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Between Need Makers and Service Provider:

China's Globalisation of
Infrastructural Development
and Emerging Global Order

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that China's globalization of infrastructural development is nuancing our present understanding of development, shifting its construct from a West-centric, need-based model to a Chinese version of development and consequently making a pathway for the emergence of a global order crafted in China's own image. By way of analysis, it also demonstrates how Chinese infrastructural development is steadily flattening the world (infrastructurally) and re-enacting the Fly Geese Model in a Chinese paradigm, particularly in China's immediate environs, Africa, and even in Europe. The paper joins the body of epistemic discourse which explores whether China should be labelled a revisionist state. Premised on its globalisation of infrastructural development, this paper argues that China cannot be equated as a revisionist state as Beijing is not embarked on the radical emasculation of the liberal world order, but is instead steadily revising (through behavioural disposition) how things should be done – particularly the systemic restructuring of global organization order. Methodologically, the paper employs a qualitative approach and analytically presents its arguments.

Introduction hassle

Change is true for life, and the same holds true for international affairs. In his seminal *Muqadimah*, Ibn Khaldun exposed the lacunas and vulnerabilities of states and empires. According to Ibn Khaldun, the rise and fall of historical political entity depends on the strength and weakness of *asabiyah* – i.e. ‘solidarity’, ‘group feeling’, ‘group consciousness’, and ‘social capital’ (Ibn Khaldun, 1989). Invariably, the fall of one leads to the rise of another, as demonstrated by the Kondratieff and Modelski cycles and has been eloquently elucidated by way of Wallerstein’s world system analysis (Taylor & Flint, 2000). By employing a historical approach, Kennedy (1990) also painted a similar picture in his rise and fall of great powers. While the author agrees that this may present a reductionist approach, this paper tends to use the end of the World War II – leading to the rise of the American century or the incontestable global power of the Americans – to prompt further discussion. The end of the Europeanisation of the world, which also corresponds to the end of the Second World War, was not merely the opening of Pax Americana (Layne, 2012), but also simultaneously paved the way for a bipolar world order, though the post-1945 international world order nonetheless largely bears the signature of Washington, be it in the areas of jurisprudence (Garth, 2008), economy, politics etc. Amongst the peculiarities of global powers is that they matured, climaxed in their hegemonic expansionism, subsequently suffered diminishing returns due to overreach, and eventually declined (Brands, 2022; Layne 2012; Ikenberry, 2008). Other than by way of their military might, global powers also strengthen their hegemony through the institutionalization of order and their collective goals, predicated on multilateralism. The proclivity of the then administration of President Trump to challenge multilateralism raises the question of Washington’s international commitment and readiness to maintain its status based on collective – i.e. global – support. Prior to Trump, observers such as Layne have argued and exposed the void in Pax Americana and how Western decline became inevitable (Layne, 2012); a similar argument underscores Brands’s (2022) exposition of US power, in which he asks: “does America have more rivals than it can handle?” Even when it is becoming increasingly evident that Washington’s hegemonic superiority is in decline and is simultaneously facing multiple challenges from different quarters, both at home and abroad, scholars like Khan continue to argue against such discussions of American decline (Khan, 2012).

The erosion of power from the West and the emergence of new global powerhouses is a burgeoning discourse within the field of international relations and security studies. The rise of trans-continental organisations such as the BRIC, for instance, have significantly contributed to this debate of rising powers, with certain commentators expressing concerns that the BRIC “will alter or destabilise the existing international system” (Mansfield et al., 2014, pp. 437-438). The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) was a victim of similar concerns, as Memon argues that the SCO “provides institutional legitimacy to China’s expanding role, and stake, in Central Asia’s security” (Menon, 2013, p.25), and that – in collaboration with Russia – China uses the sSCO to legitimize itself as a power in Central Asia and beyond.

Meanwhile, the rebounding of Russia in global politics (Bakare, 2020) and the emergence of China, with its economic, military, and international diplomatic rise, emboldens the looming discourse of a global power shift of power eastward (Hoge, Jr., 2004). As is always the case with a hegemon, fearful of being displaced, China’s rise on the global stage is received with mixed sentiments (Bakare, 2021). Ikenberry (2008, p. 23) considers this to be “one of the great dramas of the twenty-first century...” and as China’s rise becomes increasingly difficult for the west to ignore, competition between Beijing and Washington will further deepen and will be increasingly likely to polarise the world, divided between the competing US and Chinese spheres (Ikenberry, 2008, p. 35). In this changing context the fundamental question is, ‘what if China wins’? Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Francis Fukuyama (1992) dubbed the end of the Cold War the ‘End of History’; twenty years after Fukuyama’s sweeping assessment that the ascendancy of the US in the Cold War lead “not just...(to) the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as

such: That is, the end-point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government”, history is once again unfolding with the rise of China on the international stage. Given Fukuyama’s comments, the present question is, will China’s spectacular rise become the ‘Start of History’ and signal a new dawn in global politics?

China’s exponential growth has been described as its own form of exceptionalism; however, more exceptional is its Belt and Road Initiative – otherwise known as OBOR – ‘One Belt One Road’ – the series of mega projects at the core of which is infrastructural development geared towards connecting the world through maritime, road, and rail routes, in order to revive the historical Silk Route (Bakare, 2021). Since the initiative’s inception, stakeholders in geopolitical and geo-economic domains have expressed mounting concerns and interest in China’s BRI. For a better perspective on this Chinese initiative, this paper argues that China's globalisation of infrastructure development is nuancing our understanding of development, shifting the construct of development from a West-centric, need-based model to a Chinese version of development and consequently making a pathway for the emergence of a global order crafted in China’s own image. With the BRI representing China’s strategy of globalizing its world order – flattening the world through infrastructural development, the proceeding discussion will enunciate a few of the distinguishing factors characterizing the need-driven western world order, as well as a characterization of the emerging Chinese world order.

Need-driven Western world order

The Western need-driven world order is ideological, ideational, power-driven, and intellectually supported. This model is based on two types of actors: the first thinks, believes, and considers itself to be the custodian of intuition, the beacon of civility, and the bearer of exclusive knowledge and responsibility, whose existential essence is to instruct the second category of what it needs, even when the latter does not ask nor demonstrate any disposition to seek help. To understand how this order operates, the following section examines its different labels, constitutions, and components. This form of world array is as multifaceted and complex as the global order itself, including but not limited to institutional necessity, developmental plans, and political and economic frameworks.

Label of uncivility and traditional societies

The need creation liberal world order stretches back to the era of colonialism. As an epochal status-quo, colonialism in its ideological and politico-economic disposition was considered a ‘Whiteman’s burden’ and the ‘Manifest destiny’ of Euro-America, not just to lead the world, but to cleanse the ‘other’ – ‘subjugated colonies’ of barbarism, savagery, and uncultured temperament – and to spread civility amongst them (Eustace, 2008; Thiranagama et al., 2018; Wills, 2022). Such characterization of these societies has been further refined to suggest traditional societies, often referred to as indigenous or tribal peoples, are largely driven by religious and tribal identity (Voas, 2015) and defined by collectivism as a cultural pattern, in contrast to individualism in western Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand (Triandis, 2015). Such labelling becomes the binary lens and analytical tool through which societies outside the Western world are construed and analytically associated with backwardness. Against this backdrop, these societies are believed to cogently need ‘modernity’ in order to drive them towards the shores of progress or to attain some semblance of western society – as Ken Shaw puts it “successful progress towards modernity and economic success in many societies”. (Shaw, 2006, p.179). The architecture of colonialism (ideational, ideological, and politico-economic) demonstrates the profoundness of the Euro-America need creation world order, one purportedly possessed of exclusive knowledge and premised on Naeem Inayatullah’s question – Why do some people think they know what is good for others? (Inayatullah, 2014).

Institutional and political stability need

Epistemologically, Huntington (2006) and his subsequent adherents identify societies in the derogated developing nations (global south) as being devoid of political order, simply in their assertion – for lacking adaptable, coherent political institutions, effective bureaucracies, well-organized political parties, a high degree of popular participation in public affairs... and controlling political conflict. Following the legacy of his mentor, Fukuyama (2011; 2015) offered a subtler historical analysis of political order, presenting the liberal democratic state as an ideal form of government and arguing for the need for – and why some societies are found wanting in terms of – political order and system and institutional stability. Similarly, Diamond (2009) views the need in the form of governance, without which the fruition of economic growth is in jeopardy.

Economic and development need

Political stability and economic growth – i.e. development – have become inextricably intertwined in the liberal world order, with the progression of modern societies largely measured on the degree and fruition of the two (i.e. political stability and economic growth). While there is a wealth of scholarship on this line of thinking, simultaneously working papers, policy statements, and international and regional regimes have instrumentally helped in driving the need for this economic order, particularly in the post- World War II era, when the conception of development became a buzzword, and has since continued to gain traction. For instance, soon after the Second World War, Walt Rostow's five stages of growth became a celebrated analytical lens, offering a dynamic theory of growth through which nations, particularly traditional societies, are tutored on how to attain economic maturity, security, high mass-consumption, and a blossom economy (Rostow, 2013). Another economic ideologue of the time was Milton Friedman, whose theorisation upheld creating need, in the form of economic theory, for others. Not only did Friedman present a free market and monetary theorisation; advocating for free-trade, smaller government, private enterprise, competitive market economy, non-regulatory system, and a monetary policy that allows for the steady increase of money supply (Summer, 2015); he equally avowed that these are the essential preconditions for freedom. One can infer from Friedman's assertion, therefore, that societies devoid of his characterisation of capitalism must be helped – they need to be rescued from the system that undermines freedom. It is no wonder, then, that Friedman and his 'Chicago Boys' experimented with the 'needed liberal capitalism' in Chile – the success of which is contestable (Ashford, 2010; Klein, 2010).

At the heart of the bifurcation of the world – developed and under-developing – is the polarizing idea of technological and economic change, incorporated into the notion of development. The latter is represented by national growth or modernization and is characterized by “increasing economic productivity, increasing geographic and social mobility, and increasing political efficiency” (Organski, 1965, p. 6). Arguably, one of the key politico-economic outcomes of the end of the Second World War was the advocacy of development as a global need. Aside from being religiously propagated, developmental advocacy is equally ideological and politically institutionalised. Over the preceding period the Washington-based international financial institutions (IFIs), including the World Bank and the IMF, have become tools of need creation. These institutions have become renowned for their conditionality, recommendations, and application of functionality as a regime (Little, 2011), as well as their decision-making power and sanction prerogative which, when initiated, is often construed as a sovereign threat and intrusion by affected states (Krasner, 2001; Williams, 2000). Analysts such as Jotia (2011, p.246) have argued that, under the guise of globalization and institutionalism, “unjust and plethoric economic injustices pursued by institutions such as the IMF, WB (World Bank) as well as the WTO” have undermined and limited the powers of nation-states, particularly those in the global south. Stiglitz's assessment of these institutions shows that, inasmuch as the national economy is regulated by international institutions, there could be an adverse effect, characterised by broken promises and unfair practices, all because, according to Stiglitz, these institutions

lack transparency and accountability. The modus operandi of these IFIs, and their interactions with client states, is a one-way process – a power relation wherein the clients are subject to the instructions of these institutions. To this end, Stiglitz argues that they (IFIs) “failed to allow for desirable government interventions in the market, measures which can guide economic growth and make everyone better off” (Stiglitz, 2002, p.4). This argument has been reinforced by David Williams in his analytical study on Sub-Saharan Africa-World Bank relations (Williams, 2003). Regardless of the grave issues these IFIs present, however, one thing is indisputable – these institutions have significantly advanced the cause of development.

Other than these institutions, the Washington Consensus – a set of overarching economic policy recommendations for developing countries, is another pivotal point of reference. Since its inception, the consensus has been a matter of controversy underpinning the dictatorial need creation liberal world order. Analysing the consensus, Lopes (2012, p.69) argues that it “dictated most of the solutions proposed by international financial organizations.” Tellingly, in the words of John Williamson, who coined the term ‘Washington Consensus’, the consensus is framed as “policies towards their client countries of the Washington-based international financial institutions” (Williamson, 2004, p.195). A further reading of some of the practices and conducts of the IFIs and, even to a degree the Consensus itself, reiterates Inayatullah’s (2014) question: Why do some people think they know what is good for others?

Numerous academics have exposed the failure of the consensus in Africa, principally because it was not driven by the intention of service provision but by a need creation policy instead. Archibong, Coulibaly, and Okonjo-Iweala (2021) have argued that the consensus “failed to improve socioeconomic conditions in African countries for several reasons due to, among others, the failure to account for political economy within countries, and the politics of conditionality and reforms that did not adequately emphasize the role of local ownership in domestic economic policy.” Meanwhile, Williamson (2002) opines that the results of the consensus on Latin America was far from being forthcoming, but instead was rather disappointing in terms of its effects on growth, employment, and poverty reduction. These are all marketable ideas, imposed on peripheral and semi-peripheral states, whose influence has swayed these nations into a long and ‘unachievable’ race of catch-up with the developed economies (Lee, 2016; Lee -J, 2021; Nayyar, 2013; Suehiro, 2008) and transitioning from development to capitalism (Radice, 2011).

Emerging Chinese World Order

The emergence of any world order is an aggregate – and an amalgam – of many factors, both domestic and external, and the emerging ‘Chinese world order’ is neither an exemption nor a departure from this tradition. As has been the case for earlier such orders, the Chinese world order stems from its domestic configuration, intellectual and elite trajectory, its national character – i.e. ethno-nationalism, civilizational projection, the Chinese image of itself, and how China sees the rest of the world, all of which culminate into what some scholars have christened Chinese exceptionalism (Bakare, 2021). While there are shared commonalities and values amongst the world orders, there is nonetheless no insinuation that every order is characteristically unexceptional – ideologically, content wise, and with reference to its modus operandi. It is essential to state briefly what differentiates the emerging Chinese world order from its predecessors.

Firstly, the Chinese argue that China’s global positioning is rooted in its civilisational heritage, characterized by the non-militarisation of economic interests – such as in the case of expansionism, reminiscent of the tactics seen in European colonization whereby trade was followed by an assertion of political control over resource rich areas under the rubric of civilizational exceptionalism (Whiteman's burden); political non-interference in the sovereign matters of foreign states; an emphasis on 'morality' in leadership structures; building upon critiques of the liberal international order (LIO); abstention from exporting a 'China model' of governance, or replacing existing institutions by ending the prevalent LIO, but rather by way of shaping them in a way that enables Chinese participation and benefit

along with benefits (albeit disproportionate) to partner states from the Global South; and by seeking 'win-win' collaborations (the distribution or ratio of which depends upon the sagacity of the trading partner).

Secondly, relations with the outside world, is a common denominator of world order, posing the question what is the relationship between China and the rest of the world? Despite all critiques, evidence of Chinese globalization of infrastructure development does not indicate any form of direct imposition; rather “China claims that its globalist agenda is a win-win game that is predicated on the idea that human beings share a common destiny and hence, this raises the need for a common and indiscriminating developmental trajectory” (Bakare, 2021, p.22). Through its own version of flattening the world, China claims that its form of world order is harmonious, non-intrusive, voluntary, participatory, and discretionary on the part of the participating country. Though transactional, it is nonetheless predicated upon mutual benefits – a win-win and a testimony to “successful domestic policies and successful diplomacy of China, which by extension underscores China's current global prominence” (Bakare, 2021, p.22; Womack, 2013). Underlying the difference between the Chinese and Western order, Yoweri Museveni, President of Uganda, argues that “Africa has been having problems for the last 600 years due to the slave trade, colonialism, neocolonialism — and none of it was from China. They do not impose their offers if you do not want them, so we have not seen a problem for now. Maybe a problem in the future, but not now” (Xinhua, 2022).

Thirdly, there is a stark distinction between the propositions ‘what do you want / I can do this for you’, and ‘this is what you need’. Critics may argue that both are two sides of same coin but upon closer examination, through the nature, level, and scope of interaction between the interacting parties, the two can clearly be distinguished. Based on certain irrefutable parameters, Europe and America have always represented themselves as the trademark of initiative, possessing exclusive knowledge of civility, knowing what is good for others (Inayatullah, 2014), with this proclivity historically traceable back to colonialism. By contrast, the emerging Chinese order is service rendering-oriented, as identified by Bakare (2021, p.26) where he states that “China is ostensibly rendering international services in the shape of infrastructure development. Its supporters consider China as development messiah and its economic globalisation as a strategy tailored at uplifting the marginalised periphery of the world from the challenges of development.”

Fourthly, over the preceding years China has been associated with the promotion of mega projects, considered by critics as cloaked with the intention of instituting debt traps (Jain, 2019; Rajah, Dayant, & Pryke, 2019). The question of debt and its attendant consequence – dependency (Bradshaw, 1991; Lopes, 2012) – is not novel; rather such has been synonymous with the global south and has protractedly defined the power relations between the global north and south (Nygård, 2020; Wood, 1984). This intractable and perennial crisis explicates the debt sustainability framework (DSF) – an initiative of the WB and IMF that allows “multilateral institutions and other creditors to assess risks to debt sustainability in Lower-Income Countries (LICs) (The World Bank, nd). To this end, even if China’s projects were fraught with debt and debt diplomacy, an assertion initiated by a think tank in northern India but debunked by (Brautigam, 2020; Jones & Hameiri, 2020), suffice to assert that China would be as criminal as the Euro-American powers and institutions in terms of such debt trap policies. Further, there is a marked difference between the current and historical nature of debt; while Euro-American debt is largely lost in consumption, government spending, and corruption, by contrast through the BRI China is nuancing the idea of development and debt, in that even when countries are indebted to China, such debts are sustainable, tangible and measurable in the form of infrastructure – hence productive assets. Another unique aspect of Chinese debt, as underscored by one observer of China’s international engagement, is that in debt distress some further borrowing (from China) for growth stimulating projects might still be in order. Arguably, the latter further supports the notion of Chinese world order as service-oriented, differing from a dictatorial – need-making liberal world order. Additionally, the dynamics of lending between the liberal and Chinese systems bear a degree of variation. Western loans/credits are subject to a

variety of conditionalities, such as institutional development, democracy, human rights and economic development, all of which are undoubtedly recipes for national growth. By contrast, China's loans/credits are particularly directed at infrastructure development, political 'non-interference', and economic development. Despite overwhelming criticism of Chinese global political economy, scant literature exists demonstrating 'factual and direct' political interference and cooption of a country's economy through debt trap policies by China (Brautigam, 2020; Jones & Hameiri, 2020).

Fifthly, the Beijing Consensus is the Chinese version of the Washington Consensus. Since being coined by Ramo in 2004, the idea has generated considerable debate as to whether China's notion of development should be considered dominant and more sustainable (Williamson, 2012). Unlike its predecessor, the Beijing Consensus emphasises China's development experience, "highlighting its emphasis on innovation and experimentation, sustainability and equality, and self-determination in designing and implementing socioeconomic policies" (Liu, 2019). Glaringly, the Chinese experience is a fundamental volte face in our understanding and depiction of development. China has shown the world that development models can be non-Western, successful, and predicated on one's own historical experiences.

Chinese Service Provision World Order: Flattening the World

Joining the league of global powers, China now maintains the status of second largest global economy, a formidable GDP, nontrivial diplomatic clout, financial buoyancy, military strength, and scientific and intellectual ascendance. Beyond these feats, Beijing is nuancing the construct of development, re-enacting the Fly Geese Model through a Chinese lens, and offering China's Port-Park-City (PPC) development Model – known as the Shekou Model (Gong, 2020, p.79) – within and outside China. The Shekou Model is a successful Chinese development model, which transformed the old and impoverished fishing village of Shekou, Shenzhen, into an industrial, cosmopolitan, and wealthy park and city.

The emerging 'Chinese world order' has crafted a unique niche for itself, an attempt to flatten world through global infrastructure development dubbed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – diametrically opposed to Thomas Friedman's conception of a flat world (Friedman, 2005). Through its globalisation of infrastructural development, China is not only crafting its own unique version of global order, it is equally distinguishing between a need-driven and a service provision world order. The following discussion unpacks this aspect of the Chinese world order, and its manifestation in Africa, Europe, and South- and Southeast Asia.

It is now common knowledge that China's BRI-related actions represent a strategic effort to improve China's diplomatic, economic, and security interests (Mobley, 2019). Though critics of China consider the projects as Beijing's global strategy for gaining access to or establishing new ports with the potential to serve commercial and military purposes (Mobley, 2019; Vergun, 2020), for China this represents a new model of global development, geared at the revival of the Old Silk Route while developing new trade routes connecting varied geographies, to ensure that no state is left behind developmentally.

Chinese infrastructure development in Africa

Africa has a long tradition of being a contested geography whose resources have largely shaped the construct and perception of invited and uninvited global powers towards the continent. Like many invited and uninvited global powers, critics of China argue that Beijing's primary interest in the region is resource driven. For a variety of domestic and structural reasons, despite its abundance resources, the continent of Africa is comparatively behind other continents in terms of infrastructural development. This poses the question of the ultimate utility of existing international financial institutions; despite numerous claims of aiding African development, the continent remains particularly challenged by insufficient infrastructure and growth (Dollar, 2015). Amongst others, the impetus for

China's creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is to address this global lacuna, i.e. this paucity and unequal infrastructure, and hence the notion of flattening the world through infrastructural development. While there are a number of BRI-related projects scattered across the continent, owing to their strategic location East African states and the Horn of Africa have been the principal recipients and beneficiaries of Chinese BRI projects. Chinese investments are estimated at hundreds of billions of dollars spread across different mega projects. Meanwhile, according to the international law firm Baker McKenzie, "(i)n Africa, home to 40 of those BRI nations, Chinese bank financing for infrastructure projects fell from \$11 billion in 2017 to \$3.3 billion in 2020" (Miriri, 2021). Existing literature on BRI projects in Africa has generated mixed reactions; either from critics arguing that the West, especially the US, is losing ground to China, or proponents of the Chinese project who appreciate and note that "BRI projects in Africa reveals a nuanced reality of how the initiative functions in the developing world, where infrastructure financing is desperately needed" (Risberg, 2019, p. 43). The direct and indirect BRI-related projects in Africa are clear testimony of China's embrace of service provision and a fruition of flattening the world through infrastructure development. Many of China's infrastructure projects in Africa address a desperate need for roads, highways, railways, ports, aviation, and energy – submerged into larger Africa-China relations as part of Africa's Agenda 2063. China engages with all these sectors without obvious political interference in the concerned states, and where Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania are all full-fledged BRI partners, with Chinese investments in these countries not only bringing forth remarkable infrastructural development, but also greatly enhancing interstate economic and commercial cooperation and connectivity through long distance transnational transport networks. A transnational railways network connecting Kenya with Burundi, Ethiopia, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda is a relevant reference point of this last point (Bakare, 2021). Though a small country, Djibouti's strategic location is attractive and important for regional and global powers interested in the African part of the Indian Ocean. The Chinese Shekou Model has transformed Djibouti from its historical peripheral status to becoming 'Singapore of Africa' in the region (Blanchard and Collins, 2019). Through BRI-related projects there has been significant bilateral relations between Djibouti and Ethiopia – a larger economy. With BRI investments, Ethiopia is expected to embark on 'made in Ethiopia' production and market penetration that transcends the region to reach European markets. Beyond the East, Egypt has been another important BRI partner country since 2015, one of the few beneficiaries of AIIB loans. Its economy has recorded fairly good outcomes from Chinese investment, considered by some scholars as a challenge to the long standing US-Egypt relation. By and large, China's service provision through the BRI is increasingly expansive, as Calabrese (2019) notes that "as of September 2019, 40 of 55 African countries had signed some sort of memorandum of understanding or other agreement on the BRI."

Chinese infrastructure development in Europe

Service provision through BRI is far from being directed only to the periphery nations of Africa and Asia, the project of flattening the world is also extended to the semi-peripheral and core states of Europe. The BRI in Europe is commonly associated with the regions of Southern, Central/Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. Chinese investment is prominent in Greece (including port renovation and expansion); Portugal (by way of investment in Portugal's energy sector and the port of Sines); Hungary (relating to railway lines and telecommunication); Austria (telecommunication); Serbia; Montenegro (highway projects); and even in Germany. The Budapest-Belgrade transnational railway is one of BRI's flagship European projects (Hillman & Tippett, 2021). Irrespective of how the China is construed in Europe, group reports suggest that "two-thirds of EU member states (have) now signed on as formal partners" (Hillman and Tippett, 2021) of the BRI, or what is dubbed as the 16+1 group of cooperation between China and Central and East European Countries (Jain, 2019). Reacting to the BRI, the 'EU's strategy for connecting Europe and Asia' clearly identifies areas ranging from transport and energy to digital economy as spaces within which to

improve connectivity with Asia, especially China (Brattberg & Soula, 2018). To this end, the heavily subsidized rail lines connecting China and Europe, with more than 12,400 freight trains travelling between 2019 and 2021, underscores the incredible increase in connectivity between Europe and China. In addition to paving the way for cultural and civilizational cooperation between China and Europe (Callahan, 2016), BRI-related projects “could potentially support the Eastern Partnership’s (EaP) goals by generating wealth in the region and helping to diversify its economy” (Makocki, 2017, p. 1).

Chinese infrastructure development in South and Southeast Asia

Beyond geographical proximity, Southeast Asia has long been strategically important for regional and global powers along the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean. The history of imperial Japan will be indelibly incomplete without discussing the region, and the same holds true for Japan’s post-World War when the latter grew into a formidable regional power as a result of its cutting-edge industrial, economic, and technological development. Even though Tokyo remains a top foreign investor, and Washington is a vital security partner, in ASEAN member states (Freeman & Oba, 2019), China’s growing influence is eroding the long-standing strategic relationship between Washington and Tokyo.

Gong (2020, p.77) notes that Southeast Asia occupies a significant place in China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Of the six BRI corridors, “two corridors pass through Southeast Asia: the China-Indochina Peninsular Economic Corridor and the Sino-Myanmar Economic Corridor (originally Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor).” For Freeman and Oba (2019) China’s export of its infrastructure development capabilities is redefining Southeast Asia’s economic and security environment. These capabilities are geared at service provision, addressing the region’s massive infrastructure deficit and potentially jump-starting industrialization in less developed countries within. Over the preceding years, Chinese investments in the region are gradually creating new vibrant economies, similar to the Asian Tigers. The transformation of Cambodia into one of the fastest growing world economies (Mobley, 2019) and infrastructural development in Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia incentivized the Philippines to join in, suppressing its claim to the South China Sea (Jain, 2019). In Southeast Asia, China has boosted its neighboring economies with more than \$500 billion in BRI-related capital (Freeman and Oba, 2019). With the BRI, China is rehearsing the Flying Geese Model, though in its own way. Strategically, scholars have questioned China’s intentions ; however, while some treat the BRI as a tool of strategic dominance, as Mohan Malik notes, “China’s goal in its foreign relations is not usually conquest or direct control, but freedom of action, economic dominance and diplomatic influence through coercive presence.” (Malik, 2017, p. 9). Mobley (2019) argues that at the heart of BRI-related projects, particularly in Southeast Asia, is the overcoming of the ‘Malacca Dilemma’ – a long debated strategic issue in China. In 2003 Hu Jintao, China’s then-President declared that ‘certain major powers’ are bent at controlling the Malacca Strait – a strategic juncture that could used to cut off China from energy supplies.

In South Asia, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is being hailed as a flagship project of the BRI, which will allow China to enjoy transit passage through Pakistan towards Central Asia and beyond. The development of the Gwadar Port and its environs, an essential part of the corridor, is a vivid representation and demonstration of the Shekou model in Pakistan, transforming an impoverished fishing settlement into an industrial and wealthy park city. The CPEC has greatly exposed Pakistan to Chinese investments and infrastructural development (Bakare, 2021) and, by extension, has buttressed Malik’s assertions towards China in terms of economic dominance and diplomatic influence (Malik, 2017). In this regard, Chinese infrastructure development is not solely directed at Pakistan; other states in the region (with the exception of India) have witnessed a variety of Chinese investments, either directly or otherwise associated with the BRI. As in other parts of the world, where China’s imprint is becoming increasingly salient, in South Asia Chinese investments have been likened to pre-colonial enterprise characterized by the East Indian Company (Bakare, 2021) and debt-equity swaps, for instance, in the case of Sri Lanka (Mobley, 2019).

Conclusion

The dynamic changes that have long epitomised international relations expose the world to a variety of identities and characterizations of world power and order. The creation of the American liberal world order, following the end of the Second World War, has been a unique experience. Amidst the American–Western ruling order arises an Eastern power – China – its emergence greeted with mixed reactions and divided views, between those who subscribe to revisionist China and those who instead subscribe to incrementalist China. As it is with all ruling orders, the fear of being overthrown is plausible, and over the preceding years Washington has been at serious odds with Beijing, wanting to deny the latter the opportunity to demonstrate its potential. In this regard Kristen Hopewell (2017) critiqued American authorities, particularly the Trump administration, for its policy that has arguably driven the American-led liberal international economic order to the brink, all in the name of confronting China.

To further understand the distinctions between the American-Western order and the emerging Chinese order, this paper has examined several labels, constitutions, and components of the Western need-driven world order; namely, the label of uncivility and traditional societies, institutional and political stability need, and economic and development need. For the emerging Chinese order, its civilisational heritage, the non-militarisation of economic interest or expansionism, and development and engagement without imposition with others have been enunciated. Premised on its alternative developmental model, this paper considers the Chinese emerging order as a service provision order, arguing that China's globalisation of infrastructural development is nuancing our understanding of development, shifting the construct of development from a West-centric, need-driven model to a Chinese version of development, and consequently making a pathway for the emergence of a global order crafted in China's own image. This service provision becomes evident in the form of Chinese infrastructure development demonstrated in Africa, Europe, and South-and Southeast Asia.

Similarly, China cannot be equated as a revisionist state; instead Beijing is an incrementalist state whose global disposition is not geared at a radical emasculation of the liberal world order, but rather through steadily revising it (through behavioural disposition) and redefining the systemic restructuring of world order ought to be conducted. Mendis et al., (2019, p. 38) argue that “China's adoption of ‘state capitalism’” and its proclivity to export its economic-development success through the BRI further put lie to this revisionist label. Even though the liberal–Western world order is generally characterized as a rules-based order, such does not exculpate it from being dictatorial, conditional, and characterized by imposition, a point of distinction from the emerging Chinese order.

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