

Belt and Road Lifts Off

On its five-year anniversary, the Belt and Road Initiative is thriving despite challenges



A construction site of a bridge of the China-Laos railway on May 2 in Vientiane, Capital city of Laos

The international cooperation based on the Belt and Road Initiative has made great strides since the initiative was first conceived five years ago.

The initiative, which aims to promote common development, has won wide recognition from the international community. To date, China has signed cooperation deals with more than 100 countries and regions as well as international organizations to jointly advance the Belt and Road Initiative. The core ideas of the initiative have also been accepted and written into the final documents of many important international organizations and institutions including the UN, the G20, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Along with its broad acknowledgment in the world arena, the initiative is also becoming key to China's taking part in global governance and promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

A new type of public goods

Traditional globalization is often referred to as modernization dominated by the West in the World System Theory, but the target of the Belt and Road Initiative is to build a world of common modernization. The World System Theory was

first put forward by U.S. sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, who considered integration and inequality the two most important features in the capitalist world economic system. In his theory, global division of labor and world commodity exchange relations are the two major factors that bind all members of the international community firmly into a huge net that is the world economy. However, integration does not automatically lead to equalization.

The world economy is still in a hierarchical structure consisting of the core, semi-periphery and periphery. Developed countries such as the UK, the United States and Japan are at the core of the system. Some moderately developed countries are on the semi-periphery of the system and a large number of developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and even some Eastern European countries, are on the periphery of the system. With their superior position, those coun-

tries in the core can take advantage of the rest of the countries in both production and exchange.

The Belt and Road Initiative stands for a new type of globalization. With a basic logic of decentralization, it advocates common, fair and inclusive development. Therefore, the initiative is essentially opposed to colonialism, imperialism and hegemonism. In the past five years, the construction of Belt and Road projects demonstrated a noticeable feature: most projects were built in peripheral or semi-peripheral countries, such as the five Central Asian countries and the 16 Central and Eastern European countries. Many of these countries are land-locked nations, like Laos, Ethiopia, the Czech Republic and Kazakhstan. They enjoy few benefits of globalization mostly due to their geographical position. The Belt and Road Initiative, which promotes policy coordination and facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds, can help transform these landlocked nations into land-linked countries, making them indispensable nodes in the globalization grid, which fully embodies the global governance principles of achieving shared growth through discussion and collaboration. The initiative is an excellent example of public goods provided by China to promote world development.

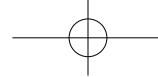
Expanding cooperation

Since the beginning of the year, unsavory comments about the Belt and Road Initiative have been increasing. In contrast to five years ago when critics accused China of exporting excess capacity and competing with the United States for geopolitical supremacy, negative narratives now focus



By Zhao Lei

The author is a professor on world studies with China National School of Administration



on alleged violation of international rules and debt-trap diplomacy of China.

While none of these accusations are well grounded, China needs to readjust its approach as it continues to advance the Belt and Road Initiative.

Many Chinese companies engage in capital-intensive projects overseas such as the Gwadar Port, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor and the China-Belarus Industrial Park. But infrastructure construction is only part of the story. It is equally crucial for China to invest more in sectors such as education, medical care and agriculture so that the Belt and Road Initiative can benefit local people in a more tangible way.

Furthermore, it is unfair that China's performance is too often judged by only Western research institutes. China needs to conduct more quantitative research into the Belt and Road Initiative based on its own indexes. With inclusiveness serving as one of its most essential traits, the initiative is open to different opinions. It is ill-advised either to exaggerate its importance or to reject its achievements.

In addition to research and consulting, it is imperative that China offer premium financing services. For example, in Africa, insufficient funds have long been a bottleneck constraining development on the continent. China can be a reliable partner as it takes a long view. China's investment goals are to help African countries promote indigenous industries so that they can sustain their development. After building roads, ports and power plants, Chinese companies should work to enhance local production capacity. Products can not only meet domestic demand but also can be exported to earn foreign exchange. Institutions that finance this development should be results-oriented and transparent.

Focused on the future

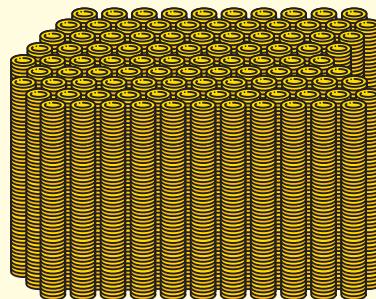
At a symposium marking the fifth anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative on August 27, President Xi Jinping called for efforts to push for progress in projects delivering real benefits to local people, and to keep expanding the market while maintaining trade balance.

He advocated a policy system of financial support for the initiative and encouraged non-governmental fund sources to invest in infrastructure

Looking at Five Years Along the Belt and Road

China's total trade with countries along the Belt and Road in the past five years exceeded

\$5.0 tln



With an annual average growth rate of



China has become the largest trade partner of

25



of these countries

82

overseas economic and trade cooperation zones have been established in countries along the Belt and Road, with an accumulated investment of

\$28.9 bln

The zones have attracted

3,995 enterprises,



creating

\$2 bln

worth of tax revenue for these countries and providing

244,000 local jobs



Trips made by China-Europe freight trains have exceeded

10,000



and reached

43 cities



across

15 European countries



(Source: Ministry of Commerce, designed by Pamela Tobey)

and resource development projects in Belt and Road countries.

Xi pointed out that jointly pursuing the Belt and Road Initiative was not only aimed at economic cooperation but also an important pathway to improve global development patterns and global governance and to promote the healthy development of economic globalization.

Indeed, the Belt and Road Initiative is intended to provide badly needed support to countries along and beyond the ancient Silk Road routes.

China, a developing nation that suffered from backwardness and dire poverty in the past, fully understands the concerns of its partners. It will never attempt to subordinate others, but will always seek win-win outcomes, a value that is in the DNA of the Chinese people. ■



Scan QR code to visit *Beijing Review*'s website
Comments to zanjifang@bjreview.com