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The Historical Connectivity between the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) and the old Silk Route traditions



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In 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative (or BRI), the Chinese President Xi Jinping bestowed upon this name. It is related historically to Old Silk Route Traditions. BRI is also termed as New Silk Road. Both Old and New Silk routes involve extensive trade networks facilitating cultural and economic exchange across different regions. Just like the Silk Route, the objective of BRI is to improve cooperation, connections between nations.

Old Silk Route origins in Han Dynasty (206BCE-220CE), expanding under Emperor Wu's initiative. This ancient trade network connected East and West. This is one of the



oldest and most Influential trade networks in history. The Han Dynasty establishes the Silk Route to facilitate trade with Central Asia and beyond, introducing Chinese silk to the wider world. The name given to this route Silk Road because from 4th century BC to 2nd century AD, the main item in trade was Silk. The Trade route was geopolitically important, so much that every power in region aspired to have dominance on this route. Charles C Mann believe that it was indeed the Asian inventions such as paper, gunpowder, stirrup and moldboard plow which led to the bigger technological innovations in the West. This technology comes to Europe through Silk Road. Land and Sea routes both comes in Silk Route. The Silk Road continues westward into the Roman Empire in first century of the common era. The commerce of silk, spices, precious metals, and other goods is booming during this time. The development and upkeep of the Silk Route, which links the Middle

East, Central Asia, and portions of Europe, are attributed to the advent of the Islamic Caliphates in the seventh century CE. Between the second century BC and eighteenth-century AD, Silk Road fostered contacts in the areas of economy, culture, politics, and religion among several nations.

Ancient Silk Route declined because of shift of commerce to safer marine routes, political unrest along route, the fall of Mongol Empire, the Ottoman Empire's influence, technological developments favoring sea routes, and Age of Exploration, which established maritime dominance.

BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) is a biggest Chinese project announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013. It is currently worlds biggest project.



It aims to improving global connectivity, encouraging economic cooperation in participating countries. Another name for it is the New Silk Road. It involves more than 140 countries. According to widely accepted estimates, China has invested between \$1 trillion and \$8 trillion on the BRI. The economies of BRI comprise about 30% of the world's GDP, 60% of population, 40% of global trade, and 75% of known energy reserves. Often called "Silk Road Economic Belt" and "21st Century Maritime Silk Road," the Belt



and Road Initiative consists of two primary parts. They are frequently summed up as the "Belt" and the "Road," in that order. Each section concentrates on particular regions and seeks to improve connection:

1. **The Silk Road Economic Belt (Belt):**

This part of BRI focuses on infrastructure and overland routes to link China to Europe through Russia, Middle East, and Central Asia. To promote trade, economic cooperation, a network of roads, railroads, and other infrastructure must be built in it.

2. **Marine Silk Road (Road):**

This part of BRI makes marine routes with goal of China's trade ties with Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa, and Europe. It includes building ports and other maritime infrastructure and improving them.

Mainly BRI focus on these:

- **Infrastructure Development:** BRI focuses on building network of railways, highways, ports, and other infrastructure to enhance connectivity.
- **Economic Goals:** Through creation of platform for greater trade and investment, it advances economic development of the participating nations, it encompasses initiatives ranging from telecommunications to energy infrastructure.
- **Trade and Investment Facilitation:** BRI encourage global trade by support investment, cooperative economic activity. It aims to lower trade barriers, open up new markets for member countries.



Consisting of 6 corridors as the major highways, BRI connects different countries and help them work together more closely. BRI corridors will bridge between: a ‘Chinese community’ and a ‘Southeast Asian community’ centered on Bangkok and Singapore; a ‘Central and West Asian community’, a ‘South Asian’ community, or a ‘North Asian’ community. While BRI addresses issue and offers tremendous economic prospects, several participating nations find it difficult to manage the debt resulting from these projects, raising questions about the sustainability of the debt. Large-scale BRI infrastructure projects could have an impact on the environment and raise questions about sustainability. Saying this, Old Silk Road and BRI include soft power and cultural exchange. They have history of direct interactions between people, and cultural exchange across varied regions.

BRI initiatives are meant to promote cooperation, diplomatic links, a shared history, and cultural heritage preservation and exhibition. As a kind of soft power, BRI encourages language acquisition and collaborative learning, encourages media and artistic collaborations. It shall not be wrong to conclude that the Old Silk Road and BRI share common aims, that is, to make international connections, economic cooperation, and cross-cultural exchanges. The Silk Road had connected East and West in ancient times. And, motivated by historic trade routes, the Belt & Road Initiative fosters trade facilitation, infrastructural development, and interpersonal relationships in the present times.