

OPENING CHINA'S 'BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE' TO COMPETITION WITH INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT: EXPANDING FREIGHT CARGO DELIVERY BETWEEN ASIA AND EUROPE TO ACCELERATE FREE TRADE AND NATIONAL SECURITY IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

"Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) is China's name for its freight cargo delivery routes between Asia and Europe. China's BRI consists of maritime and overland routes: seafaring routes between China's largest ports (Shanghai, Shenzhen, Ningbo-Zhoushan, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Qingdao, Tianjin, Dalian, Xiamen, Yingkou) and Europe, mainly the port of Piraeus near Athens, Greece, together with a myriad of overland routes from Western China across South Asia then Eurasia to Eastern Europe by highway and railway, across politically and topographically challenged terrain. Numerous "chokepoints" exist in the "Near" Seas (East China, South China, and Yellow Seas), some created by China, others by the Western Alliance. Many "bottlenecks" exist across South Asia, especially involving land territory disputed by China, India and Pakistan. As a result, the BRI is laden with obstacles, not the least of which is its gargantuan expense to China and to host countries, particularly on the overland routes, exacerbated by COVID-19. International investment is required, as are competitive maritime and land routes to counter Chinese monopolies. This paper will chart some potential solutions designed to partner China's immense BRI effort with foreign investors: (1) an express highway plus high-speed rail line between Vladivostok Russia and Łódź Poland, and (2) a sea route across the Arctic Circle ("Northwest Passage"), facilitated by global warming. Capabilities exist already, such as with the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Upgraded infrastructure requires Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from Asia, Europe, and North America to balance Chinese influence, reduce debt and risk of financial collapse in developing countries. Chinese routes seem to have deliberately sidelined the Russian Federation that should be included to promote competition. Foreign investors will become attracted to East-West freight cargo transportation as opportunities for factories to open or expand across South Asia, Eurasia, Eastern Europe, creating symbiotic opportunities for competition in manufacturing, assembly, marketing, distribution and transportation.

Keywords--Arctic, Asia, BRI, China, COVID-19, Eurasia, Post-Thucydides' Trap, Russia.

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INTRODUCTION

Manufacturing and assembly of products came to a standstill early in 2020 across Asia then Eurasia, Europe and North America, as individuals within entire communities went into isolation as protection against the rapid spread of COVID-19, the Coronavirus. Months or even years will be required for industries to return to normal production. Supply chain management in the West, particularly, has been uprooted. Evidently, purveyors of Western brands have overly relied upon Chinese factories to supply necessary products in a timely manner. More factories have closed in the United States and Europe since World War II (Donnan & Coppola, 2020). This supply chain shock, "born in China", has gone global (Donnan, Rauwald, Deaux & King, 2020), threatening globalisation in the future as the world has come to know that phenomenon (Farrell & Newman, 2020), even raising questions concerning the motives of China's communist government (Mações, 2020), rendering at least an appearance that China is using the pandemic (Hayward, 2020) as a pretext for displacing United States, United Kingdom, Western European global leadership (Campbell & Doshi, 2020). Security concerns would follow there from. Stated simply, the West cannot be entirely or even substantially dependent upon China for producing any widgets, certainly not for producing lifesaving products required in a pandemic ranging from personal protective equipment (PPE) such as isolation gowns, N-95 face masks, goggles, disposable gloves at the basic levels to medicines, respirators and ventilators at levels that are more technologically sophisticated. China's ambitions are rendered transparent with its effort to capture global wealth firms with its USD 30 Trillion market

promise (Chen, 2020), and the ineptitude of Chinese factories has been made even more obvious recently than it was a decade ago with publication of Middler's book, *Poorly Made in China* (2009). Products from or passing through China are poorly delivered, also.

Individuals worldwide donated face masks plus other PPE to the Chinese people during its COVID-19 epidemic, including the Vatican that donated hundreds of thousands of face masks ("Vatican Donates", 2020). When Italy and Spain became inundated with this disease, presumptively contracted through travelers arriving from China, some testing equipment supplied by Chinese factories gave false results that Chinese authorities blamed on unlicensed counterfeiting (Baker & Moynihan, 2020), the Netherlands reportedly cancelled an order for 600,000 face masks upon determining they were faulty (Payne, Baker & Moynihan, 2020), and allegations abound that distributors of PPE are price gouging with markups of as much as factor 1,000, from one cent to Euro 10 each mask (Parodi, 2020). Some cast blame for this on price gouging by large corporations, such as Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company (3M) (Nelson, 2020), ranking 82 on the Fortune 500 list. Curiosity focuses on American labour unions such as United Healthcare Workers West, Service Employees International Union, that suddenly found 39 million N-95 masks it offered to sell to California and New York hospitals at Euro 5.00 each (Pietsch, 2020). In the single day between 31 March 2020 and 01 April 2020, a colleague of this author, an American living in Poland with vast hospital management experience over many decades was brokering sale of several hundred ventilators desperately needed

in New York City by Mt. Sinai Hospital, ranked No. 3 by *U.S. News & World Report* (2020). They were selling at USD 30,000 per unit the week before, then jumped to USD 35,000, then all of a sudden the Chinese seller, China's largest, said they had 50 ventilators left, sold the others to the highest bidder with the fastest payment. Rather clearly, major countries worldwide have been caught unprepared in their supply chains, with misplaced over-reliance upon Chinese suppliers generally (Buskirk, 2020), particularly emergency supplies (Tandon, 2020) including China's "chokehold" on pharmaceuticals (Chambria, 2020). This has to change very fast if, as contended in intelligence circles, Chinese military scientists are endeavouring to weaponise genetic and germ research such as by gene editing in humans and viruses to utilise artificial intelligence to achieve biological dominance then utilise that to achieve ethnic cleansing of Islamic Uyghurs first, others afterwards (Kania & VornDick, 2019). Proposals for rapid change are outlined in this article. Western and other Asian businesses, consumers, and governments will have to retrench funding to China if China is bent on using its accumulated knowledge and wealth to orchestrate our destruction or subjugation by spreading viruses that inflict unforeseen pathogeneses resulting in brain damage such as "strokes, seizures, encephalitis-like symptoms ... blood clots ... tingling or numbness in the extremities, called acroparesthesia", amounting to "necrotizing encephalopathy" in some patients, reported by *The New York Times* to have occurred in the United States as secondary to COVID-19 (Rabin, 2020).

Ethical standards have changed in the West, also, or at least the change of ethical standards has become more transparent, arguably in the aftermath of ethical relativity in authoritarian countries that seem to have licked COVID-19 swiftly within their domestic populations, however harshly. As an example, American and European hospitals have revised "rationing" protocols, attempting to prioritise different human lives, such as younger ahead of older, stronger ahead of weaker or, possibly even worse, relegating to hospital "committees" or inanimate "protocols" the task of making life and death decisions affecting intensive care patients to divert this responsibility away from real time practitioners (Emanuel, Persad, Upshur, Thome, Parker, Glickman, Zhang, Boyle, Smith & Phillips, *passim* and Table 2, 2020). Have liberal as well as illiberal democracies capitulated to autocratic practices, possibly in desperation, regarding such lifesaving technology as ventilators becoming demographic rewards (Truog, Mitchell & Daley, 2020), instead of fundamental human rights to which the sick always must be entitled in every circumstance, of which no human being ever should be deprived for any reason?

SKEPTICISM TOWARD CHINA OCCASIONED BY CORONAVIRUS

Global trading partners have become skeptical of Chinese supply chain management during and following the COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic for several reasons. Primarily, China lost what credibility it had for transparency when, apparently, it delayed notifying other countries of the COVID-19 Coronavirus when this disease became evident in Wuhan, Hubei Province. Instead, it blamed the messenger for the message, as with the late Wuhan whistle blowing ophthalmologist, 34 year old Dr. Li Wenliang (Westcott, 2020) whose alarm, if listened and responded to, almost certainly would have spared the world this pandemic. On 01 April 2020, another physician, Dr. Ai Fen, head of the emergency room at Wuhan Central Hospital, disappeared, and operatives posted her image on her own website saying "Happy April Fools Day" (Woods, 2020). Taiwan resisted being beguiled, met the challenge in time (Yun, 2020), alerted the World Health Organisation that was slow to respond (Blanchard, 2020). This prompted Florida senior Senator Marco Rubio to

enquire if the World Health Organisation (W.H.O.) actually is concerned with world health as much as pleasing Chinese officials (2020).

Speculation then emerged suggesting Chinese P-4 military laboratories located in Wuhan purposefully manipulated the virus to weaponise it (Pradhan, Pandey, Mishra, Gupta, Tripathi, Menon, Gomes, Vivekanandan & Kundu, 2020), but a recent analysis questions whether the labs engaged in deliberate or negligent if not unethical practices (Li, 2020). Part of this suspicion emanates from articles published by Chinese defence cadre who have been outspoken about China's pursuit of seven "new domains of warfare" discussed "in a 2017 book by Zhang Shibo (张仕波), a retired general and former president of China's National Defence University, who concluded ominously: 'Modern biotechnology development is gradually showing strong signs characteristic of an offensive capability,' including the possibility that 'specific ethnic genetic attacks' [«特定种族基因攻击»] could be employed", drawing upon a similar theme advanced in a late 20th century book by PLA Air Force officers Qiao and Wang (1999) entitled *Warfare Beyond Rules: Judgment of War and Methods of War in the Age of Globalization* (Kania & VornDick, 2020), also drawing upon a similar theme in an early 21st century book written a decade later, entitled unabashedly *War for Biological Dominance* by Dr. Jiwei Guo (2010), professor and chief physician at the Third Military Medical University of the PLA, focusing upon emerging trends in military thinking, the invisible battlefield, and unexpected changes in warfare including the spread of weaponised viruses (Chansoria, 2020) leading to genocide, unthinkable since World War II by any industrialised nation, patently inconsistent with a Western physician's Hippocratic Oath "to do no harm".

Another part stems from experiments conducted in 2015 and earlier at China's P-4 virology laboratory in Wuhan, capital of Hubei Province, building chimeric (artificially bonded) viruses with seemingly incompatible DNA sequences that resulted in emergence among humans of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-Cov):

The emergence of SARS-CoV heralded a new era in the cross-species transmission of severe respiratory illness with globalization leading to rapid spread around the world and massive economic impact. Since then, several strains—including influenza A strains H5N1, H1N1 and H7N9 and MERS-CoV—have emerged [in humans] from animal populations, **causing considerable disease, mortality and economic hardship for the afflicted regions**. Although public health measures were able to stop the SARS-CoV outbreak, recent metagenomics studies have identified sequences of closely related SARS-like **viruses circulating in Chinese bat populations that may pose a future threat** (Menachery, Yount, Jr., Debbink, Agnihothram, Gralinski, Plante, Graham, Scobey, Ge, Donaldson, Randell, Lanzavecchia, Marasco, Shi & Baric, 2015 [Footnotes omitted, emphasis added].

Further inference was made only three days afterwards in *Nature*, warning that findings such as these have "triggered renewed debate over whether engineering lab variants of viruses with possible pandemic potential is worth the risks" (Butler, 2015).

Always one must bear in mind that association does not mean causation. Nevertheless, evidence is beginning to mount with triangulation of data as that data becomes subject to scrutiny by qualified scientists in different countries that have populations affected by the disease. Throughout the escalation of this pandemic, China has destroyed or hidden much of its data,

arguably reflecting a “consciousness of guilt” by reason of its cover-up. More recent analysis of the COVID-19 mutations, fully peer-reviewed, concludes that mutation of this virus other than by natural means is unlikely, but cannot be excluded entirely (Andersen, Rambaut, Lipkin, Holmes & Garry, 2020), rendering China’s muzzling of Dr. Li all the more reprehensible, even irrational, if as presumed Chinese authorities had nothing to hide. Soon after Dr. Li’s warning went unheeded, the disease burgeoned, across Asia then Europe then the United States (Sukkar, 2020), tracked weekly on screen (Hodcroft, Müller, Wagner, Ilcisin, Hadfield, Bell, Neher, & Bedford, 2020), without effective / efficient forward planning, almost exactly as Manachery, *et al.* forecasted in 2015, with anticipated economic consequences.

Addressing this disease systematically and timely has been delayed, from determining its origins to mapping a containment strategy to supplying tools required for clinical intervention, reflecting gross global governmental incompetence. Questions remain unanswered, such as did this virus spread from animals to humans, human to human, through contaminated cargo freight including infected packaging? Is airborne transmission very likely? As noted by an international team that studied the rise of COVID-19 in Wuhan from 09 January 2020 when it was first discovered:

One of the most critical clinical and public health questions during the emergence of a completely novel pathogen, especially one that could cause a global pandemic, pertains to the spectrum of illness presentation or severity profile. For the patient and clinician, this affects triage and diagnostic decision-making, especially in settings without ready access to laboratory testing or when surge capacity has been exceeded. It also influences therapeutic choice and prognostic expectations. For managers of health services, it is important for rapid forward planning in terms of procurement of supplies, readiness of human resources to staff beds at different intensities of care and generally ensuring the sustainability of the health system through the peak and duration of the epidemic (Wu, Leung, Kishore, Niehus, de Salazar, Lipsitch & Leung, 2020).

Rather evidently, products manufactured or assembled in Asia outside of China need to be transported to European and other global markets without having to pass through Chinese territory or waterways, or on Chinese vehicles, be they ships, trains, or lorries. Already, Chinese officialdom seems to be trying to shift blame to the United States, ranging from athletes to soldiers to President Trump, when indisputably original fault rests with Chinese officials themselves at least in their own delayed reaction to this pandemic (Evans, 2020; Sheth & Scher, 2020; Wadhams & Jacobs, 2020), requiring a global effort to be made to resist distortions by Chinese officials to distort the origin of COVID-19 (Boxwell, 2020) then to use the pandemic to their own advantage (Sobolik, 2020). Designing and implementing alternative cargo routes between Asia and Europe will go a long way in that direction, especially if as reported global technology companies will begin to shun goods made in China (Wu, 2020).

NAÏVE OVER-RELIANCE ON CHINA

Kyrgyzstan and countries located on the “New Silk Road” face an opposite dilemma as well: their economies ground to a standstill when China closed off cargoes once flowing freely into their territories, with China slow to resume cross-border transportation (Auyezov & Dzyubenko, 2020). Competition in cargo delivery either would speed up return to normalcy or provide a sustainable alternative to Chinese trade routes. Certainly, COVID-19 did not originate in Japan, South Korea, or Taiwan, so no good reason exists why their products should not

flow freely into Europe. Eurasian transportation is being held captive to China for one reason or another. Urgently, this must stop. Global economic decoupling is required such that other countries are much less dependent upon Chinese products or Chinese delivery of products made elsewhere, particularly in Asia (Saha & Feng, 2020). Academic decoupling may be required as well, if collaborative scientific research is going to be put to harmful uses (Ledeen, 2020). Figure 1 below documents that the COVID-19 pandemic primarily has affected China itself among nations of East Asia, leaving other territories such as the Russian Federation, most of Eurasia, unscathed. This is further evidence for the argument that goods in shipment between East Asian countries other than China should be transported to Eurasia and Europe along routes that bypass China providing competitive alternatives, with Russia being an obvious candidate.

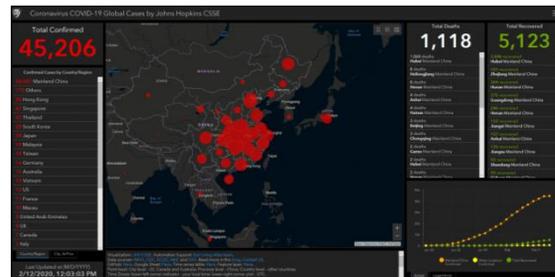


Figure 1. COVID-19 Impact Across East Asia, Eurasia, March 2020

Source: “Coronavirus COVID-19 Global Cases by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE), Johns Hopkins University (JHU). 30 March 2020. <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

This would help to curb what some perceive as being China’s aim to dominate maritime cargo traffic between Asia and Europe (O’Dea, 2020). Also, it would help to reduce the risk of shut down operations across all or parts of China, occasioned by future pandemic outbreaks. Global trading partners cannot sit back idly to watch, meaning encourage, China to “take over the world”, using the COVID-19 as the pretext (Maçães, 2020) or another fanciful justification. On the contrary, the Coronavirus outbreak in central China should be a wakeup call to the rest of Asia and to the West to stop abetting China’s transparent effort to dominate its neighbours or its translucent attempt to compel the world to submit to its authoritarian domination.

Various options exist besides China’s “Belt and Road Initiative” or “BRI”, apart from China’s overland routes or maritime “roads”, ending up in roughly the same locations in Central or Eastern Europe. It is important to recognise that China does not own outright most of its BRI, because highways and railways traverse multiple countries. On the other hand, China induced many nations that are situated along its BRI to become heavily indebted to China economically and politically (Shepard, 2020), rendering some of those countries functional indentured servants to China’s wishes. What are the most viable alternatives to China’s BRI or “New Silk Road”, where to be situated? At least two alternatives, each viable, seem plausible: (1) Parallel highway and railway *express* routes across Siberia in the Russian Federation from Vladivostok to Moscow then across East Central Europe to Łódź, Poland, Budapest, Hungary or elsewhere, then alternatively or preferably in addition (2) a maritime “road” Northwest across the Arctic Circle, or in effect what Kenneth Roberts called a “Northwest Passage”, across the Arctic Ocean enabled by climate change, global warming, bringing into reality that “fabled thoroughfare” about which Roberts wrote in his 1937 historical novel commemorating the exploits of famed

Colonial British American officer Lt. Col. Robert Rogers, trained in the New Hampshire Militia, afterwards leader of the "King's Rangers", better known affectionately as "Rogers' Rangers" (Roberts, 1937, 1). Admittedly, this dual proposal provides the Russian Federation with maritime and overland advantage in transporting freight cargo between Asia and Europe. This it deserves because of sacrifices the Soviet Union made to liberate much of Europe from Nazi tyranny during World War II, whereas China deserves it much less from its "feudal internationalism" posture toward many Eurasian countries plus areas of Africa and Latin America (Liu & Jones, 2018), compounded by China's gross mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic that it may bear some responsibility for having created in the first place if one heeds the historical warnings of Qiao & Wang (1999), Guo, 2010, or Zheng, 2017 as reported by more recent authors (Kania & VornDick, 2019; Chansoria, 2020).

COMPETITIVE ALTERNATIVE OVERLAND OPTION: ACROSS SIBERIA

As an alternative to China's BRI, a high-speed express improvement of the Trans-Siberian Rail line will be very competitive: it is more direct, runs across flat rather than hilly terrain, benefits from Russian Federation security. In Figure 2 below, the green line marks the approximate route of the current Trans-Siberian Railway much as it was designed then constructed in 1890 and afterwards, completed in 1916, spanning 9,289 kilometres (5,772 miles), the longest railroad in the world to date. It is double track. Infrastructure improvements have been made periodically over the course of 150 years, although more improvements will be required to upgrade this route to make it into a high-speed express corridor. Presumably, an *express highway* will be added parallel or near to the railroad for purposes of security, freight logistics, passenger accommodations, vehicle logistics. At present, the Trans-Siberian Railway is entirely electric. As with China's high-speed passenger trains, the *express railroad* that the author envisions here will require upgraded rail infra-structure in many locations, all feasible to construct in an urgent timeframe, albeit at heavy cost structure.

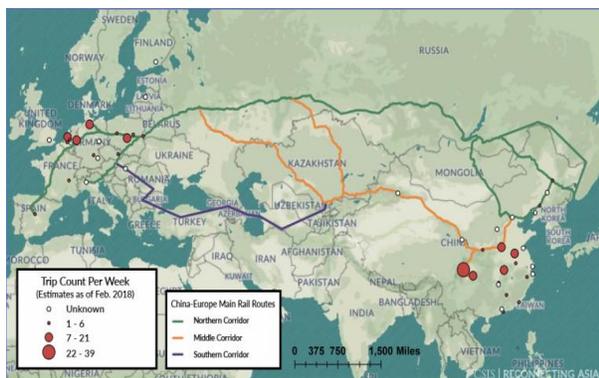


Figure 2. China's "New Silk Road" Compared with the Trans-Siberian Railroad, 2020

Source: Hillman, Jonathan E. 2018. "The Rise of China-Europe Railways," Washington: CSIS, 08 Mar.

This is where Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) will help, possibly be required, plus become part of the author's *balance of power* strategy that is a key component of another strategy known as the "international separation of powers". In this approach, China and the Russian Federation would become competitive suitors for cargo transportation between Asia and Europe, thus demopolising China's BRI.

Currently, the Trans-Siberian Railway uses its own unique "Broader" gauge track (1524 mm or five feet), as does part of the Baikal-Arnur Mainline (BAM) Railway that runs about 610 to 770 km (380 to 480 miles) north of and parallel to the Trans-Siberian Railway, although most of the BAM uses "Broad gauge" or "Imperial gauge" 1520 mm (four feet 11-27/32 inch) rail used by most railroads across Russia and the former provinces of the Soviet Union. That in turn is slightly wider and stronger than "Standard" gauge 1435 mm (four feet 8-1/2 inch) rail used in most European countries and most parts of the United States. Actually, wider gauge track facilitates high speed freight cargo traffic over longer distances of rural countryside better than "standard" gauge, because it withstands frost, snow, temperature change, general winter conditions better. It does pose potential delays at the border of the European Union that uses "standard" gauge track for the most part. Wheels on freight train cars can be widened going Eastbound, narrowed going Westbound, as is the case at the present time with railroad traffic traveling between the European Community and Ukraine, for example, but this takes one hour or longer to change by hand, posing delays. Tracks can be laid to accommodate multiple gauge wheels, very expensive except nearby to border locations. Railroad cars can be constructed to roll on multiple gauge wheels at the same time, rendering the cars heavier, slower at the same consumption of energy, maintaining speed with increased energy consumption. What alternative courses of action are viable? Currently, the best option appears to be freight car wheels that automatically can expand or contract width rapidly if lifted or run through a switching mechanism. Engines tend to change at borders. Figure 3 below illustrates potential junctions at which freight cargo traffic from China and from other Asian locations can intersect with the Trans-Siberian Railroad without difficulty.

This proposal to transform the Trans-Siberian Highway and Railway into an express path for transporting freight cargo from East Asia to Europe is not limited to logistics. On the contrary, vast manufacturing opportunities exist for cities along the way that can be designed to improve their local economies, putting an end to China's dominating role of "Factory to the World" that clearly it must cease to be. Drawing upon our own managerial experience, we cannot help but to conclude that it is a bad idea for any manufacturer to collude to put its customers out of business. Evidently, that is China's aim, the purpose of its virological "research" in Wuhan, probably also elsewhere, in effect to poison its customers, to risk annihilating the sources of the wealth that has enabled the Chinese to rise above abject poverty, to participate in middle class life styles, to be consumers of the products they have worked hard to manufacture and assemble over a generation.



Figure 3. Trans-Siberian, BAM, Trans-Manchurian Trans-Mongolian Railway Map, 2020

Source: Bendarzsevszkij, Anton. 2018. "100 Years of the Trans-Siberian Railway," *PAGEO GeopolitikaIKutatointezet*. 22 Feb.

Carriers (APC) between Atlantic and Pacific countries and regions, deemed necessary to keep in check and balance the rise of China or of rogue states such as the “Democratic” People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea) also. As Figure 4 below reflects, the Russian Federation is exploring various prospective high-speed rail lines running both East-West and North-South, important because freight traffic from various countries as well as passenger traffic must be able to tie into a high-speed express route across the Russian Federation at many junctions along the way, without need to divert cargoes to Vladivostok at the Pacific extreme or Yekaterinburg in the Ural region in order to benefit from this alternative express delivery system. Countries along China’s BRI should be provided with an opportunity to choose between a Chinese and a Russian route also, or to use both, dividing their business accordingly. Highways across the Trans-Siberian region of the Russian Federation will be useful to transport freight cargo between East Asia and Eastern Europe, then to collect raw materials from Russia that are increasingly becoming in demand across Europe, plus valuable for deployment of artillery, tanks, armoured personnel carriers (APCs) from Atlantic to Pacific.

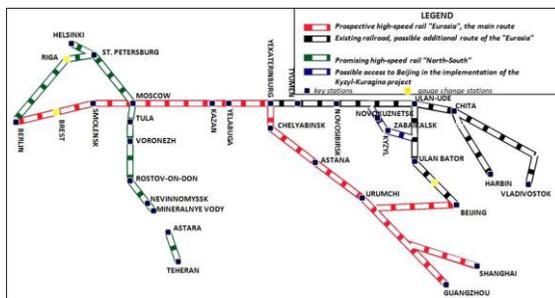


Figure 4. Creation of High-Speed Freight-Passenger Railway via Russia

Source: Kolsoy, Vladimir. 2017. “A Future of EU-EAEU-China Cooperation in Trade and Railway Transport,” *Infrastructure Economics Center*, 2.

Lorries are more flexible than trains, able to stop over to collect or drop freight cargoes at factory loading docks. Russian highways are located in positions different from Russian railways, however, as Figure 5 below depicts. They are deemed to be among the most dangerous roadways worldwide, largely because of erratic winter weather conditions. With suitable investment, Trans-Siberian highways can be made safe and efficient in all seasons including winter, with new technologies including electric wires embedded in the road surface to prevent ice from forming. Figure 5 below shows the current locations of principal highways across Russia.



Figure 5. Trans-Siberian Highways
Source: “Trans-Siberian Highways”, *Dangerousroads.org*.

As is the case with rail lines, highways benefit from the flat topographical environment Siberia provides, quite different from the environment through which China’s BRI passes that is akin to a roller coaster, sometimes impeded by mountains requiring tunnels, alternatively by rivers requiring bridges. To state the problem succinctly, China’s “New Silk Road” is as chaotic in the 21st century as the original “old” Silk Road was historically, veritably a “long and winding road” across terrain that is as inhospitable politically as topographically, making little to no sense whatsoever except possibly to increase China’s “feudal internationalism”, and only momentarily, before host nations implode economically from debt they can little afford to bear, as they are beginning to do (Matthews & Oh, 2020).

COMPETITIVE ALTERNATIVE MARITIME OPTIONS

As glacial ice melts, arguably on account of global warming caused by climate changes, passages across the Arctic Circle open up, as Figures 6 and 7 below reflect, connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans through the Arctic Circle, thereby bridging Asia with Europe without becoming trapped in Chinese “chokeholds”. This is an emerging opportunity, ice has yet to clear sufficiently to enable vessels of all sizes and weights to cross the Arctic Circle. It has melted enough to render the Arctic region suitable for commerce notwithstanding Russian militarisation thereof. According to a study in The Netherlands, routine sailing of cargo ships across the Arctic Circle will shorten distance and time, with a corresponding reduction of fossil fuels burned in transit together with decongestion of the Suez Canal (Bekkers, Francois & Rojas-Romagosa, 2015). Melting of the Arctic ice facilitates surface ship travel but, of course, that comes at the cost of global warming, sea levels rising, potential storms, forest fires burning. Arctic shipping provides the choice of Asian countries to avoid the bottleneck of the “Near Seas” south of China, but then requires them to confront a potential interference by the Russian Federation or other neighbouring nations with Arctic Ocean coastlines. Although this risk is small with Russia, even smaller with Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Finland, Norway, Sweden, or the United States as Arctic neighbours, it is a risk. Furthermore, in winter months especially, an Arctic crossing is more hazardous than a trip across the Indian Ocean or Mediterranean Sea waterways. At least initially, until cities crop up in the Arctic to service this rising commerce, cost saved in fuel and time may be lost in accidents within a region where rescue efforts may be slower or non-existent over a protracted time period. Trans-Arctic freight cargo shipping does present Asian countries with a viable alternative to the “Near Seas” controlled by China, where commerce from Asia to Europe or from Europe to Asia risks being halted for reasons known best to China as an obstacle to Freedom of the Seas. Behaviour of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Navy (PLAN) across the “Near” Seas confirms suspicion that China cannot be trusted, as the COVID-19 pandemic has done, also.

Exactly what China expects to gain from this malevolent behavior can only be speculated. Currently, Chinese fleets seem to be engaged in ample fishing in the region, but many vessels giving a facial appearance of fishing turn out to be militia patrol craft upon more thorough examination (Polling, 2019). It is likely designed eventually to deter shipping of Japanese or Korean raw materials and finished products to markets in Europe, to confound shipping of raw materials from Africa to industrial competitors of China across Asia such as Japan, Korea and Taiwan in East Asia, the Association of South East Asia Nations (ASEAN) bloc in Southeast Asia. That the Arctic is “open for business” is evidenced by Figure 7 below, charting in reality what Kenneth Roberts portrayed imaginatively in his 1937 novel, *Northwest Passage*, occasioned by melting ice from global warming, creating a 35 day maritime voyage of 7,500 nautical

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miles from Pacific to Atlantic ports, roughly reducing by 1,800 nautical miles the 9,300 nautical mile voyage from East Asia across the "Near" Seas, Indian Ocean, through the Suez Canal, across the Mediterranean Sea. This is without the Chinese hassle in the "Near" Sea region off the coast of Southeast Asia, designed to control commerce as well as to function as forward assets from which to launch missiles thought capable of reaching some United States cities (Panda, 2020). In fact, by rerouting Europe-bound cargo traffic across the Arctic should result in a time savings of 25 percent, reduced from 48 to 36 days, with proportional cost structure savings to Northeast Asian producers of cargo headed to Northeastern, Northern, or Northwestern Europe, compared with the same cargo sailing across the "Near" Seas, Indian Ocean, through the Suez Canal, across the Mediterranean to Western European posts such as Marseilles and Gibraltar, up the Atlantic coastline to Rotterdam, Antwerp, Hamburg, or across to the United Kingdom or Baltic Sea to Gdansk and St. Petersburg.



Figure 6. "Northwest Passage" Across the Arctic Circle, with Russian Fortifications
Source: "Russia Fortifying Bases in Arctic Region," *Heritage Foundation*

Dangers abound within the Arctic Circle, as anywhere else. They will be different. No piracy risk, for example, as on the Mediterranean near North Africa. An exchange of fortifications will be made, avoiding China's, encountering Russia's. If as supposed the Arctic Circle contains vast reserves of energy resources, other precious minerals, seafood ("Arctic Ocean Economy", 2018), Russian will encourage shipping, desiring to sell energy resources plus other products, desiring to sell its energy to Asian markets. Of course, the Arctic Ocean is bordered by a number of other countries besides Russia, another example of the "Balance of International Power" referenced as a concept earlier.

WRITING THE REQUIRED "CHINGBIROK"

From chaotic current freight transportation paradigms in Asia, a "Book of Corrections" or "Record of Reprimands and Admonitions" ["Chingbirok", 懲禁录] is required expeditiously in order to preclude disaster from befalling China's Asian, European,

and North American trading partners such as that which befell Japan during and after its Samurai-led invasion of Chosŏn in Northern Korea from 1592 to 1598 that was called the Imjin War, as part of Japan's ill-fated effort to conquer Korea and Ming Dynasty China at once (Hawley, 2014). Chosŏn's chief state councilor (prime minister), Yu Sŏngnyong, wrote his "Chingbirok" as an aftermath analysis in an effort to warn Asia "never again" to embark upon needless warfare without hope of victory (Yu, Choi, tr., 2002).

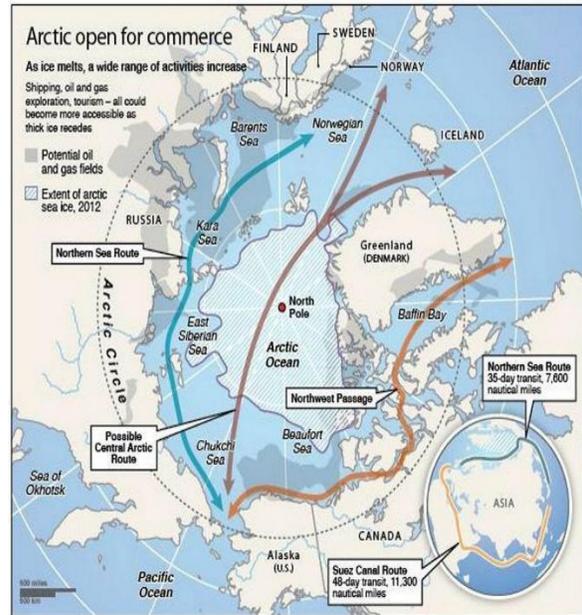


Figure 7. Arctic Circle Maritime Routes
Walker, Edward W. N.d. "Arctic Open for Commerce," *Eurasian Geopolitics*

That is exactly what China appears to be doing at the present time, albeit drawing upon its biological arsenal instead of deploying troops on land, in the air, or on the seas. Chinese leaders have not heeded that admonition from Yu Sŏngnyong. Accordingly, more competitive trade routes coupled with diminished Western markets will make it more evident as a 21st century "Chingbirok" will clarify. This clarification must be written in practice, not words, by China's Asian neighbours and (former?) Western trading partners, acting in unison. A good point of beginning will be to implement competitor trade routes on land and by sea to de-monopolise BRI together with alternative logistical strategies Chinese authorities may have in mind. To not do so will incur an unacceptably high risk of China encircling its Asian neighbours by cutting them off or limiting their access to European goods and markets. Frequently, China is heard to complain of other nations "encircling" it (Jones, 2015), whether they be the United Kingdom acting with India, the United States in collusion with Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, or others. Fortunately, this is becoming reality in the planning of the United States Indo-Pacific Command (Mehta, 2020). The community of nations with interests along the Western Pacific rim and Indian Ocean cannot afford to capitulate to Chinese whimpers in the face of a rapidly-escalating existential threat posed by the current Chinese regime's inability to govern its interior effectively. It cannot be permitted to unilaterally govern external commerce. It is forecasted that "Not Made In China" will be global tech's next big trend (Wu, 2020), and nations should close ranks to make this trend extend beyond the tech giants, reach into every economic sector.

CONCLUSION

Western nations must be joined by China's Asian neighbours in respecting and properly reacting to the "wakeup call" presented by China's gross mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a moment to reassess China's short-, medium-, and long-term aspirations and to reconcile openly whether China's rise is compatible with their own destinies. Asia in general, from Japan and Korea to Taiwan to the ASEAN bloc to India and beyond, including the Russian Federation, stand to become trapped by China's effort to dominate manufacturing as well as distribution of raw materials and finished products. What China calls a "New Silk Road" is merely a cog in the wheel to its own expansionist ideology. Already, China's inept (or deliberate) failure to curtail spread of the COVID-19 has brought industry to a standstill in the United States, Europe, as well as much of the rest of the world even beyond Asia. Rather obviously, Asian and Western nations alike have to detoxify from their addiction to China, Chinese propaganda, and Chinese products. In reacting to events of the Chinese government's making, historically and at the present time, one must take care in what one does and in what one says, not to transfer blame to the Chinese people who have next to no control over their destiny. They are victims also, same as everyone.

Another reason for countries to quickly reduce dependence upon China is to avoid what one might term the "Post-Thucydides' Trap", meaning that if China were to engage in actual warfare with the United States (or be proven to have done so already with the COVID-19 and Harvard Professor Graham Allison's veiled forecast were to come true (Allison, 2017), nations would be wise to avoid coming down on the wrong side of history. America would prevail. Western Allies would draw China into a pincer grip: United States and Europe from East to West, India from the Northwest, Australia and New Zealand from the Southeast, Russian Federation from the North very likely, with China partitioned among the remaining "Great Powers" until it would eventually be returned to the Republic of China, and Chinese global assets to be divided as the spoils of victory by right of conquest.

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