



Research Article

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The New Silk Road, Old Concepts of Globalization, and New Questions

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Abstract: New Silk Roads and their economic, political and cultural aspects are new components of our modernity. As such, they raise questions and call for new studies. They are best addressed within interdisciplinary approaches exploring a wide range of subjects across a variety of geographical and historical settings. The cultural facets of the new developments (meanings, values, norms and their multiculturalism) cannot be examined out of their economic and political contexts. To make sense of the New Silk Road(s) phenomenon, connections among different geographical locations must be studied alongside the links between the past and the present. For this reason, I consider my manuscript to be suitable for publication in *Open Cultural Studies*. New Silk Roads can also be seen as a species of globalisation, and I hope that my contribution will propel academic discussions in the field of global studies, seeking to provide answers to such queries as: Are we witnessing the rise of a new globalisation and a new global order? How can they be related to the present and past ones? Do we need new global theories to grasp them or are the existing frameworks still adequate?

Keywords: New Silk Road, multipolarity, values

For several years now, there has been a consensus that a New Silk Road is in the making. Whenever the emergent phenomenon is referred to, China tends to be evoked as an active agent in its development, reminding us of the country's agency in the old Silk Road. The New Road is proclaimed to comprise not only the Old Road countries, but also other regions, continents, and even the entire world. Several researchers also believe that, as a new international initiative, the New Silk Road entails a new global order. Nake Kamrany observes that “a new international economic and political order is being born” concomitantly with the New Road. Sebastien Peyrouse explicitly writes about “the New World Order.” Pepe Escobar and Peimin Ni herald the coming of, respectively, the “New (Silk) World Order” and the “New Silk Road World Order,” while Afshin Molavi contends that “[t]he ‘New Silk Road’ is fundamentally transforming our world.” These are not just separate voices: there is a concerted debate on the theme, as evidenced, for example, in the conference on The Silk Road, The New World Order, held in Brussels on the 6th of October 2015.

The debate addresses not only the New Road and a new world order it is reportedly producing but also a new model of globalisation it is supposed to usher in. Peter Kien-hong Yu argues: “An academic coined a new term, Chiglobalization, which fuses the strengths of all other globalizations, such as Ameriglobalization, Angloglobalization, and the Silk Road, which was the first wave of globalization” (157). The academic cited here is Wenshan Jia, who proposed the moniker “Chiglobalization” in order to convey the growing global role of China. The term does not go uncontested. For example, Sujian and Baogang Guo prefer referring to the phenomenon as “globalization with Chinese characteristics” (6), while Radosław Pyffel and Adrian Zwoliński define this new iteration of globalisation as another, new Silk Road: “Globalization is Silk Road 2.0.”

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Given this variety of approaches, we need to attend to a series of questions. The central one is: How is the New Silk Road, together with its attendant new world order and new globalisation, related to the previously advanced concepts and ideas of globalisation? How far do these concepts and ideas promote understanding of the current developments? Rather than discussing all the concepts of globalization in depth, in the following, I will draw on selected authors to analyse the New Silk Road. Therein, I will focus on the studies exploring, in particular, the relationship between the present and the past.

The New Silk Road has entered a variety of discourses and is talked about by politicians, entrepreneurs, members of social organisations, artists, journalists, and scholars. The enumeration below illustrates the range of contexts in which the notion of the New Silk Road has been used in recent years. In 2003, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze insisted that the Great Silk Road must be rebuilt (Cheng 31). In 2008, Turkey's Minister of Customs and Trade Hayati Yazıcı outlined the concept of "promoting trade among Silk Road countries" (Fedorenko 9). On the 20th of July, 2011, the U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton said in Chennai (India): "[l]et's work together to create a new Silk Road." On the 7th of September, 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping in a speech delivered at the Nazarbayev University in Astana (Kazakhstan) proposed to build a "Silk Road economic belt." On the 26th September 2015, Russian President Vladimir Putin also spoke of the New Silk Road in his address to the United Nations General Assembly in New York. Kim Won-ho, Chairman of the Seoul-based Silk Road Foundation (Korea), declared: "[w]e want to help create a new Silk Road, which will connect people from different countries" (Kim). The New Silk Road Institute Prague (Czech Republic) formulates its mission statement as "searching for new ways of communication and economic cooperation within the concept of New Silk Road." According to Helga Zepp-LaRouche from the International Schiller Institute, "[t]he New Silk Road leads to the future of mankind." The New Silk Road features in the names of corporate institutions: New Silk Road Company Ltd. in Dubai (UAE), New Silk Road Group Ltd. from Dongguan (China), or New Silk Road Investment in Singapore. New Silk Roads is a research project by Kyong Park, a Korean artist and theorist. The project was presented at the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Castilla y León (Spain) (*New Silk Roads*).

The New Silk Road designates a wide array of business and infrastructure operations, some of them still in the planning stage and other ones in the process of implementation. They include freight trains, such as the already operational service from Yiwu (China) to Madrid (Spain) and the planned trans-American railway, designed to connect Peru's Pacific coast with Brazil's Atlantic shore; tunnels, such as Marmaray under the Bosphorus Strait connecting Turkey's Asian and European railway grids; bridges, such as a bridge over the Danube in Serbia, which facilitates access to Europe from the Greek port of Piraeus; highways, such as the planned road from the port of Chābahār, Iran, to Zaranj and Delārām, Afghanistan; sea freight, such as the Shanghai-Hamburg shipping line across three oceans and through the Caspian and Black Seas, with the cargo from China reaching Europe via Ukraine; new sea terminals, such as those administered by a Chinese company in Piraeus (Greece); airports, such as Koktokay (China) and Dubai (UAE); pipelines, such as TAPI, which is supposed to carry gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan, Afghanistan and India; power stations and power lines, such as the one designed to deliver electricity from hydropower plants of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Afghanistan and Pakistan; financial institutions such as the Beijing-based International Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Silk Road Fund in Beijing, the New Silk Road Company Ltd. in Dubai (UAE), and the New Silk Road Investment (Singapore); manufacturers, such as the textile producer New Silk Road Group Ltd. in Dongguan (China); shipment companies, such as the Silk Road Group in Tbilisi (Georgia) and the Silk Route Rail (Hong Kong); social organizations, such as the New Silk Road Institute Prague (Czech Republic) and the Silk Road Foundation in Seoul (Korea); international cultural events, such as the Silk Road International Arts Festival in Xi'an (China). Long and tedious though this list may sound, it represents merely a sample of the New Silk Road-related enterprises. As a matter of fact, according to official documents, politicians, social activists, and commentators, the New Silk Road also stands for new international relations with their underpinning values, a new international, global order these relations and values institute, and a new globalization. These new meanings are expressed, for example, in the *Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road*, published by the Chinese National Development and Reform Commission. The senses and relevance of the New Silk Road are also addressed and explored by journalists, analysts, and scholars, such as the above-quoted authors Peimin Ni and Peter Kien-hong Yu.

Given the complexities and variegation delineated in the foregoing, the existing concepts of globalisation should be seriously reexamined in terms of their utility in advancing our understanding of this new “silk” globalisation. To establish which aspects of the recent developments (if any at all) can be effectively illuminated by old notions, let us now survey a few selected frameworks of globalisation in place. A good starting point is provided by Arjun Appadurai’s *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Appadurai outlines “a theory of a break—or rupture,” insisting that “the world in which we now live . . . surely does involve a general break with all sorts of pasts.” Concluding that “the modern and the global often appear as flip sides of the same coin” (3), Appadurai identifies globality with the present and, at the same time, distinguishes it from, or even opposes it to, the “pasts.” A similar postmodernist notion of globalisation is also propounded by other scholars, including Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, Zygmunt Bauman, and Roland Robertson.

However, the concept of the New Silk Road tends to be employed in ways that refer, in a variety of manners, to the old Silk Road. The *Vision and Actions* insists:

For thousands of years, the Silk Road Spirit—“peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit”—has been passed from generation to generation, promoted the progress of human civilization, and contributed greatly to the prosperity and development of the countries along the Silk Road. Symbolizing communication and cooperation between the East and the West, the Silk Road Spirit is a historic and cultural heritage shared by all countries around the world. In the 21st century, a new era marked by the theme of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit, it is all the more important for us to carry on the Silk Road Spirit in the face of the weak recovery of the global economy, and complex international and regional situations. (National Development and Reform Commission)

Without the old Road, the new one (and, alongside it, the new “silk” globality and globalisation) would be hardly conceptualizable and largely incomprehensible. Therefore, if the old Road is shown to have been a species of globality on which the new one inevitably builds, what we need, rather than any “theory of a break—or rupture,” is a form of “continuity theory,” or “la longue durée,” as explored by Fernand Braudel. Yet Braudel’s model is not directly transferable into the Silk Road research since it posits that the capitalist and global *économie-monde* began in late medieval Italy.

But other, perhaps more applicable, global theories have been developed as well. Janet Abu-Lughod’s *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* portrays a mature network of production, exchange, and communications spanning between distant regions of the Old World. Abu-Lughod dates the system’s origins back to Antiquity and considers its 13th-century form to be a reflection of the then Silk Road. Jack Goody, in turn, identifies the Bronze Age as a period that witnessed the rise of towns and the establishment of a network of contacts among them, which initiated our modernity and its distinct globality. Helle Vandkilde investigates the Bronze Age globalisation and calls it *bronzization*: “the Bronze Age—covering a hyper-region in Afro-Eurasia—constituted a unique case of pre-modern interconnectivity which arose prior to c. 2000 BCE and began to close down c. 1200 BCE. The term Bronzization is invented to describe the Bronze Age as an overarching globalising phenomenon” (103). The concept of bronzization can effectively help us understand that the “New Silk Road globalization” has a long history of its own as well as its own antecedents: other past globalisations.

Nevertheless, “iron globalization” seems to be an even closer past equivalent of “silk globalisation.” The New Silk Road is sometimes labelled an “Iron Road” because of its reliance on railways, which are believed to be crucial to the new globalisation. Kevin O’Rourke and Jeffrey Williamson propose to view the nineteenth-century as an age of “Anglobalization” with, at its core, trans-Atlantic flows of people, goods, capital, technology, and information between Europe and America—above all, between the U.K. and the U.S. Essential to that “Atlantic globalization” was iron-based technology: trains and steamships, moving along railroads and canals. This picture only takes on additional facets as we move closer to our times. Appadurai explains that “electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present” (4). Other authors also emphasise the crucial role the Internet, television, and mobile phones played in globalisation in the last two decades of the twentieth century and call these processes an electronic or cyber-globalisation. Still, railways, trains, ships, and canals are a central factor in the New Silk Road, just as they were in the nineteenth-century “Iron” Anglobalization.

The transportation and communications infrastructure comprised under the umbrella term of the New Silk Road is being deliberately and steadily developed. Regular maritime links have been established between the ports of China and other continents. Regular train connections have been launched between Chinese cities and other cities of Eurasia, such as Tehran, Moscow, Hamburg, Madrid, London, etc. The Beijing-proposed trans-American railway between the Atlantic and the Pacific resembles the Pacific Railroad constructed between 1863 and 1869 in the U.S., the difference being that the planned new “silk” transcontinental railway will cut across the Andes and link port cities on the Pacific and Atlantic coasts of Peru and Brazil. The newly planned canal connecting the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean brings to mind the Panama Canal, the difference being that the new “silk” waterway will run through Nicaragua, and will be built, financed, and managed by the Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Investment Company. For now, the plan is still on the drawing board. At present, the New Silk Road is a vast construction site, in which some parts are already completed, other ones still under construction, and yet others only in the planning stage. Advanced work is, certainly, underway for the construction of the freight transport infrastructure. Ships, trains, and cargo, rather than electronic mediation and mass migrations, are indeed the hallmarks of the New Silk Road. All these developments may be strongly redolent of the nineteenth century, but Kevin O’Rourke and Jeffrey Williamson insist that nineteenth-century globalisation would not have been possible without mass migrations of European settlers to America. This is, by far, not the only difference. Another one lies in the geopolitical configuration of the world as such. For a while London formed the unquestioned centre of the global system in the nineteenth century, to determine where the centre lies today is both challenging and disputable.

Arguably, China’s prominent role in the building of the New Silk Road can make one think of the old Silk Road, which branched off in several directions and linked China to remote regions of the world (the one portrayed by Janet Abu-Lughod in *Before European Hegemony*). Describing that world of old—the world from before European hegemony—Andre Gunder Frank argues that “the globe-encompassing world economy/system did not have a single centre but at most a hierarchy of centres, probably with China at the top” (328). Abu-Lughod, on her part, highlights the multipolarity and eight circuits of the thirteenth-century world system. Even if it is legitimate to inquire whether the New Silk Road means a return to that world, it must be borne in mind that, crucially, the World System A.D. 1250-1350 was not a global or worldwide system. It was merely the Old World System as a network of communications, with land and maritime routes and the central role of the Indian Ocean in the communications.

European oceanic discoveries have thoroughly changed the world. William McNeill elucidates: “[t]he most obvious effect of these successive transformations of world communications was to expand the reach of the Eurasian ecumene throughout the globe.” We can wonder whether McNeill’s ecumene should actually be deemed Eurasian, or perhaps Afro-Eurasian. Be it as it may, Frank discusses this new truly global system and observes that centrally relevant to it is the Atlantic and its routes between the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia (Map 2.1. 65). The development of waterways brought about the marginalisation of the land Silk Road, and the Atlantic replaced the Indian Ocean as a new central node of communications. Globality is not the only reason why the New Silk Road does not entail returning to the thirteenth-century world system. Emphatically, neither the Indian Ocean nor the Atlantic can be considered a key communications ocean anymore. Giovanni Arrighi explains: “[i]n 1980, trans-Pacific trade began to surpass trans-Atlantic trade in value. By the end of the decade, it was 1.5 times greater. At the same time, trade between countries on the Asian side of the Pacific Rim was on the point of surpassing in value trade across the Pacific” (337).

In the New “Silk” World Order, the Pacific retains its position of centrality. The major reason for this precedence is the “Maritime Silk Road of the 21st Century,” which designates, primarily, connections between Chinese and other Asian ports, and also overall connections between China and other continents. Some authors underscore that while the European-built global system was underpinned by sea transport, the new “silk” system again affords priority to land traffic, in which it dovetails with Abu-Lughod’s vision of the thirteenth-century world system. At the same time, another remarkable return is addressed. Namely, after a long period of peripheralization, the oases of Central Asia come back to the World System. It may (but need not) be taken to imply that Central Asia is resuming the prominent role it performed in the history of the world in the times of the Mongol Empire and the glory days of Samarkand

and Bukhara. The essential instrumentality of land transport, however, involves not only railway lines from China to Europe through Central Asia, but also the already completed, currently being built, and/or planned new railway tracks in Africa and South America as well as, first of all perhaps, immense investments in rapid trains in China itself.

The concepts of globalisation and global order cited above prove rather inadequate in analysing the New Silk Road and its concomitant globality and globalisation. Appadurai's "theory of a break" fails in that overlooks the many various ways in which the New Silk Road undertakings look back to and draw on the past. The model of the European-built world system developed by Frank is not productive, either, as it ascribes the crucial role to the Atlantic connections between America and Europe. Admittedly, the trans-Atlantic links are still relevant today due to the commerce and other relationships between the U.S. and the European Union. However, as explicated in the foregoing, the primary role belongs now to the Pacific, among others because of the links between the U.S. and the Far East countries, therein China. Abu-Lughod's model of "the thirteenth-century world system" falls short as a framework within which to grasp the current globalisation processes as well, for two reasons at least. Firstly, the Indian Ocean, reduced mainly to a transit site today, has long lost its centrality to worldwide communications. Secondly, the non-inclusion of the New Worlds in the picture is, as just mentioned, also a thing of the remote past.

At the same time, however, certain elements of the existing frameworks can effectively further our analysis and understanding of the New Silk Road, the new "silk" order, and "silk" globalisation. The world system model proposed by Abu-Lughod offers a valuable insight into the role of land traffic as well as into the complementarity of land and sea transport in the world system. Ports are places where maritime routes intersect with land roads. Frank's concept of the world system illuminates the still relevant, global role of the Atlantic, Europe and the Americas. Also, Appadurai's "theory of a break," though overly radical and, consequently, misconceived, can help us fathom the utter novelty of the New Silk Road and its radical otherness from the old Silk Road. In his framework, Appadurai grievously misses the point when he severs the past from the present, yet he is certainly right to emphasise the difference between the former and the latter. Today, Central Asia is crisscrossed by freight trains while Bactrian caravans serve just as a tourist attraction. In the new system, the Atlantic is still important but for a different reason than in the past. It is via the Atlantic that Chinese container ships reach the ports of Europe and the Americas, while tankers from Latin America and West Africa carry crude oil to China. As the unfolding transformations are irreversible, the New Silk Road integrates quite a different world than the old Silk Road did. Silk is no longer one of the most coveted goods in the world; nor is it anymore an important item in the containers transported by trains and ships or a reason behind their heightened traffic.

I believe that our understanding of relations between the new and the old can be usefully advanced by the notion of "hybrid cultures" propounded by Néstor García Canclini. In his portrayal of Latin America, Canclini foregrounds "the sociocultural hybrids in which the traditional and the modern are mixed," and highlights their "multitemporal heterogeneity" (2-3). In my view, this framework can effectively capture not only Latin America but also the entire contemporary world, including the New Silk Road with its New "Silk" World Order and new globalisation. In these optics, to comprehend these new developments, we need to remember that they are comprised of both old and new elements as well as interrelations between the two. These mutual correlations modify the respective meanings of the old and the new, amalgamating them into a whole which is, paradoxically, new and old at the same time, but never completely new or uniformly old. This perplexing fusion is pithily implied by Renato Rosaldo when he asks: "[i]f a traditional peddler is walking on a modern road, does the road become more traditional or the peddler more modern? Both, either, neither?" (XV). Rosaldo poses this query in the context of Latin America, but we can productively apply it to Central Asia (and other regions) as well.

Revisiting the unadulterated past is impossible, as a matter of fact, since new developments inexorably alter the old ones, but, at the same time, depend on them, emerging from and taking shape because of them. If we bear this linkage in mind, the old notions can helpfully contribute to our understanding of the new ones. Chinese documents emphasise the pluralistic nature of the New Silk Road, which is supposed to inscribe itself in "the trend towards a multipolar world" and to "strengthen exchanges and mutual learning between different civilisations" (National Development and Reform Commission). In

his discussion of the Chinese New Silk Road project, Yury Kulintsev (Юрий Кулинцев) insists that “it is not a Chinese solo, but rather a symphony performed by all the interested countries.” The multilateral character of China’s latest international initiative is understandable as the enterprise is predicated on the collaboration of other countries. This pluralism also has another facet as the New Silk Road subsumes an array of plans and programs designed and implemented not only specifically by China, but also by other states, including the U.S., Russia, the European Union, Turkey, India, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, and others. These countries’ agendas may have different aims, and be informed by different ideas, but they also share several concerns and often overlap in working on the same projects. This multiplicity should perhaps make us think in terms of several various New Silk Roads rather than one New Silk Road. This might indicate a pluralistic nature of the new Road, the New World Order, and new globalisation, especially conspicuous in comparison with the order and globalisation at hand, whose characteristic monocentricity, U.S. hegemonism, and normative universalism of values tend to elicit censure from the New Silk Road authors. This universalism seeks to homogenise the economically, politically, and culturally different parts of the world.

Of course, we must not be oblivious to the fact that the ancient silk routes were plural as well. Without a doubt, a historically contingent array of goods was transported along different roads traversing various regions. For example, in antiquity, eastward jade and nephrite roads and a westward lapis lazuli road were prominent in Central Asia; in the Middle Ages, ceramics trade thrived across the Indian Ocean; in the 16th-18th centuries, furs were traded across Siberia, and maritime spice routes flourished while commerce in silver developed between China and the Americas. The list contains only selected examples of the historically plural, time- and place-specific intercontinental trading roads and lanes. The legitimate question is, nevertheless, whether the many various goods traded along different routes in different periods formed a historically and topographically integral whole or whether, perhaps, they were different, albeit interconnected, phenomena. A similar question concerns now the New Silk Road, and we are justified to inquire whether it constitutes a complex whole or, rather, involves several interrelated, yet separate, entities. This is not just a semantic question; it is, by all means, an ontological point as it pertains to the structure of the real world. This reasoning leads us to another question, one concerning the structure of our modernity today.

It stands to reason to ask whether a country as vast, as dynamically developing, and possessing as considerable financial resources as China is actually capable of building a pluralistic global order. With not unreasonable doubts arising, this question breeds another one: Are we, perhaps, on the verge of the future in which a common slogan will be that “All roads lead to China” (Casarini)? We must thus seriously re-assess which concepts of the past (if any at all) can be relied on for furthering our anticipations of the future. The plural centres from before the times of European hegemony are thematised by Abu-Lughod and Frank. However, while the former stresses that “the system was not hierarchical, in the sense that no single hegemon dictated the terms of production and trade to others, no geographic entity could be said to be located at the center” (Abu-Lughod 365), the latter speaks of “a hierarchy of centers, probably with China at the top” (Frank 328). Therefore, it is rather unclear whether “the thirteenth-century world system” and its Silk Road were pluralistic or monocentric. If we cannot ascertain this about the past, we should be hardly surprised at our inability to settle the question of the future lucidly.

With the past and the future beyond our firm grasp, we should focus on the present status of the New Silk Road, and conclude whether we are witnessing the rise of a new globalisation, and if so, attempt to study its character. The first step would be determining whether it is a multilateral “silk” globalisation or, rather, a monocentric “Chiglobalization,” that is, globalisation with Chinese characteristics. The documents, commentaries, and addresses on the New Road all reiterate the notion of new values. The New Road is supposed to implement them while they are supposed to justify it in return. One of these values is multiplicity. The Chinese initiative of building a New Silk Road envisaged as the “Belt and Road” is touted as “a pluralistic and open process” (National Development and Reform Commission). It is pluralistic because it aims “towards a multipolar world”; and it is open because “[i]t is open to all countries.” Pluralism as the New Road value is cited by already-quoted Zepp-LaRouche, Kulintsev, and others. Pluralism is associated with another value—diversity. The New Road initiative:

advocates tolerance among civilisations, respects the paths and modes of development chosen by different countries, and supports dialogues among different civilisations on the principles of seeking common ground while shelving differences and drawing on each other's strengths so that all countries can coexist in peace for common prosperity.

Pluralism and diversity entail other values, such as dialogue and understanding. The *Vision and Actions* proclaims that the Belt and Road “support dialogues among different civilizations.” India’s Mausam Project is geared towards the establishment of links with India’s neighbours to “enhanc[e] the understanding of cultural values and concerns” (The Hans India). Many authors and commentators highlight the very value of multipolarity, which features not only in Chinese documents but also in many other statements and studies. Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya writes about a “multipolar Silk World Order,” and Ahmad Talmiz observes: “A multi-polar Asia already exists and India is an important part of it.” In its turn, multipolarity is intertwined with multilaterality, which designates decision-making based on agreements involving several countries, instead of sealed singlehandedly by individual countries or international power-wielding institutions. Yury Tavrovsky argues that the Chinese project contributes to building a “new multilateral world order” which is “not vertical, but horizontal.” This means that decisions are made not by a single hegemon, but by many mutually collaborating countries. Drawing on this insight, Peimin Ni references the new Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), founded in 2015 on the initiative of China to implement the New Silk Road undertakings:

despite the fact that China is taking a leading role in the establishment of the AIIB and it holds an overwhelming 30% of voting share, it offered to forgo veto power at the AIIB to ensure that no single country can dictate decision-making at the new bank. This is in stark contrast to the long-standing practice at World Bank and IMF . . . , in which the U.S. retains the only veto power despite holding less than 20% of voting shares. (3)

Against this backdrop, Peimin Ni compares China and the U.S., concluding: “[i]t is interesting that a country tainted with the reputation of lacking democracy is advocating a trend of global democracy, while the country proud of its democracy is now haunted by the image of being hegemonic in the word” (3). By the same token, he points out another New Silk Road value, that is, democracy.

Importantly, Peimin Ni also addresses other notions expressed in the Chinese New Road initiative. They are conveyed in two phrases used by China’s President Xi Jinping: “*mingyun gongtongti* 命运共同体—community of shared destiny” and “*hezuo gongyin* 合作共赢—cooperation and co-prosperity.” Peimin Ni adds: “Confucians are well-known for their sense of seeing *tianxia* 天下, ‘all under heaven,’ as a community of shared destiny.” In the Chinese New Road initiative, pluralism has distinct Chinese characteristics. In a pluralistic world, “differences are . . . cherished for their unique contributions to the harmonious whole” (4). Consequently, the values surrounding the concepts and implementation of the New Silk Road(s) are characterised by multitemporal heterogeneity. Despite that, they find themselves involved in a variety of interactions in which they specify and valorise one another. Some notions and values, such as *tianxia*, look back to the days of yore, while other ones, such as democracy, originate in the less distant past. Meanings inscribed in and values informing the respective agendas of different countries are also embedded in their current domestic and international situations. Thus, the meanings and values underpinning and attributed to the New Silk Road(s) are of a doubly hybrid nature. Firstly, the New Silk Road evocations connote specific, different meanings in different frameworks, as a result of which the New Road is not exactly the same thing in the Chinese Belt and Road initiative, in the Indian Mausam Project, or in the Russian idea of Eurasian Union. Secondly, the meanings and values of the New Silk Road(s) embody Canclini’s “hybrids in which the traditional and the modern are mixed” (2).

A key value in the concepts and undertakings of the New Silk Road(s) is the Silk Road itself, invested with idealised meanings induced by the needs and concerns of our times. In the *Vision and Actions*, the Silk Road spirit is envisioned as “peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit” (National Development and Reform Commission). Haruhiko Kuroda, President of the Asian Development Bank, eulogises “[t]he spirit of trust and confidence that has evolved through the years among good neighbors and good partners” (6). Georgia’s President Eduard Shevardnadze viewed the Great Silk Road as a way of tolerance and profit (Cheng 31). The very emergence of the New Silk Road moniker re-asserts and

promotes the value of the old Road, at the same time ascribing novel meanings to it. The value of the Silk Road as such is a compelling thing in its own right. On the one hand, this value has a contemporary genesis, as does the coinage *Seidenstrasse* proposed alongside the notion by the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877. On the other hand, the name and the concept Von Richthofen devised were originally and have remained Romantic idealisations. However, both back in the late nineteenth century and today, the idealisations make sense also through referring to the historical reality. The past and the present are so tightly interlaced in this value that it is pointless to ask: “does the New Silk Road become more traditional or the Silk Road more modern? Both, either, neither?”

It is clear that various countries, companies, and individuals launch recognisably distinct actions underpinned by specific concepts and values. It is equally clear that these actions, concepts, and values display both similarities and differences, and that they tie in with each other sometimes as well as diverge on other occasions. But the problem may be that this multiplicity of details obscures the total image and prevents us from grasping it; to put it simply, perhaps we cannot see the forest for the trees. There is a disturbing possibility, though, that there might be no forest in the first place. Perhaps, indeed, we are faced with a multitude of divergent, albeit interrelated, initiatives that shape a pluralistic, multilateral, and multipolar world, with globalisation as a form of communication among different societies and cultures. To settle this issue conclusively, we cannot rely merely on a selection of useful, though fragmentary, insights gleaned from the existing frameworks developed to account for other realities. Instead, we need a new model to explain the nature of the New Silk Road(s) and its (their) global order and globalisation. We need a concept that will not only shed light on the new global developments but also illuminate their links to historical processes and ones in progress now. Last, but not least, we need a concept of globalisation which could elucidate the evolution that globalisation has undergone over centuries.

To effectively further our inquiries, such a concept should meet certain conditions. First of all, it should assume that changes at hand are irreversible. Irreversibility entails that global changes are inevitable. The *nihil novi sub sole* maxim from the Ecclesiastes is not viable in this context. Irreversibility means also that it is impossible to alter the past, which determines the conditions in which current events and processes unfold. In this sense, irreversibility also means that the past is inexorable and cannot be possibly erased. Given this, the “theory of a break” is unlikely to promote our attempts at providing a comprehensive and reliable account of the New Silk Road(s). Instead, we need a concept that will attend to the new “silk” phenomena (such as roads, the world order, and globalisation) in a very special fashion in which the explication of the new will be coupled with the acknowledgement of the old. In other words, we need a concept that will explain how the already familiar global phenomena fostered the rise and development of the new ones and, the other way round, how the new processes contribute to the re-casting and re-inventing of the old ones.

It may well be that the New “Silk” World entails going back to the multipolarity of the thirteenth-century world system and its Silk Road. Or, if Frank is right, it may mean revisiting the conjuncture in which all roads lead to China. This, however, does not mean that the resumption of the erstwhile global order as the geopolitical and conceptual configurations have transformed irrevocably. Back in that era, the Atlantic and the Pacific divided the globe in the way that superficially resembles the Iron Curtain splitting the world in the Cold War days. Yet the dividing lines did not run between the East and the West, but between what we now ethnocentrically refer to as the Old and New Worlds. In that global order of yore, the Indian Ocean and a network of land Silk Roads that enveloped it served as a natural, primary form of communication of the Old World. Nevertheless, that world came to be transfigured by the global order instituted by Europeans, who included New Worlds into the Old World *ecumene*. Therefore, if today we envision a return to the pluralistic, multipolar world, we envision an *ecumene* that encompasses all worlds: old and new ones. And if we anticipate that, in the New Silk Road, all roads, also those from the Americas and Australia, will lead to China, this fixed directionality has been made possible, paradoxically, by the European-built global Atlantic order.

To conclude, the New Silk Road, “silk globalisation,” and “the silk world order” all call for a new concept of globalisation in which three fundamental issues could be effectively addressed. The first issue is the whole-part relationship. The central question to be settled in this respect is whether we witness one globalisation or, perhaps, many globalisations. Further, we should determine whether by the Silk Road

(new and old) we mean an ages-old phenomenon observable in various parts of the world. Finally, we need to assess whether the world we inhabit is integral or pluralistic and whether it permits contingency, chaos, unpredictable changes, and radical transformations. To answer these questions and, consequently, construct a much-needed new concept of globalisation, we may usefully rely on the notions of self-organisation (Nobis, Kruszelnicki).

The first issue is linked to the second one, which concerns the past-present relationship. In this context, we should ponder whether the new ensues from the old, or whether the new re-casts, or even produces, the old in its own semblance in order to suit its own needs. The crucial consideration in these terms is whether the old road affords meanings and values to the new one or, perhaps, the opposite is the case. Having established this, we may be able to identify the connection of the “old” to the “new,” and vice versa. In her insightful text, Marie Thorsten observes that “the ‘Silk Road’ has become globalisation’s fashionable nostalgia, expressing a ‘longing’ (*algia*) for a cosmopolitan ‘home’ (*nostos*)” (301). Of course, our modern sentiments, hopes, and fears coupled with political interests and economic needs invest certain values and meanings in the old Silk Road, and, consequently, re-make the entity which Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen crafted in the second half of the nineteenth century. But this is the only one facet of the phenomenon. The other facet is the irreversible past—one that has come to pass, enabling us to draw on, manipulate, transform, and use its legacy. Quoted by Thorsten, Andreas Huyssen explains that “global memory will always be prismatic and heterogeneous rather than holistic” (2003, qtd. in Thorsten 302). And, citing Laurent Olivier, Bjørn Olsen adds that the present “consists of a palimpsest of all durations of the past that have become recorded in matter” (Olivier, 2001, qtd. in Olsen 108). Fundamentally, the present is heterogeneous also in that the new co-exists with the old and with the yet older. Furthermore, rather than isolation, this co-existence involves interaction in which the old makes possible and limits the new while the new transforms and, sometimes, destroys the old. Crucially, these processes unfold beyond the imaginary.

This observation leads us to the third issue to be explored in and through the new concept of globalisation, namely to the imagination-materiality relationship. Olsen refers to Graham Harman, who discussing tools explains: “Equipment is not effective ‘because people use it; on the contrary, it can only be used because it is capable of an effect, of inflicting some kind of blow on reality. In short, the tool isn’t ‘used’—it is” (Harman, 20). We produce, use, and modify our tools, ascribing meanings and values to them, and they produce and transform us in turn. The imaginary and the material constantly interact. New materialist approaches seem to provide an effective framework in which to grasp these relationships accurately.

To sum up our argument, the New Silk Road and the new “silk” world order require a new concept of globalisation which, instead of taking the holistic character of globalisation and the Silk Road for granted, will parse them as objects of careful examination. This new concept will also encourage the study of today’s Road as a co-existence and interaction of the new and the old. Additionally, it will fuel interest in how present-day nostalgia, political agendas, and/or economic needs use and mould the old Road. Finally, this new concept will focus on how our desires, anxieties, needs, and interests are formed by the Old Road’s legacy, which is part of our hybrid present, comprised of both the material and the immaterial.

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