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The Belt and Road Initiative:
The Sources of China's
Conduct, and India and Japan's
Responses

By
Hao Nan

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ABSTRACT

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is now more than seven years old, projecting ever-increasing influence throughout the world while stimulating growing concerns about China's motives and behavior. This large-scale and multifaceted program benefits China, and not only economically, but in the politico-security sense. In response, India has stuck to its stance of distancing itself from the BRI while Japan has evolved past its initial rejection to selectively engage with the initiative. Tracing Chinese motives and conduct, along with the Indian and Japanese responses, back to the respective countries' long-existing schools of strategic thought enables us to better decode current affairs and predict future dynamics.

I. INTRODUCTION

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is now more than seven years old, evolving from its initial phase as an exporter of surplus production capacity to the major international development initiative it is today. Composed of a seaborne 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and an overland Silk Road Economic Belt, the BRI covers the Eurasian continent and its periphery, with emerging extensions to Africa and South America. Along the BRI routes, China provides a package of loans, technologies, equipment, and personnel for developing—initially—hardware infrastructure, which later spilled over to other areas, with “silk roads” for digital technology, health cooperation, green development, etc.

However, coming with the gradual unfolding of the BRI is major powers' growing concerns regarding China's motives and behavior. Though China touts its peace- and development-oriented agenda, the large-scale, multifaceted BRI brings tremendous benefits to China, not merely in the economic sense but also the politico-security realm, coloring the BRI with a strategic tint. Thus, major world powers have grown concerned about the spread of China's state-dominated model and the reshaping of the world order in China's favor. This includes not only the United States, which has clearly positioned China as its strategic competitor in the current administration's National Security Strategy,¹ but also major Asian powers, namely India and Japan, which are geographically proximate to China and would directly endure any strategic consequences from China's rise.

This paper, by probing the international and strategic thought of China, Japan, and India, tries to clarify China's conduct via the BRI and Japan and India's responses to the initiative. Tracing all such conduct and responses back to these countries' long-existing schools of strategic thought enables us to decode China's launch of the BRI, India's repeated rejections of it, and Japan's selective engagement with the BRI. Nevertheless, one should be aware that the ideal correlation between certain strategic thought and strategy-making could only take place in a laboratory. In the real world, one strategy is instead a product of different lines of thought and political stances.

This paper will start with the background, presenting the rationale, motives, and content of the BRI, followed by analysis of the strategic thought of China, Japan, and India.

II. CHINA'S CONDUCT

The BRI, now labelled an international development initiative and grand global strategy, actually had clear domestic drivers at the beginning, highly associated with China's domestic agenda. By the time Xi Jinping assumed the presidency in 2013, China had witnessed 35 years of rapid economic development since its reform and opening-up of 1978. The average 9.8% annual growth rate in its gross domestic product (GDP) from 1978 to 2012, far beyond the world's average 2.8% over the same period, helped elevate the country to the world's second largest economy and an upper-middle-income club member.² A variety of China-made

¹ White House, “National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” December 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>

² China National Statistics Bureau, “Socio-economic Changes in China Since the Reform and Opening-up”, 6 November 2013, Accessed on 4 April 2020, http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2013-11/06/content_2522445.htm

products, ranging from socks and screws to electronics, are found at practically every corner of the globe from the state of Georgia in the US to the republic of Georgia in the Caucasus. By 2013, China’s foreign trade value reached \$2.209 trillion, 221 times its value in 1978, ranking it as the world’s largest trader.³

However, with such great socio-economic development came a bottleneck of internal structural problems and external market risks. In 2008, after the global financial crisis spread throughout the world—including China—Beijing worked to stabilize economic growth and employment through a 4-trillion yuan (\$586 billion) stimulus plan, mostly poured into infrastructure construction, amplifying the structural problems in China’s economy, such as over-reliance on investment-driven growth, widening the development gap across the inland west and the coastal east, diminishing profits from labor-intensive export-oriented industries, vulnerability in energy security and environmental degradation.⁴

By the early 2010s, tensions started to surface with a large amount of production capacity surplus of cement, steel, electrolytic aluminum, and sheet glass produced by industries related to infrastructure construction that involved a huge number of employees.⁵ At the time, the government, constrained by the need to maintain economic growth and employment stability, found itself unwilling to simply cut off surplus production capacity. Meanwhile, as the world’s largest trading nation, China was also increasingly sensitive about the increasing costs of transporting goods, its currency’s international status and the global market demands of its large volume of manufactured goods. Therefore, the BRI, then called “One Belt, One Road,” was conceived to export to the developing world a package of production capacity, personnel, and investment, so as to enhance trade-serving and energy-oriented connectivity, channel out internally abundant investment, more intensively develop its vast inland west, internationalize the renminbi, and develop global market demand for China manufactured goods.⁶

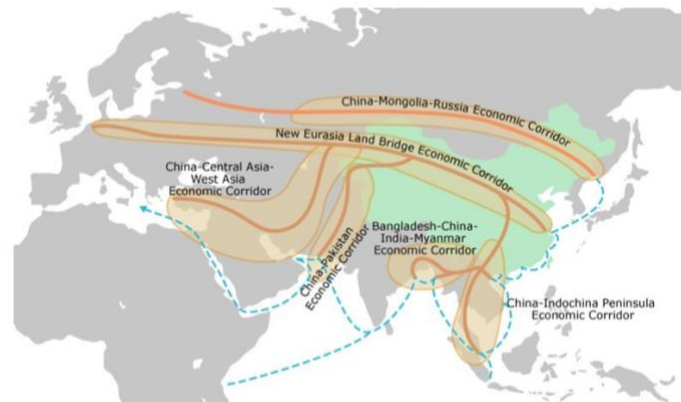


Figure 1 The Belt and Road Initiative: Six Economic Corridors Spanning Asia, Europe, and Africa.

³ The World Bank Database, Trade Value of China, <https://data.worldbank.org/topic/trade?locations=CN>

⁴ Su Dong, “4-trillion-yuan-stimulus plan criticized again and the stabilization of economic development policy is doubted by a group of economists at Boao Forum for Asia,” 12 April 2014, China Stock Website, Accessed on 8 October 2020, <http://news.cnstock.com/news/bwxx-201404-2983889.htm>,

⁵ China State Council, “State Council’s Guiding Opinions on Tackling Significant Production Capacity Surplus,” State (2013) No. 41, China Government Website, 15 October 2013, accessed on 4 April 2020, http://www.gov.cn/zwggk/2013-10/15/content_2507143.htm

⁶ Simeon Djankov, Sean Miner, “China’s Belt and Road Initiative Motives, Scope, And Challenges,” PIIE Briefing 16-2, Peterson Institute for International Economics, March 2016, pp.7-8, https://www.piie.com/system/files/documents/piieb16-2_1.pdf

A comprehensive and ambitious roadmap⁷ for the BRI was issued in March 2015. Built upon Asia-Europe historical linkages forged by the ancient Silk Road, the BRI was laid out all the way from China's major cities to major European trading hubs, with six economic corridors including China-Mongolia-Russia, New Eurasia Land Bridge, China-Central Asia-West Asia, China-Indochina Peninsula, China-Pakistan, and Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar. The BRI emphasized connectivity in policy, infrastructure, trade, finance, and people-to-people ties and new international institutions like Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and Silk Road Fund. China has promoted the BRI as the path to a "Community of Shared Future for Mankind,"⁸ in which China does not seek hegemony of any kind but co-existence and prosperity with the rest of the world.

III. CHINA'S BRI CONDUCT

The policy of contemporary China has three sources: Chinese tradition, economic pragmatism, and Marxism. In recent decades, China's contemporary diplomacy has rid itself of communist economic doctrine and manifested traces of Chinese traditional thought, citing classical phrases and conducting transactional relations.⁹ Owing to its initial domestic socio-economic drivers, large scale, and multifaceted scope, the BRI, unlike the most of China's contemporary diplomatic practices, clearly extends beyond the spectrum of diplomacy to a higher level of long-term grand strategy. Hence, the BRI finds itself based not only on traditional thought, but also on economic pragmatism and Marxism.

1. Chinese Traditional Thought

In Chinese strategic thought, one of the most relevant ideas in the conception of the BRI is *Shi* (勢, a combination of "trend," "pattern," and "order") and the ontological idea of relations (*Guangxi*, 关系). Unlike the United States' rationality-based meta-thought that eyes power and capability—see Zbigniew Brzezinski's *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*¹⁰—Chinese traditional strategic thought emphasized *Shi*, which, interestingly, can find representation in the game *Weiqi* (围棋, also known as Go), in which the objective is to surround rather than eradicate, as characterized by chess in the West. *Weiqi* players tend to pursue relative gains and, ultimately, shape an advantageous *Shi*. Once a player occupies a larger portion or key areas of the board, victorious *Shi* becomes obvious and, hence, there is no need or motivation for the victor to eradicate the loser or for the loser to desperately fight to the

⁷ China National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Commerce, "The Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road," March 2015, the Official Website of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, Accessed on 8 October 2020, <http://www.beltandroadforum.org/n100/2019/0418/c27-1098.html>

⁸ China National Reform and Development Commission Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Commerce, "Joining Hands to Build a Silk Road Economic Belt and a 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road: Vision and Actions," 28 March 2015, accessed on 4 April 2020, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-03/28/content_2839723.htm

⁹ Yan Xuetong, "Chinese Values vs. Liberalism: What Ideology Will Shape the International Normative Order?," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Volume 11, Issue 1, Spring 2018, pp. 1-2, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poy001>

¹⁰ Brzezinski, Zbigniew. 1997. *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

end.¹¹ In this vein, players do not fall into hostile confrontation but tolerate short-term losses, pursuing long-term and macro planning and maintaining transactional relations.

Such logic is, in fact, rooted in Chinese ontological ideas focused more on relations than rationality. The Chinese assume that the world is always dynamic rather than static, composed of continuous events and ongoing relations. An entity does not exist on its own, but in relation with other entities. The ultimate goal for entities in the relational network is not to maximize gains (nor make gains at the expense of relations), but maintain a certain balance, a transaction, while shaping or bidding for an advantageous *Shi*.¹²

Likewise, China tends to identify the *Shi* of the time, then bid for and try to shape *Shi* to its favor. By the early 2010s, China, after a more than three-decade internal socio-economic development and external *Taoguang Yanghui* (韬光养晦, translated by the US Department of Defense as “hide our capabilities and bide our time,”¹³ or “hide and bide” for short), found that its rise had no strong international institutional support, as the major multilateral institutions are dominated by Western countries. It, however, neither walked away nor resisted those institutions. Rather, through its increasing participation in and support for those major institutions, it gradually conceived and gave birth to a series of new institutions including the BRI and the complementary AIIB, New Development Bank, Silk Road Fund, and so on. As a manifestation of *Shi*, China has advocated for win-win cooperation based on relations, an obvious goal for *Weiqi* players pursuing relative gains, but not for chess players. This relational logic, plus all those above-mentioned institutions, whether they are led by China or not, create an advantageous *Shi* for China, enabling its comparatively advantaged capacities and resources to be exported, and amplifying China’s influence.

1. Economic Pragmatism and Marxism

Economic pragmatism and Marxism are in fact largely intertwined. The former embodies the national goal of reform and opening-up, leveraging the power of the global market to lift the Chinese people out of poverty up to affluence and sufficiency, consolidating the essential component of the national comprehensive strength—the economy—and thus strengthening the legitimacy of the official ideology, Marxism, and, ultimately, the Communist Party of China and its government. The latter, particularly its Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory ensures the absolute leadership of the Communist Party of China and provides the ideological basis for economic pragmatism. This is because, in Marxist theory, the development of substructure, consisting of the forces and relations of production, would naturally push the development of superstructure, consisting of socio-political institutions and facilities, thus becoming a key to resolving all socio-political problems.¹⁴

¹¹ Pan Zhongqi, “Guanxi, Weiqi and Chinese Strategic Thinking,” *Chinese Political Science Review*, 1, March 2016, pp. 309-310.

¹² Qin Yaqing, “A Relational Theory of World Politics,” *International Studies Review*, Volume 18, Issue 1, March 2016, pp. 35-39.

¹³ U.S. Department of Defense, “Annual Report to Congress on China’s Military Power,” USC US-China Institute, University of Southern California Annenberg, 15 May 2002, accessed on 19 October 2020, <https://china.usc.edu/us-department-defense-military-power-people%E2%80%99s-republic-china-2002>

¹⁴ Yan Xuetong, “Chinese Values vs. Liberalism: What Ideology Will Shape the International Normative Order?”, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Volume 11, Issue 1, Spring 2018, Pages 1–22, <https://doi-org.libproxy1.nus.edu.sg/10.1093/cjip/poy001>

Both lines of thought can be found in a clear feature of China's contemporary strategy: its domestic orientation, more specifically its economic development orientation. Since the 1980s, leaders from Deng to Xi without exception put their strategic emphases on domestic development and stability with a clear focus on socio-economic thriving, largely using external strategies to serve internal purposes. The peaceful rise theory proclaimed by China's respected strategist Zheng Bijian says China will, for the foreseeable future, be largely preoccupied by its urgent internal challenges of resource shortages, environmental degradation, and socio-economic development coordination. This, the theory goes, will push China to transcend the old model of industrialization, great power competition, and outdated modes of social control, thus making China unable to afford any costly hegemony-seeking.¹⁵

China's elevation to the status of the world's second-largest economy, the largest trading nation, and a world-class military powerhouse has undermined the credibility of the peaceful rise theory. Nonetheless, the BRI largely remains internally oriented but with a modified approach of reassurance and reaffirmation through further integration into the world and incorporation of international institutions. The BRI bore the responsibility of exporting the production capacity surplus, caused by the radical stimulus program of 2008, to a developing world trapped in an infrastructure deficit. Attached with the BRI is also a portfolio of penetrating foreign markets and enhancing foreign demand for Chinese goods. In fact, the BRI formula, based on China's four-decade experience of economic catch-up would indeed bring development dividends to the developing world, as evidenced by a World Bank study,¹⁶ but ultimately the BRI is mandated to serve China's domestic agenda, the Two Centenary Goals and the China Dream. The former aims to eradicate poverty by 2020,¹⁷ at the centenary of the Communist Party of China, and subsequently, to become a modern socialist great power by the mid-21st century at around the centenary of the People's Republic of China's founding.¹⁸

IV. JAPAN'S RESPONSES TO THE BRI AND THE SOURCES OF STRATEGIC THOUGHT

1. Japan's Response to the BRI

Japan, once a member of the China-centered tributary system,¹⁹ is today the US' anchoring ally in the Indo-Pacific region. Facing the contemporary Sino-US great power competition, Japan is at a state of strategic hesitation between the two powers. With the United States, Japan proposed an essentially China-targeted idea of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific and became a committed supporter of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, helping institutionalize the US-Japan-

¹⁵ Zheng Bijian, "China's 'Peaceful Rise' to Great Power Status," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2005, pp. 21-22

¹⁶ Michele Ruta, Matias Herrera Dappe and others, "Belt and Road Economics: Opportunities and Risks of Transport Corridors," World Bank Group Website, 18 June 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/regional-integration/publication/belt-and-road-economics-opportunities-and-risks-of-transport-corridors#authors>

¹⁷ Zhao Hong, "China is set to end absolute poverty by 2020, what's next," 17 October 2020, CGTN, accessed on 7 November 2020, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-10-17/China-is-set-to-end-absolute-poverty-by-2020-what-s-next--UF1rzv5WH6/index.html>

¹⁸ China Central Government, Xi Jinping's Speech at 19th National Party

Congress, viewed January 8 2020, http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm

¹⁹ See Zhang Yongjin, "The Tribute System," Oxford Bibliographies, Accessed on 8 October 2020, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199920082/obo-9780199920082-0069.xml>

Australia-India Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and financing the Blue Dot Network,²⁰ evolving out of the US-Japan-Australia Trilateral Infrastructure Partnership, as an alternative to the infrastructure connectivity component of the BRI.²¹ Japan also, after initial opposition, reversed its decision to launch third party cooperation with China under the BRI in 2017.²² Such cooperation is designed to complement China's advantaged production capacity with Japanese capital and technology in third countries.²³ The first China-Japan Third-Party Market Cooperation Forum witnessed the signing of 52 memoranda of cooperation.²⁴

This strategic deflection from opposition to cooperation is based on the fact that, though Japan pioneered infrastructure projects, with the largest accumulative investment in Southeast Asia since the 1950s, China has demonstrated much faster growth in investment and influence under the BRI.²⁵ However, Japan did not fully embrace the initiative. Worrying about the competition between AIIB and Japan-backed Asian Development Bank (ADB), Japan remains reluctant to join the BRI's flagship financing institution, AIIB.

2. The Sources of Japan's Responses

Japan's responses to the BRI can be perceived as a compromised consensus on decade-long debates between four Japanese schools of strategic thought after World War II: the pacifists, neo-autonomists, normal nationalists, and middle power internationalists. The pacifists, largely confined to civil society groups, non-governmental organizations, and peripheral political parties with limited political influence over governance of Japan, would conditionally embrace the BRI, as it fills the infrastructure deficit and could improve the comprehensive security of Japan and the region at large. However, the pacifists might also be suspicious of whether Japan's participation in the BRI would help China's rise to build a China-dominated regional and world order, which is clearly not in Japan's or other regional countries' interests. This embrace-and-suspicion is rooted in the pacifists' doctrines. Pacifists dominated Japan's post-war arrangement based on "Peace Constitution," particularly Article 9, and the Treaty of San Francisco.²⁶ Complying with such documents, the pacified and economic development-oriented Japan forever renounced war as a sovereign right and promised to never maintain war potential. This inevitably drove Japan to put its security stakes on security alliance protection from the United States and, as specified by Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda's Doctrine,²⁷ the reassurance to former East Asian victims on Japan's peaceful intentions.

²⁰ ASEAN-United States Summit 2019, "Chairman's Statement of the 7th ASEAN-United States Summit," 4 November 2019, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/FINAL-Chairmans-Statement-of-the-7th-ASEAN-US-Summit.pdf>

²¹ Australian Government, "Trilateral Infrastructure Partnership Joint Statement," 25 June 2019, accessed on 5 April 2020, <https://www.exportfinance.gov.au/resources-news/news-events/government-news/2019/june/trilateral-infrastructure-partnership-joint-statement/>

²² "Japan and 'One Belt, One Road,'" *Japan Times*, 24 June 2017, Accessed on 8 October 2020, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2017/06/24/editorials/japan-one-belt-one-road/>

²³ Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, "Japan and China Conclude Memorandum on Business Cooperation in Third Countries," 10 May 2018, accessed on 5 April 2020, https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2018/0510_003.html

²⁴ Japan External Trade Organization, "1st Japan-China Third Country Market Cooperation Forum," October 2018, accessed on 5 April 2020, https://www.jetro.go.jp/en/jetro/topics/2018/1810_topics11/

²⁵ Michelle Jamrisko, "China No Match for Japan in Southeast Asia Infrastructure Race," 23 June 2019, Bloomberg, Accessed on 8 October 2020. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-06-23/china-no-match-for-japan-in-southeast-asia-infrastructure-race>

²⁶ Richard J. Samuels. 2007. "Securing Japan: Tokyo's Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia," chapter 5, pp. 117-118.

²⁷ Fukuda Doctrine, Britannica, Accessed on 8 October 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Fukuda-Doctrine>

The other peace-oriented group, middle power internationalists, has also found it hard to say no to the BRI in the context of a more self-interested United States under the Trump administration and an ambitious China on the rise, further shifting from reliance on the United States to balance between Washington and Beijing. Starting with Japan's economic rise in the 1960s, Japan started to distance itself from the United States for building its own modest defense and advocate for a comprehensive security invested in regional institutions (the Japan-backed ADB), inter-society friendship (rapprochement with China and the development assistance programs to China), and economic cooperation (foreign direct investment to Southeast Asia), so as to make Japan's surrounding environment conducive to Japan's foreign trade, investment, and national security.²⁸ A dimension of Asian multilateralism was added, prompting Japan to imitate Germany and Canada in conducting middle power diplomacy, while reaffirming its non-military intentions to China, the two Koreas, and ASEAN countries, and contributing to international security under multinational auspices.²⁹ In this vein, Japan facilitated various regional multilateral institutions including the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and ASEAN Regional Forum.³⁰

The other, relatively more aggressive groups—neo-autonomists and normal nationalists—are clearly more visible to the public, owing to their official roles in government and radical moves in security and territorial issues, especially with China. Facing the BRI, these two groups are naturally unhappy to see it to serve China's rise, replacing Japan's Asian leadership. However, the BRI might also serve attempts by neo-autonomists to further distance themselves from US restraints, and as insurance for "normal" nationalists to become a "normal nation" in the potential Sino-US G2 order or even the China-led order. Neo-autonomists, the heirs to the nativists in the imperial period and often labelled "right-wing militarists," have tired of Japan's subordinate position to the United States and desire to restore Japan's prestige by seeking autonomy through strength. Politician Ishihara Shintaro, academics Nishibe Susumu and Makanishi Terumasa, and cartoonist Kobayashi Yoshinori utilized revisionist war history and economic pride to criticize the unreliability of US military capabilities and commitment, while appealing for a proud Japan. Supported by the United States' "unfair" treatment of Japan (particularly under the Trump administration) and the negative social sentiments derived from decades-long economic stagnation, these neo-autonomist arguments have been increasingly popular in recent years, even among the youth.³¹

Normal nationalists, by contrast, are more clear-minded, arguing that Japan's future does not lie in full autonomy through gaining (and showing off) strength but using the United States to achieve the de facto normalization of the Japanese nation by, for example, removing Article 9 and sending military personnel overseas. Betting some chips on China in the current great power competition would be a convenient back-up to ensure that normalization comes about should a world-order scenario favoring China come about. The chips have also been bet by Japan's powerful Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)'s Prime Ministers Junichiro Koizumi and the

²⁸ Nakanishi Hiroshi, "Redefining Comprehensive Security in Japan," in *Challenges for China-Japan-U.S. Cooperation*, The JCIE Papers: 21, 1998, pp. 45-48.

²⁹ Richard J. Samuels. 2007. "Securing Japan: Tokyo's Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia," chapter 5, pp. 128.

³⁰ See Seng Tan, "Japan and Multilateralism in Asia" in Rizal Sukma and Yoshihide Soeya, eds., *Navigating Change: ASEAN-Japan Strategic Partnership in East Asia and in Global Governance* (Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchange, 2015), pp. 60-82.

³¹ Samuels pp. 121-123.

incumbent Abe Shinzo on regionalism and multilateralism. Since the 1990s Japan has sought alternative channels to gain trust for Japan's "normalization," which would involve doing away with the constraints imposed by the Pacifist Constitution and post-World War II international arrangement. Apart from continuously facilitating multilateral institutions in the region, like the East Asia Summit, Japan has also proposed human security, supplementing comprehensive security, focusing on the strengthening of human-centered efforts from the perspective of protecting lives, livelihoods, and the dignity of individual human beings and realizing the abundant potential inherent in each individual.³² This, plus Japanese financial and peace-keeping contributions to major international organizations like United Nations, and to United States-led international missions like Iraq War, builds Japan's image of a good global citizen.³³ In fact, Japan's participation in the BRI was indeed conditioned on China's compliance with international standards and norms. In this vein, Japan's regionalism and multilateralism efforts would also become an instrument to constrain China, so as to earn more chances for the LDP to normalize the nation gradually.

V. INDIA'S RESPONSES TO THE BRI AND STRATEGIC THOUGHT

1. India's Responses to the BRI

India has long sought to maintain a certain South Asian version of Monroe Doctrine, asserting its legitimate dominance over the sub-continent and Indian Ocean at large. In this vein, it is understandable that India sees the extension of its neighbor's BRI into South Asia as an emerging threat to the regional order. India twice declined the invitations from the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2017 and 2019. However, India has also found it hard to reject Chinese capital and technology and escape the China-centered value chains that actually serve India's own development and revitalization. Even in the recent border conflicts with China, though a few Indian ministers represented by Ram Vilas Paswan³⁴ and Ramdas Athawale³⁵ advocated boycotts against Chinese enterprises and products, the Indian market found it easier said than done based on a simple fact that more than 50% of daily household items like footwear, knitted fabrics, and furniture products, among others, are imported from China,³⁶ not even to mention India's pharmaceutical industries' heavy reliance on China-supplied active pharmaceutical ingredients (API).³⁷ In the global context, India, remains part of

³² Nobumasa Akiyama, "Human Security at the Crossroad: Human Security in the Japanese Foreign Policy Context," IPSHU English Research Report Series No.19 Conflict and Human Security: A Search for New Approaches of Peace-building (2004), pp.254-255.

³³ Samuels pp. 124-127.

³⁴ "Ram Vilas Paswan urges people to boycott Chinese products," ET Retail.com, 18 June 2002, accessed on 19 October 2020, <https://retail.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/news/industry/ram-vilas-paswan-urges-people-to-boycott-chinese-products/76444539>

³⁵ NH Web Desk, "After 'Go Corona Go' Union minister Ramdas Athawale comes up with yet another idea-boycott Chinese food," National Herald, 18 June 2020, accessed on 19 October 2020, <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/india/after-go-corona-go-union-minister-ramdas-athawale-comes-up-with-yet-another-idea-boycott-chinese-food>

³⁶ Vineet Sachdev, "How households in India bank on Chinese imports," Hindustan Times, 21 September 2020, accessed on 19 October 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/how-households-in-india-bank-on-chinese-imports/story-ysxqlEtvPaYIA1dPFxYFZM.html>

³⁷ "Boycott Chinese Products: Can India survive without them?" ET CFO.com, 20 June 2020, accessed on 19 October 2020, <https://cfo.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/news/boycott-chinese-products-can-india-survive-without-them/76475949>

global discourse criticizing the BRI for so-called “debt-trap diplomacy” and threats to democratic and market values India upholds. India ostensibly plays the role of a frontline counterbalance in the US’ strategic competition and containment against the BRI and China itself. In exchange, Delhi is tacitly recognized by the United States as South Asia’s dominant power, and elevated as Washington’s pillar partner, along with Japan and Australia, in the Blue Dot Network, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, and Indo-Pacific Strategy. China, which values stability in its neighborhood to ensure a peaceful development environment, India also virtually harvests substantial benefits from China such as China’s government mobilized investment and infrastructure development aids. In fact, under the tacit mutual understanding with China, India actually carries out practical cooperation with China just not in the name of the BRI.

2. The Sources of India’s Responses

India’s balance between the US offer and the BRI is also well-rooted in a certain consensus among three major schools of strategic thought—Nehruvianism, neo-liberalism, and hyperrealism—and three minor ones: Marxism, Hindutva, and Gandhianism.³⁸ Nehruvianism would be fascinated by the vision of the BRI, with its “community of shared future for mankind.” Nehruvianism possesses qualities of internationalism, idealism, and pacifism. It strongly believes that states and peoples, ultimately, can come to a mutual understanding and therefore make eternal peace. Before reaching a permanent peace, however, Jawaharlal Nehru was also aware that the international system is of an anarchic nature and lacks a supranational authority that produces orders and laws.³⁹ However, the 1962 defeat by China would bitterly remind the Nehruvianists that China’s ambition might not stop at the status of regional power, but seek global hegemony. Potential coercion from China and the Sino-US great power competition would inevitably push India to another round of non-alignment between China and the United States.⁴⁰

The other two major schools—neoliberal and hyperrealist—are probably also happy to see India balance between United States’ Indo-Pacific strategy and China’s BRI and harvest benefits from both sides, accumulating hard power for India. Neoliberals believe economic well-being is the basis for hard power and hence is vital for national security. Since India is short on capital, skilled labor, and technologies, to develop its own economy India should therefore distance itself from ideological confrontations and great power competition, instead pragmatically harvesting the benefits of foreign trade, investment, and aid to consolidate economic strength, hiding its aspirations and biding its time.⁴¹ Hyperrealists, unlike neoliberals, prioritize military over economic power, believing military power is the only guarantor of peace and security, and which ensures economic development. Neither the US nor China treat India as a friend, instead using India for their own interests. Since the US earnestly expects India to counterbalance China by selling weapons and training military and China is becoming cautious on India-Pakistan disputes to achieve stability in its neighborhood, hyperrealists would love to maximize strategic opportunities to keep provoking China and suppressing the BRI via a variety

³⁸ Kanti Bajpai, “Indian Grand Strategy: Six Schools of Thought.” In Kanti Bajpai, V. Krishnappa, and Saira Basit, eds., *India’s Grand Strategic Thought and Practice: History, Theory, Cases* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014), pp. 113-114.

³⁹ Bajpai pp. 113-150.

⁴⁰ A.P. Rana, “The Intellectual Dimensions of India’s Non-Alignment,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 28:2, February 1969, pp. 299-312.

⁴¹ Bajpai pp. 118-119.

of instruments.⁴² In the recent India-China border disputes and resulting tensions, such earnestness by the US and the cautiousness of China are reflected in the US' proclaimed support for India⁴³ and China's self-restraint out of concern for its interests in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.⁴⁴ Apart from the border disputes, hyperrealists might even step further, instigating a coalition of South and East Asian states all the way to Japan against China and lure them away from the BRI.

Embraced by the incumbent Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Hindutva is the most influential minor school of strategic thought at the moment.⁴⁵ By its nature, it is inevitably hostile to both Chinese civilization and the United States-championed Western civilization. Hindutva perceives both the BRI and Indo-Pacific strategy as threats to Indian civilization. Hindutva thinkers envisage a world championed by different civilization-states, in which the Indian one ultimately unveils its true superiority.⁴⁶ Traditionally, Hindutva disciples were especially hostile to the US for its formidable hard capabilities and soft influences. However, such hostilities might be shifting to China, as China's threat has since the 2010s appeared larger due to its rapid development and ever-increasing economic and military capabilities, not to mention China's de facto alliance with Pakistan, potential linkages with Indian Maoists, plus the shameful 1962 defeat.⁴⁷ Hindutva thinkers argue India should play the game of international relations adeptly, even ruthlessly, to preserve Indian civilization.⁴⁸ In this vein, India would gradually utilize US support to make troubles for China's BRI and slow down China's rise.

Marxists and Gandhianists' responses to the BRI would be ambivalent, making them less influential on India's decision on the BRI. Indian Marxists, like Marxists in general, see a world of classes and are hostile to imperialism and capitalism. Meanwhile, Marxism has a dimension of internationalism, pursuing unity among all communists across the world.⁴⁹ In this vein, Indian Marxists would inevitably be ambivalent toward the BRI and China. Today's China has incorporated Western capitalist elements clearly disliked by Indian Maoists. They might therefore perceive the BRI, though it to some extent advances both China's and India's local development, as another type of capitalist exploitation and alienation. Gandhianists would largely have the same ambivalence. On one hand, Gandhian thought upholds a certain Asianism against Western imperialism and modernity,⁵⁰ on the other, Gandhianists dislike large-scale modernization projects of any kind, emphasizing an independent India without any external

⁴² Bajpai pp. 120-121.

⁴³ Yashwant Raj, "China has deployed 60,000 troops on India's northern border: Mike Pompeo," *Hindustan Times*, 11 October 2020, accessed on 19 October 2020, [hindustantimes.com/world-news/china-has-deployed-60-000-troops-on-india-s-northern-border-mike-pompeo/story-CmE7EOvDWEHYVVbaIqOtcO.html](https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/china-has-deployed-60-000-troops-on-india-s-northern-border-mike-pompeo/story-CmE7EOvDWEHYVVbaIqOtcO.html)

⁴⁴ Eduardo Baptista, "Why Pakistan is a big factor in China's border clashes with India," *South China Morning Post*, 27 June 2020, accessed on 19 October 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3090758/why-pakistan-big-factor-chinas-border-clashes-india>

⁴⁵ Azeem Ibrahim, "Modi's Slide Toward Autocracy Using Hindutva ideology, India's leader is restyling the country as one with only the trappings of democracy," *Foreign Policy*, 13 July 2020, Accessed on 8 October 2020

⁴⁶ Benoy Kumar Sarkar, "The Hindu Theory of International Relations," *American Political Science Review*, 1919, pp. 400-414.

⁴⁷ Bajpai pp. 113-150.

⁴⁸ Sarkar pp. 400-414.

⁴⁹ Bajpai pp. 128-146.

⁵⁰ Bajpai pp. 136-146.

subjugation and exploitation, under good governance at the village level.⁵¹ The BRI, advocating Asianism and a community of a shared future for mankind, is somewhat in line with Gandhian pursuits. However, whether the large-scale influx of Chinese influences would be perceived as another round of potential subjugation and exploitation toward India would remain unsure.

3. Conclusions

Owing to its large scale and diverse aspects, the BRI is arguably a grand post-Cold War strategy. Though China argues that the BRI is merely an international development initiative and connectivity facilitator, it would inevitably bring to China tremendous benefits not only in the economic and development sense but also the politico-security sense. Likewise, whether China deliberately attaches a China-led order to the BRI, the BRI can also shape the world order in China's favor. In this vein, world major powers, particularly neighboring Asian powers like India and Japan, naturally take into account their own strategic calculations when responding to the BRI.

As India chose to distance itself from the BRI while Japan decided to join, both responses can be explained via the constant internal debates between different schools of strategic thought in the two countries. However, one needs to be clear-minded that the ideally strong correlation between certain strategic thought and strategy-making could only take place in laboratories. In real world, one strategy is a product of different lines of thought and political stances. Even leaders are famously overwhelmed by a certain school of strategic thought, the actual strategy-making would still be subject to a mix of different schools' influences.

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⁵¹ Bharat Karnad, *Nuclear Weapons and Indian Security: The Realist Foundations of Strategy* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 2002), chapter 1, pp 1-65.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hao Nan is a Young Leader at the Pacific Forum, the United States and an assistant research fellow with the Charhar Institute, China. He obtained his master's degree at Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore. The author is grateful for kind comments and suggestions from Prof. Kanti Bajpai, Director of Centre on Asia and Globalization and Wilmar Professor of Asian Studies at Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, the anonymous reviewer invited by Pacific Forum and Mr. Robert York, Director for Regional Affairs at Pacific Forum.