towards Europe and Eurasia.

The concept of Eurasianism primarily is Russian phenomenon. Its key features were based on geo-political significance of Russia as a 'pivotal' country of Eurasia. The term 'Eurasia' is supposed to be rooted in the classical theories and concepts of 'Geo-politics' as the thinkers like Nicholas J. Spykman, Friedrich Ratzel, Rudolf Kjellen, and Mackinder have supported power struggle, race, land and maritime control to enhance desired supremacy. Among these, the most well-known is the 1904 'heartland theory' by Harlford Mackinder. Many successor carried their theories to new dimensions to enrich the neo-classical explanations of geo-politics such as Nikolai Danilevsky, Pytor Chaadev, Vasily Tatishchev and Alexander Dugin. It can be argued that the Eurasianism has valuable conceptual and theoretical framework to be supported with but without sufficient political will to materialize the concept.²³

The vision of Eurasian integration has become state policy of Kazakhstan as stated by its President Nursultan Nazarbayev in 1990s. Kazakh leadership shared this ideology with Russia, were behind the idea of creating a "Eurasian Union".²⁴ They valued the European Union as a model of regional zone of peace, security, cooperation and development. The Eurasian dream would have far reaching political, economic and strategic impacts on the foreign policies of EU and its member states, China and other regional states. To accomplish a goal of regional integration, cooperative and harmonious approaches in the region are preferably essential.

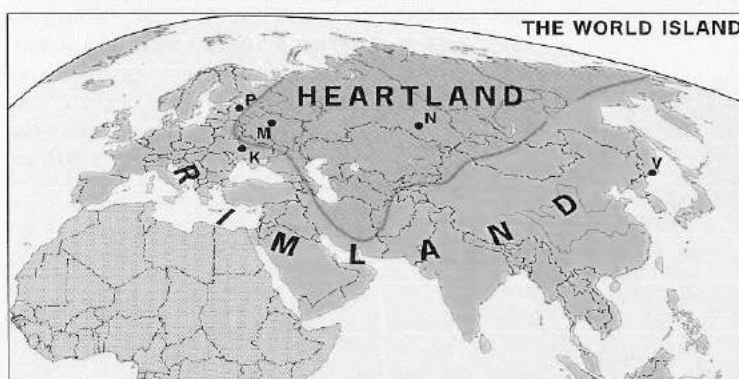
Another theory related to the geopolitics known as the "Rimland" theory, developed in the post - Second World War by Nicholas Spykman, which

²³ Golam Mostafa, The Concept of 'Eurasia'.

²⁴ Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan formed the Customs Union in 2010 with the intention of increasing cooperation among themselves in economics, politics and security. Though facilitating trade among the group's members was part of its agenda, the bloc's broader purpose was to become a comprehensive system equal to the European Union. The organization was also based on the unspoken assumption that Russia would become its undisputed leader. To read more at <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/why-urasian-union-will-never-be-eu>.

mainly stressed on the advantageous position of coastal belts over the heartland. It is a key to control on mainland. According to him, "Who controls the rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world."²⁵ Mackinder prioritized the geopolitical importance of the Central Asian while Spykman granted Eurasian coastal areas a more strategic pull than Central Asia. In this article Mackinder and Spykman's theories are supposed to closely intertwine with OBOR initiative due to a unique possibility of combining naval and land forces.

Figure 5: Spykman theory of "Heartland" and the "Rimland"



Source: <https://www.sott.net/article/394826-Revenge-of-Eurasian-land-powers-the-Great-Game-updated>

The identity debate that arose in the changing dynamics of post-Soviet regionalism advanced complicated geopolitical narratives on the significance of Eurasian landmass and the contesting regional powers to play their role in identifying the true nature of regional connectivity.²⁶ International players intend to strengthen their positions on the strategic region, while China is already a leading power with its initiative OBOR. Moreover, military presence of USA in Asia and its involvement in South China demonstrates the military aspect of great game theory and also can be related with other above mentioned classical and neo classical geo political theories.

²⁵ Nicholas John Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2007), xxvii.

²⁶ Dmitry Shlapentokh, "Dugin, Eurasianism, and Central Asia".

OBOR and Europe

EU-China relations have considerably reconfigured over the past five years. Every single European state has its own particular association with China, which are relatively at the periphery of the OBOR initiative, while Europeans countries tended to feel genuine fear from China's influence to see many projects and investment in the continent serving long-term benefits for China.

On the other hand, direct railway corridors are now linking together many Chinese and European cities. Routes such as, Zhengzhou to Hamburg, Chengdu to Lodz, Lianyungang to Rotterdam, Chongqing to Duisburg, Yiwu to Madrid, and more than altogether twelve cities from China and nine from Europe are now centers for 12,000 kilometers long trans-continental train system. Besides this, port deals between Europe and China specifies Beijing's ambitious plans to link China to Europe through land and maritime routes. These Sea ports are almost half of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Maritime route stretches from South East Asia, across the Indian Ocean, and via Somalia, Egypt, and Suez Canal into the Mediterranean Sea and Europe. In this regard, Chinese government has invested about \$20 billion for this route in 2016.²⁷ One must keep in mind, the geopolitical importance of Suez Canal in Egypt which has been one of the busiest shipping routes of the world. It is a waterway that links two seas Mediterranean and the Red Sea, and also separates Asia from Africa. The Suez Canals is 120 miles (193 kilometers) long, and is separated from the Mediterranean Sea through a narrow portion of land called the Isthmus of Suez.²⁸ Through the extension of Suez Canal China willingly connect the Athens.

The above mentioned train consists of two main routes: either from the North of China to Russia, joining Russia's Trans-Siberian Railway, or stretching towards west across Kazakhstan (figure 6). The rail routes when reach to the Trans-Siberian Railway station in Yekaterinburg – situated at

²⁷ Visit at <https://www.nextbigfuture.com/2018/03/china-now-controls-10-of-european-port-capacity.html> (accessed on September 19, 2018).

²⁸ Max E. Fletcher, "The Suez Canal and World Shipping, 1869-1914", *The Journal of Economic History* 18, no. 4 (1958): 556-573, at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-economic-history/article/suez-canal-and-world-shipping-18691914/050B1DB65001B93F9F4BC8A0CB122659>.

the Ural Mountains in the Asian part of Russia, it divides Asia from Europe.²⁹

Figure 6: Yekaterinburg, a dividing line between Asia and Europe



Source: <http://wall2paper.gq/map-jekaterinburg/>

Balkan countries including Bosnia, Albania, Herzegovina, Kosovo, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, Slovenia, Turkey, and Portions of Greece, are supposed to be more involved and active within the OBOR initiative. Therefore, China made several important investments in this region. They bought the largest Greek port, which is also one of the largest ports in Europe, called Piraeus. Due to the extension of the Suez Canal, China will be capable to reach the Mediterranean Sea and will treat Piraeus as a station for Chinese goods. Chinese state-owned shipping company, Cosco aims to turn Piraeus into one of the biggest transit harbors in Europe.

Another important step of OBOR project will be the construction of high-speed railway line between Belgrade (Serbia) and Budapest (Hungary) on their already existing railway line, which will be modernized by designing the track in such a way that reduces the travel time from eight hours to three and an half hours, and the speed limit of the track has been calculated to be 200 km/h (120 mph). Some reports reveal that China has also invested in industries, adding a steel factory nearby the Serbian capital Belgrade.³⁰

²⁹ Visit at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/wadeshepard/2016/01/28/why-china-europe-silk-road-rail-transport-is-growing-fast/> (accessed on September 19, 2018).

³⁰ Visit at <https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/serbia-chinas-open-door-to-the-balkans/>.

China has been gradually strengthening its presence in Europe. It created the “16+1” mechanism in 2012, a platform where the Chinese Prime Minister meets yearly with the heads of 16 European states including Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovenia, and the Baltic states, and non-EU members including Montenegro, Serbia and Albania. This framework ultimately supports Belt and Road Initiative as well, because half of the countries have signed BRI. It helps China to configure close relations with Eastern European countries. The involvement of Chinese in each project has raised various questions regarding local socio-economic setup. The experts keen to examine ongoing development cooperation between China and European countries, which possess different interpretation of ideologies and concepts of labor division and human rights.

The OBOR project finally reaches the influential zone of Europe i.e. The North-Western Europe which consists of Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Ireland, Denmark, Belgium, Northern, Luxembourg, Northern France, Norway, Sweden and Iceland. Before reaching this zone, BRI scheme will need to cope with more ports in Central and Southern Europe. This may encourage logistics service providers to adjust their strategies about Europe. However, the high level of investments in building infrastructure may subject to several reservations concerning the Chinese threat to the European market.³¹ Additionally, as a result of adherence to new market rules, possibility of increased anti-dumping cases will exist. The rich Western, Eastern and southern Europe has a mixed perception of China, such as Beijing now controls the Greek harbor and has acquired 50 % of the port jurisdiction which are claimed to be further increased by 2021.³²

In 2016, Chinese foreign direct investments (FDI) in the EU increased by 35 billion euros, and reached to a 77% increase in 2017.³³ Same year, COSCO acquired the authority of Piraeus. The company is already investing 385 million Euros (£343m) to increase trade with the EU.³⁴ The port of Piraeus is not only the heart of Greece’s shipping industry but also one of the busiest

³¹ *BBC News*, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41654346> (accessed on September 7, 2018).

³² Visit at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/05/23/europes-mixed-views-on-chinas-one-belt-one-road-initiative> (accessed on February 1, 2019).

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *BBC News*, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41654346>.

passenger ports in Europe and has been the same since ancient times. Athens-based Greek-Chinese Economic Council has recently talked to the European media regarding Chinese investment in Greece:

"We do not have industries so we do not compete with the Chinese in that way. They are welcome to come here and make cars and other industrial products. This is not the same elsewhere in Europe. They are competitors."³⁵

This statement shows that the Greek government understands that Chinese investment will facilitate the country's recovery from serious financial crisis. The overall privatization in Greece has a huge impact over its economy which has been in a severe recession for the past seven years and has struggled to attract investors. As a consequence, Chinese state-owned companies now supervise the affairs of nearly one-tenth of all European ports.³⁶ Major BRI infrastructure ventures are now beginning to take shape in Europe.

Russia and OBOR

OBOR connects China and Europe via intermediate points in Russia, Central, West, and South Asia as well. In September 2013, when China called out the idea of the Silk Road Economic Belt, the Kremlin responded with concerns that China's grand initiative would compete with its own project, the Eurasian Economic Union, which was striven to reincorporate the post-Soviet space. In 2007-2008 European economy faced its most acute crisis ever since the Great Depression of the 1930. Right after four years, in 2014, the Ukraine war altered the tartar between Brussels – Moscow relationship. Conflict between the West and Russia's declining economy following the US-imposed sanctions and dwindling oil prices left Moscow with limited choices. After some preliminary reluctance, Russia joined the Chinese owned Asian Infra- structure Investment Bank in March 2015.

In 2015, Russia and China signed a contract on the collaboration among the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the BRI. The major outcome of the pact was the commencement of the talks over free trade region between

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

the EAEU and Beijing.³⁷ Even though Moscow is supposed to be one of the strong partners of the Silk Road, there are not seen much of any tangible projects in progress. Those which we can consider as noticeable are, a gas deal between China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and Gazprom (2014), and Silk Road Fund investments in Russian petrochemical company Sibur.³⁸ The CNPC is already working on nearly 92 projects in thirty four countries among which 50 development schemes are under progress in nineteen states comes under OBOR.³⁹ However, while acclaiming the BRI plan, Moscow is eager to ignore Beijing's geopolitical dominion of continental Eurasia and facilitates its particular vision of "Greater Eurasia." Russia's vital powers traditionally lay in the political, military and diplomatic areas. BRI ventures like Moscow–Kazan high-speed railway. Further, the Yamal LNG plant⁴⁰ (figure 7) are constructed as the result of current China-Russia energy collaboration. Russia's northern sea route appears as a best possibility for Beijing's "Polar Silk Route" project. The evolution of the Belt and Road initiative is perceived by Moscow as a prospect to recuperate the idea of a polar sea route that links China to Europe. Consequently, Russia's turn to the East was inevitable; hence, Moscow will pivot to the east for its political and economic future.⁴¹ With this reference, it has been proposed that Eurasianism has regained attention among other theories along with the outbreak of debate on OBOR.

³⁷ Artyom Lukin, "Putin's Silk Road Gamble", *Washington Post* 8 (2018). Visit at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldpost/wp/2018/02/08/putin-china/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a6412e8d2e3b.

³⁸ SIBUR is a Russian petrochemicals company founded in 1995. Its headquarters is in Moscow, operates 22 production sites located all over the country. It has over 1,400 major customers engaged in the energy fields. SIBUR's top competitors are Exxon Mobil, Shell and Chevron. Read more at <https://www.sibur.ru/en/>.

³⁹ "Cooperation delivers energy security for all", 19 August 2019, available at <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201908/19/WS5d59f62da310cf3e355666f4.html>.

⁴⁰ Russia's largest independent natural gas producer and LNG operator, Novatek has shipped more than 5 million tonnes of liquefied natural gas from its \$27 billion Yamal project in the Arctic. To read more visit at <https://www.lngworldnews.com/russias-novatek-in-yamal-lng-milestone/>.

⁴¹ Antony S. Cheng, Linda E. Kruger, and Steven E. Daniels, "'Place' as an integrating concept in natural resource politics: Propositions for a social science research Agenda", *Society & Natural Resources* 16, no. 2 (2003): 87-104. Read more visit at <https://www.voanews.com/a/russia-investment-trade-china-silk-road/3850402.html> (accessed on September 7, 2018).

There is no direct access of mainland of Central Asian Republic (CARs) to open seas, as this is world's largest land-locked region; a regional dependency on Russia-based energy projects, is elementary along with the significance of BRI.

Figure 7: Yamal LNG plant



Source: <https://www.exproofcranes.com/projects/Eilbeck-Cranes-inside-the-Arctic-Circle>

Khorgos: The New Silk Road's Central Station between China and Europe

Kazakhstan, a landlocked state is emerging as the most linked country in the whole continent as China-Europe train enters the dry port in Khorgos, planet's furthest points from the ocean. Kazakhstan's state railway company has built this gateway which lies near the Kazakh-Chinese border. It got operational in July 2015. New Silk Road strategy between China and Europe, and its aim is to re-structure trade links between Eurasia and the Indian Ocean. Russia, the largest territory in the world, and China, poised to become the largest economy, both share their borders with Kazakhstan, which makes it the ideal place for linking China to Europe. Direct cargo trains are now linking together multiple cities in China and Europe. Correspondingly, China is now heading to increase investment in Kazakhstan's dry port. In addition, China has also built a new city Horgos,⁴²

⁴² Horgos, a small and young city in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, will no longer be a "tax haven" for companies that take advantage of the city's preferential policies on tax exemption, as the city has been tightening up requirements for businesses that are eligible for the policies. "Even the companies that run businesses to help other companies register in Horgos have closed. Read more at <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/regional/2018/10/15/chinas-horgos-no-longer-tax-haven-after-fans-scandal/#HmcUsDCKBLv7XOtk.99>.

stretching high-rise housing developments. This high-tech trade zone is supposed to be World's first cross-border free-trade area. It allows entry of citizens from any country with valid passports or with entry permits. Since its launch, the economic zone has secured a trade volume of 878 million U.S. dollars.⁴³ (figure 8)

Figure 8: Horgos at China-Kazakh border



Source: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-04/13/c_136205015.htm

Two years back, the Chinese coastal province Jiangsu signed a five year plan to finance US\$600 million in the economic zone of Khorgos.⁴⁴ Against hundreds of millions of dollars of major investment, the planet's farthest mainland from the ocean still depends on maritime routes for the exchange of trade commodities. Here, it is ought to be stated that in 2020, Khorgos will be the world's largest "dry port", where tones of goods could be stored and transported annually through Chinese and Kazakh trains.⁴⁵

AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank) - Financing arm of OBOR

AIIB bank was established in 2015 by China. Its importance for OBOR also validates the game theory as it is considered to be a potential competitor

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Zhen Summer, "China's Silk Road strategy takes shape in Khorgos", *South China Morning Post*, International edition, at <https://www.scmp.com/business/china-business/article/1869193/chinas-silk-road-strategy-takes-shape-khorgos> (accessed on September 22, 2018).

⁴⁵ Emily, Henry Foy, "China-Kazakhstan border woes dent Silk Road ambitions", UHRP, December 21, 2017, at <https://uhrp.org/news/china-kazakhstan-border-woes-dent-silk-road-ambitions> (accessed on September 22, 2018).

of IMF, World Bank and Asian development bank. These western dominating financial institutions prevented China to become an emerging entity in international political economy. AIIB, which consists of 70 members from all over the world, is financing the construction and improvement of BRI.⁴⁶ China is launching OBOR to break this containment, and establishing the financial and commercial network around the globe.

Furthermore, China's involvement in OBOR claims to bring prosperity and economic dynamism in Europe, Asia and Africa. On the other hand, the US heavily invested in military deployments in different regions to demonstrate its increasing involvement in various disputes, for instance, in Middle East and Afghanistan. This project may help to reduce the risk of war in third world countries considering Rim land. The proposed land and maritime routes lie almost exactly at Rimland, which was presented by Spykman. (figure 1 and 6)

There is no direct access of mainland of Central Asian Republic (CARs) to open seas, as this is world largest land locked region of the world this why; dependence on Russia's Gazprom-based energy projects, is elementary along with the significance of BRI.

Conclusion

OBOR and its geo-political back lashes have become the most debatable subjects in contemporary world politics. In addition, these discussions came under the debate when Eurasianism, neo-Eurasianism, heartland and Rim land theories are getting relevancy. With this relevance it can be perceive that BRI is designed not only to transfer trade goods from continent to continent but also to carry the ideas, and cultures. There are potential rivalries, challenges and difficulties, while unexplored energy resources of the region have a great attraction for international players. Industrialized world is highly dependent on energy resources at a large extent, therefore global economic power attempts to influence the region inevitably. On this account, there is a hope that OBOR will give a steady growth along with political influence in Eurasia and Europe.

Members of the European Union must be able to coordinate their actions with Asia in order to be fully involved in the development of the Asian

⁴⁶ Zhiqun Zhu, "China's AIIB and OBOR: Ambitions and Challenges", *The Diplomat* 9, no. 10 (2015): 2015.

continent. There is even more room for cooperation between the different states to develop economic corridors and also exists a scope for all energy projects. BRI offers far-reaching opportunities for Russia to work with China. The Belt and Road Initiative, or BRI, is interpreted as a tool for soft power in recent years. On contrary China's economic power has shaken the image of United States' status of being super power. This study hence, aims to unfold a debate on geo-political repercussions initiated by OBOR that how this new project, as part of Silk Road plan is going to change the region into a logistic hub and an industrial production zone appealing Chinese investment with the participation of more than sixty countries of two continents, as predict by different thinkers mentioned.

Although connectivity is a mutual concept of China and EU, it is easy to comprehend why certain European authorities and influential circles are unwilling to give China a complete legitimacy to invest in the continent's infrastructure. Eventually, Europe and China have parallel aims: generating and sustaining jobs; powering economic growth; and maintaining social constancy. They might not be able to attain these objectives in the equal ways.