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## CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY UNDER XI JINPING: FROM THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE TO A COMMUNITY WITH A SHARED FUTURE FOR MANKIND

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**Abstract.** The author of the article examines the evolution of China's foreign policy since Xi Jinping's ascension to General Secretary of the Communist party of China Central Committee and subsequent leadership of the country. The analysis centres on Xi Jinping's global cooperation initiatives, specifically the Belt and road initiative and the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind. These initiatives represent significant innovations in China's diplomatic approach. The study concludes that both the Belt and road initiative and the community with a shared future for mankind are predicated on mutually beneficial, responsible, and equitable cooperation. Furthermore, the implementation of these initiatives within the international political framework positions China, under Xi Jinping's leadership, as a predominant actor.

**Keywords:** China; foreign policy; Xi Jinping; community with a shared future for mankind; Belt and road initiative.

## ВНЕШНЯЯ ПОЛИТИКА КИТАЯ В ПЕРИОД ПРЕДСЕДАТЕЛЬСТВА СИ ЦЗИНЬПИНА: ОТ ИНИЦИАТИВЫ «ОДИН ПОЯС, ОДИН ПУТЬ» К СООБЩЕСТВУ ЕДИНОЙ СУДЬБЫ ЧЕЛОВЕЧЕСТВА

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**Аннотация.** Рассматривается внешнеполитический курс Китая после избрания Си Цзиньпина генеральным секретарем ЦК Коммунистической партии Китайской Народной Республики, а затем Председателем Китайской Народной Республики. Анализируются выдвинутые Си Цзиньпином инициативы по глобальному сотрудничеству, а именно инициатива «Один пояс, один путь» и концепт сообщества единой судьбы человечества, которые рассматриваются как примечательные новации внешней политики Китая. В результате исследования определено, что в основу инициативы «Один пояс, один путь» и концепта сообщества единой судьбы человечества положен принцип взаимовыгодного, ответственного, равноправного сотрудничества. При этом в процессе их имплементации в систему мировой политики главенствующая роль отведена Китаю во главе с Си Цзиньпином.

**Ключевые слова:** Китай; внешняя политика; Си Цзиньпин; сообщество единой судьбы человечества; инициатива «Один пояс, один путь».

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## Introduction

The foreign policy landscape of China has undergone significant transformations since Xi Jinping assumed the role of General Secretary of the Communist party of China in 2012 and subsequently became President of the People's Republic of China in 2013.

The era of progressive reforms and adaptation to the evolving geopolitical landscape, which characterised China's foreign policy in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, has transitioned to a more assertive and dynamic engagement in shaping the international order. China has moved away from a detached stance on global issues, actively initiating revisions to established international norms. A complex interplay of factors, including a reassessment of the China's role in global politics and the increasing complexity of international cooperation and rivalry, has prompted the new Chinese leadership to revise the nation's global positioning strategies fundamentally.

Xi Jinping's tenure has introduced greater diversity into China's diplomatic efforts with ambitious, long-term objectives. Central to these efforts are the Belt and road initiative (BRI) and the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, representing key pillars of China's redefined foreign policy strategy.

Xi Jinping's official reports, abstracts, and speeches, particularly those concerning the BRI and the shared future concept, are essential for understanding China's current strategic foreign policy direction. These pronouncements articulate China's foreign policy vectors, aims, and objectives, revealing the leadership's stance

on pressing issues in contemporary international relations. They also clarify the principles underpinning China's strategy for international cooperation. Consequently, addressing the conceptualisation of China's foreign policy guidelines during the Xi Jinping era and examining the intricate interplay between the BRI and the community with a shared future for mankind constitutes a critical area of inquiry within international relations scholarship.

Some Belarusian political scientists (J. I. Malevich and I. A. Chuvilov [1], A. M. Baichorov [2], K. I. Yarmoshuk [3]) have examined China's foreign policy, including the BRI and the shared future concept, exploring various contentious aspects of China's international role, including its expanding global influence, competition with other major powers, and bilateral relations. Guo Jinlong's [4] studies examine the challenges and prospects associated with the BRI. Zhang Weiwei's [5] offers seminal interpretations of China's current policy, emphasising the significance of civilisational and humanitarian factors in shaping China's international strategy. Despite these scholarly contributions, the evolving dynamics of the BRI and the community with a shared future necessitate further rigorous academic scrutiny, given their ongoing development and the emergence of new priorities in China's foreign policy.

This article identifies the salient features of implementing the BRI and the shared future concept within China's foreign policy under Xi Jinping.

## The Belt and road initiative in China's foreign policy during the Xi Jinping era

China's foreign policy directives are mainly articulated through Xi Jinping's speeches and pronouncements. Chinese diplomatic practice typically involves disseminating core foreign policy concepts, forms, and methods, initially presented by state officials, with Xi Jinping often introducing new international initiatives and programmes.

One of the China's most consequential proposals for transforming inter-state relations and international organisations is the BRI. It was first unveiled to the global community during Xi Jinping's official visits to Kazakhstan and Indonesia in the autumn of 2013.

The BRI traces its origins to the Great Silk Road, which historically united multiple regions within China and facilitated the growth of trade, economic, and cultural exchanges. «More than 2100 years ago, during the Han Dynasty, the diplomat Zhang Qian – renowned in Chinese history – undertook two peaceful and friendly missions to Central Asia, thereby establishing contacts between China and Central Asian states and laying the foundations for the Great Silk Road from East to West, connecting Europe with Asia» stated Xi Jinping in his 2013 address in Astana [6, p. 187].

Xi Jinping further elaborated at Nazarbayev University: «For millennia, along this ancient Silk Road, peoples from diverse nations have co-authored narratives of friendship passed down through generations. Our two-thousand-year history of engagement demonstrates that by adhering to principles of solidarity and mutual trust, equality and reciprocity, tolerance and exchange of experiences, cooperation and shared benefits, countries with distinct ethnic, religious, and cultural characteristics can coexist peacefully and prosper collectively. This is the invaluable concept that the ancient Great Silk Road imparts to us»<sup>1</sup> [6, p. 388].

The BRI inherits the peaceful ethos of the ancient Silk Road and seeks to foster amicable, equitable, and mutually advantageous relations among its participants. Simultaneously, it addresses contemporary international realities, including emerging global threats. As A. M. Baichorov observes, China's role in world politics has transformed significantly [2, p. 14]. China consciously advocates for a novel path of international development to mitigate negative trends in the global economy, resolve conflicts, and establish new principles of global multilateral cooperation.

<sup>1</sup>Hereinafter translated by us. – *I. Ch.*

Xi Jinping's BRI is advancing along multiple trajectories. One primary dimension of the BRI is economic cooperation, emphasising equitable partnerships among participating states and international organisations. As part of the initiative, China is undertaking numerous infrastructure projects to enhance the prosperity of populations in the Belt and road area, particularly in Southeast Asia, Africa, and Central Asia.

For example, trade relations between China and the countries of Western and Central Asia have intensified significantly as the BRI progresses. Since the beginning of 2024, rail freight volume to Kashgar for transit has surged, exceeding 100 000 – a 53 300-ton increase year-on-year<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, logistical collaboration between China and European nations has shown positive trends. From 2016 to 2023, the annual number of China – Europe freight train departures surged from 1702 to over 17 000, with the value of transported goods increasing substantially from 8 to 56.7 bln US dollars<sup>3</sup>. The diversity of products transported has expanded to over 50 000 items, including electronics such as laptops and printers, apparel and footwear, vehicles and spare parts, essential goods, food, timber, furniture, chemicals, and equipment<sup>4</sup>.

Beyond economic cooperation, the BRI also aims to consolidate a shared political development strategy, aimed at strengthening political ties and enhancing diplomatic engagement among participating countries.

The first Belt and road forum for international cooperation exemplifies the interest of contemporary states and international organisations in engaging with the BRI. The inaugural forum in 2017 outlined the initiative's priorities and China's approach to multilateral collaboration. The second forum, held in 2019 under the theme of inclusive and high-quality growth through enhanced coordination, attracted over 5000 participants from more than 150 countries and 90 international organisations, including the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations<sup>5</sup>. Through these forums, China demonstrated its commitment to exploring new cooperative frameworks and articulated a vision for an international order rooted in mutual respect, national interests, and comprehensive collaboration.

At the third forum in 2023, Xi Jinping summarised the BRI's first decade: «This year marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative I proposed. The BRI, drawing inspiration from the ancient Silk Road and focusing on enhancing connectivity, aims to improve po-

licity, infrastructure, trade, financial, and people-to-people contacts, inject new impetus into the global economy, create new opportunities for global development, and build a new platform for international economic cooperation. Over these ten years, we have remained committed to this founding mission. Thanks to our joint efforts, Belt and road international cooperation has been launched, expanded rapidly, and produced fruitful outcomes. Belt and road collaboration has extended from the Eurasian continent to Africa and Latin America. More than 150 countries and more than 30 international organisations have signed Belt and road cooperation agreements. We have held two previous BRFs and established over 20 specialised multilateral cooperation platforms under the BRI»<sup>6</sup>.

China's political cooperation has gained particular momentum with African and Asian nations, while ties with European states are strengthening steadily within the BRI framework. Italy, for example, had long shown interest and joined in 2019 – even though it later suspended its participation in 2023, citing productive and effective bilateral cooperation with China outside the BRI framework [7, p. 216]. According to Guo Jinlong, China generally seeks to cultivate friendships with developing countries while strengthening partnerships with Europe [4, p. 224].

In the summer of 2024, Chinese Vice Prime Minister Ding Xuexiang and Luxembourg's deputy Prime Minister Xavier Bettel affirmed their commitment to expanding bilateral cooperation within the BRI framework in a statement issued during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Zhengzhou – Luxembourg «Air Silk Road» international cooperation forum held in Luxembourg<sup>7</sup>.

Humanitarian cooperation constitutes the third pillar of the BRI. China views this framework as an opportunity to develop educational, cultural, and scientific ties with international partners. Through such projects, China introduces the global community to its history, culture, and philosophy.

Confucius institutes play a pivotal role in this domain by offering opportunities for individuals worldwide to learn the Chinese language and engage with Chinese traditions.

China's humanitarian cooperation with Africa has intensified significantly, culminating in the agreement to designate 2026 as the Year of Chinese-African cultural and humanitarian exchanges<sup>8</sup>. China supports African

<sup>2</sup>Since the beginning of 2024, 100 freight train departures have been recorded within the framework of mixed freight transportation «China – Kyrgyzstan – Uzbekistan» [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://russian.news.cn/20240728/b7c9f8ae8a3243d3894e0e52f02a8241/c.html> (date of access: 11.09.2024) (in Russ.).

<sup>3</sup>The number of China – Europe freight train departures exceeded 90 thousand [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://russian.news.cn/20240525/331b487630914525a630ce96cfe1e149/c.html> (date of access: 11.09.2024) (in Russ.).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Belt and road forum opens in Beijing with Russia's participation [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/6373631> (date of access: 12.09.2024) (in Russ.).

<sup>6</sup>Full text of Xi Jinping's keynote speech at 3<sup>rd</sup> Belt and road forum for international cooperation [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://english.news.cn/20231018/7bfc16ac51d443c6a7a00ce25c972104/c.html> (date of access: 12.09.2024).

<sup>7</sup>Chinese Vice Prime Minister, Luxembourg deputy Prime Minister agree to expand Belt and road cooperation [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://russian.news.cn/20240622/33ccd32a0b0f4405805c1ed45e3babd7/c.html> (date of access: 12.09.2024) (in Russ.).

<sup>8</sup>Xi Jinping says China is ready to implement 10 partnership action plans with Africa to jointly advance modernisation cooperation [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://russian.peopledaily.com.cn/n3/2024/0906/c31521-20215672.html> (date of access: 17.09.2024) (in Russ.).

nations through scientific and educational initiatives, contributing to improved educational standards through activities such as school construction and the establishment of Confucius institutes.

Overall, the BRI encompasses multiple vectors for China's international engagement, primarily focusing on economic, political, and humanitarian cooperation.

### **A community with a shared future for mankind: China's international cooperation under Xi Jinping**

Concurrent with the BRI, China is advancing the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, representing a logical extension of the BRI's political and humanitarian dimensions. Xi Jinping leads in advocating this concept within the international relations framework.

Xi Jinping's advocacy for the shared future concept stems from the recognition of interdependence among the modern states: «With the continued development of multipolarity, economic globalisation, and the informatisation of society, the interests, fates, and security of all countries have become intertwined. Consequently, a community with a shared future for mankind has emerged...» [8, p. 129].

In promoting this idea, China under Xi Jinping seeks to establish a new paradigm of international relations: «China calls on the world to jointly build a community with a shared future for mankind, to create a new type of international relations, the core of which will be mutually beneficial cooperation. We firmly advocate the democratisation of international relations, adhere to a correct understanding of justice and benefit, and firmly advocate the peaceful resolution of inter-state differences and conflicts through dialogue and consultations. We will work with all states to protect world peace, defend equality and justice, and promote shared prosperity» [8, p. 340].

Zhang Xiao, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China to the Republic of Kazakhstan observed that «building the community with a shared future for mankind consolidates the greatest common denominator of the desire of people of all countries to build a better world, pointing out the right direction for human society leading to common development, lasting peace and stability, security and mutual enrichment of civilisations»<sup>9</sup>. The diplomat further sta-

This multifaceted approach allows China to diversify its relations with other states, addressing all critical sectors. Furthermore, the initiative is evolving to include novel dimensions such as the Green Silk Road, Air Silk Road, and Digital Silk Road. These new formats serve to consolidate the interests of the participating nations further.

ted: «The ultimate goal of the concept of the community with a shared future is to create a clean and beautiful world where universal security, shared prosperity, openness and inclusivity prevail»<sup>10</sup>.

Professor of Shanghai University of Political Science and Law Wang Qingping contends that building a community with a shared future for mankind necessitates unity, action, and cooperation among diverse peoples, cultures, and regions. It offers a significant solution to the challenges of human destiny, yet it requires gradual progress in alignment with historical development's logic and laws [9, p. 127]. Chinese scholar Wang Xin identifies one of the foundational principles of this concept as openness and cooperation, which underscores the importance of collective efforts among nations and peoples to build an open global economy and foster sustainable social development [10, p. 66].

The community with a shared future for mankind prioritises humanitarian cooperation between China and its international partners, emphasising civilisational development and cultural understanding. In constructing this community, China utilises soft power, a hallmark of its foreign policy under Xi Jinping.

Furthermore, China explicitly links the BRI to the shared future concept. A 2023 document «The Belt and road initiative: a key pillar of the global community of shared future», states: «China stands ready to work with other countries to pursue closer and more fruitful cooperation under the BRI framework, implement the Global development initiative, the Global security initiative, and the Global civilisation initiative, and build an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity. Our goals are to pass on the torch of peace from generation to generation, sustain development, ensure that civilisations flourish, and build a global community of a shared future»<sup>11</sup>.

### **Conclusions**

China's foreign policy under Xi Jinping is distinguished by several key international initiatives. Foremost among these is the BRI, which has enabled China

to enhance its standing within the global economic system while establishing robust political and humanitarian ties with numerous states and international

<sup>9</sup>Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China to the Republic of Kazakhstan Zhang Xiao published an article on the topic «Building the community with a shared future for mankind and promoting a bright future for peace, security, prosperity and progress» [Electronic resource]. URL: [http://kz.china-embassy.gov.cn/rus/sgxx/sgdt/202401/t20240123\\_11231051.htm](http://kz.china-embassy.gov.cn/rus/sgxx/sgdt/202401/t20240123_11231051.htm) (date of access: 21.09.2024) (in Russ.).

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>The Belt and road initiative: a key pillar of the global community of shared future [Electronic resource]. URL: [http://gd.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zxhd\\_1/202310/t20231011\\_11159072.htm](http://gd.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zxhd_1/202310/t20231011_11159072.htm) (date of access: 21.09.2024).



organisations. The community with a shared future for mankind emerges as China's primary model for international relations under Xi Jinping's leadership. This concept not only complements the political and humanitarian dimensions of the BRI but also provides the international community with alternative frameworks for collaboration. Contemporary China has emerged as a formidable global power, with the influence of the

Communist party of China significantly strengthened under Xi Jinping's guidance.

In recent years, Xi Jinping has introduced additional cooperative frameworks, namely the Global civilisation initiative and the Global security initiative. Collectively, these initiatives underscore the continuity of China's political strategy and reflect the confidence of the Chinese in Xi Jinping's policies on the international stage.

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