Infrastructure, narrative, impact : a counter-reading of belt and road

Vincent de Paul, Jegan Joyston

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**INFRASTRUCTURE, NARRATIVE, IMPACT:
A COUNTER-READING OF BELT AND ROAD**

JEGAN JOYSTON VINCENT DE PAUL

School of Art, Design and Media

2021

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A COUNTER-READING OF BELT AND ROAD**

JEGAN JOYSTON VINCENT DE PAUL

School of Art, Design and Media

A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University
in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

2021

Statement of Originality

I certify that all work submitted for this thesis is my original work. I declare that no other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement. Except where it is clearly stated that I have used some of this material elsewhere, this work has not been presented by me for assessment in any other institution or University. I certify that the data collected for this project are authentic and the investigations were conducted in accordance with the ethics policies and integrity standards of Nanyang Technological University and that the research data are presented honestly and without prejudice.

January 1, 2021

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Date

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JEGAN JOYSTON VINCENT DE PAUL

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18 January 2021

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Ute Meta Bauer

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UTE META BAUER

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January 1, 2021

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Date

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JEGAN JOYSTON VINCENT DE PAUL

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Summary

This project is an experiment on the possibilities of artistic research to examine and represent large-scale systems and networks. Taking a critical subjective position, I interpret the phenomenon of “Belt and Road” as a fragmented narrative premised on infrastructure and constructed in realtime by a network of global entities. I begin with an observation of infrastructure as ideal sites of protest and consider its implications as a term and form. I question whether the noun “infrastructure” is used to depoliticise and necessitate the things and processes it denotes. I then propose that infrastructure is a physical embodiment of the state and can be read as a map of its extent across space. The central written chapter is an exposition of Belt and Road and how it is manifested in the process of interpretation and analysis, existing more as an instrument of communication and political discourse than a Chinese initiative to construct infrastructure. I use the concept of a “metastructure” to show how the many definitions, scopes and implications of Belt and Road function like archetypes of a story rather than factual descriptions. I finally focus my attention on Sri Lanka and the construction of Hambantota port by Chinese-state owned companies and the implications of this for local space and the end of the country’s civil war in 2009. The last chapter is a documentation of the methods I use to simultaneously research, represent and produce a counter-reading of Belt and Road. These methods are: collection of materials on Belt and Road, composition of text and images, and the transmission of collections and compositions via publications, talks and exhibitions. Taking art as a research methodology, my thesis is not argumentative or theoretical, but an exploration of Belt and Road as a captivating new subject and infrastructure as a personally meaningful topic. With this project, I hope to exemplify the expanded potential of art to investigate and critique complex global phenomena.

Preface

This dissertation has turned out to be different than I anticipated. Instead of a linear progression of research findings and writing, it has been a struggle of resolving intellectual and practical conundrums. How does a doctoral dissertation and its formal requirements fit with subjectivity, creative impulses and the production of art? This is not a question I ask with the intention of answering, but as a way of introducing my approach and the conundrums I have faced. If you are reading this you are already aware this project has something to do with “Belt and Road.” But this was not always the case. I actually began with an interest in infrastructures built by Chinese state-owned companies outside of China and the possibilities of producing art on them. Once Belt and Road emerged as the dominant frame such infrastructures were seen through, I was confronted with my first conundrum: is my subject this new idea many are talking about or is it the really-existing hard infrastructures of ports and pipes? As I have come to see in retrospect—and hope to demonstrate in this thesis—these are two different things: Belt and Road is a figure of imaginations and infrastructures are material constructions independent of it. This distinction was not apparent early on and only dawned on me after several years that Belt and Road is an abyss of a subject one can easily become entrapped and distracted by. And by subject, I mean it as something that can only be read, discussed and elaborated on, but spatially unmappable and closed off to sensorial experience. This is in the same sense that “The Silk Road” was never mapped and experienced by peoples of ancient Eurasia because it is a nineteenth century orientalist construction. Ancient silk was a reality and so were roads, but silk + road is a fiction disguised as a description of the past.

Unlike Belt and Road or Silk Road, infrastructures are more than a subject, can be real constructions and are enticing for artistic research and representation in their very materiality and sublime objectness. At the same time, it was not possible for me to forgo Belt and Road as a subject to focus strictly on built infrastructures, since it had quickly become synonymous with and irrevocably associated to China's construction of transnational infrastructure. Resolving this conundrum was to take a dialectical path where Belt and Road is accepted as the subject and infrastructure as the topic and material phenomenon it is born out of.

Deciding to pursue Belt and Road led to yet another conundrum: it has no recognisable limits as a subject. A search for "Belt and Road" on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (China's national research database supported by the Propaganda Department and other state level agencies), reveals more than 150,000 journal articles, news paper articles and books amongst other publications in the Chinese language. One paper in 2018 is titled "International Real-time Magnetic Observatory Network and Geomagnetic Environmental Monitoring along the Belt and Road." Associating Belt and Road with any given topic (geophysical observation in this case), event or development related to China are not uncommon and certainly not arbitrary or divergent. It is precisely Belt and Road fulfilling its function as a signifier of spatial specificity and political legitimacy (emanating from Xi Jinping himself) and widely exploited by Chinese academia, media, business and politics. In the English-language, it would not be hyperbolic to state that more has been written on Belt and Road over the last seven years than ever written on the two thousand years of Eurasian history categorised under "Silk Road." A search on Google Scholar for books and other scholarly content on or related to "Silk Road" (exact search term) published between the years 1877 (the year Ferdinand von Richthofen coined the term in German) and 2013 (the

year Belt and Road was announced) yields close to 28,900 results. While a search for “Belt and Road” and the commonly used variants of “One Belt One Road” and “New Silk Road” between 2013 and 2020 yield over 50,000 results. While indexing by Google is not definitive of publication histories, it reveals major trends and rates at which specific topics have been and are written about. At this rate of production, the many descriptions, hypotheses or conclusions on Belt and Road can become obsolete or counter-argued within days of publication. Within a mere seven years, Belt and Road has become a sub-discipline of China studies in which grand ideas of China’s present rise and future trajectories are pronounced on a daily basis.

Without limits as a subject, Belt and Road has no scope either. This leads to the final conundrum of this PhD: how can literature be reviewed for something that has no limits or scope, discussed globally by thousands of entities producing tens of thousands of publications simultaneous to my study of it? I began with a literature review (see Literature Review As Appendix), but rather than maintaining the claim that certain literature will be relevant to my study and others not so much, I decided on more of a real-time approach where I collected and examined expressions of Belt and Road as they were being produced, as I encountered them during the entire course of this project and as I looked for certain information when necessary to produce art work with a specific concept. The literature search and review is thus embedded in my creative process and artistic methods. This approach has allowed me to be constantly engaged with Belt and Road parallel to its very realisation and has ultimately engendered an active counter-reading of it.

To orient myself on both the topic of transnational infrastructure and China at large, I started with Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems analysis. This was conceptually appealing because it considers large geographic zones of the world as the unit of analysis and fiercely

questions the traditional disciplines that interpret world relations and events. Rather than a disciplinary theory, world-systems is a method of analysis to read the world in relation to the structures of knowledge it is based on. Always having taken a kind of anti-disciplinary position in my thinking and art making, world-systems resonates because it offers a way out of the silos of knowledge produced in the traditional social science disciplines of economics, history, political science, and sociology. I, however, encountered a major problem: world-systems analysis eschews a focus on any singular nation-state and I had already decided to study China's relations with the world through infrastructure construction.

What about methods and views from the discipline of geopolitics, which has the opposite approach of world-systems with an acute focus on individual nation-states and an extreme focus on contemporary China? With *Art on the Geopolitical* as the original title of this thesis and catalyst by the so called "String of Pearls," I examined numerous geopolitical texts on Chinese infrastructure along the Indian Ocean littoral (my geographical area of interest) only to be disillusioned by sophisticated sounding paranoias of a global Chinese take over plot using commercial ports cleverly placed in "strategic" areas. As a sub discipline of international relations, geopolitics historically was and continues to be instrumentalist, being oriented in policy advice, political calculation, ideological schools of thought and statist antagonism rather than the production of transcendent knowledge to facilitate universal political engagement and dialogue. As both a discipline of knowledge and a practice of state power, geopolitics creates prejudiced representations of the world, sometimes under the guise of criticality, objectivity and even cosmopolitanism. I do not argue against geopolitical perspectives of Belt and Road, but rather show that they are constituent of Belt and Road. That geopolitical analysis, like that of many other disciplines studying China, create Belt and Road in the very process of describing it.

The deeper I dived into Belt and Road, the more it became apparent that it has become too big and too nebulous to be perceived through established systems of knowledge. It requires other forms of knowledge gathering and production that do not rely on methodologies with traditional forms of observation, application of theory, modes of analysis or literature reviews. I eventually abandoned my search for a general theoretical framework, a broad method of analysis, or intellectual canons I can rely on to inform my study. Instead, I began to rely more on my own intuitions, creative capacities and intellectual capabilities. Driven by a desire for open enquiry and critical artistic expression over producing a neat academic argument, I began collecting and indexing disparate pieces of content on Belt and Road regardless of who said what and why about China, its intentions and infrastructures. I came to see that the unrestrained and contradictory expressions of Belt and Road are part of a global consciousness and the chapters, paragraphs, sentences and words of a complex story being written on China and its place in the world. My project is a journey into reading and counter-reading that story.

Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BC	British Columbia
BRF	Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CDB	China Development Bank
CELAC	Community of Latin American and Caribbean States
CFA	Ceasefire Agreement
CHEC	China Harbour Engineering Company
CM Port	China Merchants Port Holdings Company
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
CPR	Canadian Pacific Railway
HSBC	Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
LST	Law & Society Trust
MERICS	Mercator Institute for China Studies
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTR	Mass Transit Railway
OBOR	One Belt One Road
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRC	People's Republic of China
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
SCMP	South China Morning Post
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SLPA	Sri Lanka Ports Authority
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US	United States
US\$	United States Dollar

INTRODUCTION

VISION AND ACTIONS ON JOINTLY BUILDING SILK ROAD ECONOMIC BELT & 21ST-CENTURY MARITIME SILK ROAD

2015/03/28

Issued by the National Development and Reform Commission,

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China,

with State Council authorization

March 2015

First Edition 2015

Introduction

“Everything under heaven is in utter chaos. The situation is excellent.”

—Mao Zedong

Belt and Road is a mysterious phenomenon. It has been described as “a quest to shift the world’s centre of gravity”¹ by former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger, “a continental-maritime geo-strategic realm”² by former Indian foreign secretary Shyam Saran, and “project of the century”³ by Chinese president Xi Jinping. Since the phrases “economic belt along the Silk Road” and “maritime Silk Road” were uttered in separate speeches by Xi in late 2013, Chinese officials and agencies have expressed it with extreme optimism and conviction, but never articulating it beyond vague or hyperbolic statements. Starting as new Silk Roads for infrastructure connectivity on land and sea, Xi’s two ideas were first pronounced as “One Belt One Road,” extravagantly elaborated, and eventually declared as “The Belt and Road Initiative” in early 2015. Because its Chinese progenitors have not reduced its meaning to any one thing, Belt and Road remains ambiguous and open to any number of interpretations (fig. 1). It quickly gained enormous currency in the world of international relations (particularly geopolitics) as the ideal frame of reference to read China and its growing role in the world. Exploited to both condone and condemn China, Belt and Road has become a topic of discussion that generates an endless (quite literally) stream of commentaries, articles, papers, reports, books, speeches, forums and visual material (fig. 2). As it has momentum as a real phenomenon of communication, and no concrete articulation, Belt and Road is in a constant state of excursive reproduction. This thesis is the result of examining and coming to terms with the monumental scale of this reproduction.

I propose here that since its inception, “The Belt and Road” has been produced in the process of interpretation and analysis, functioning largely as a convenient platform of political discourse, and not a tangible program to construct physical infrastructure. In fact, in 2015, China’s National Development and Reform Commission together with other state agencies issued a mandate to avoid the use of terms such as “strategy,” “project,” “program” and “agenda” in official English-language communications of The Belt and Road Initiative; it advises that only “initiative” be used and only in the singular. Engendered by China, Belt and Road is effectively a self-generating and decentralised narrative constructed in realtime by a global network of disparate agents, including pundits, media organisations, academic centers, think tanks, consultancies, business lobbies, financial institutions, military institutes and government agencies amongst others. Drastically heterogeneous and open-ended in its medium and message, this narrative is grounded in infrastructure as a pretextual theme rather than the central object of attention. The idea of “Chinese infrastructure” sustains Belt and Road, but infrastructure itself as a material and political force are secondary or ignored entirely. This makes Belt and Road a kind of paradox: it is grounded in infrastructure but obfuscates the universal socio-cultural powers of infrastructure as both built and imagined. In particular, infrastructure as a political apparatus of all states (and not just China) has been pushed to the background of Belt and Road and part of my goal in this thesis is to foreground it.

My study of Belt and Road—within the scope of a practice-oriented doctoral dissertation in art—is an experiment into the potential of artistic research to foster critical readings of large-scale systems and networks emerging into the twenty-first century. Can research-based art and its methods produce new forms of knowledge and representations of the macroscopic world beyond the confines and trappings of disciplines and institutional

boundaries? Taking art as my methodology, my project aims to: 1. Describe how Belt and Road is written as an infrastructure-themed narrative and 2. Produce a counter-reading of it in the process. Towards this end, I first discuss how infrastructure functions as a term, form and a map of the state in Chapter 1. Then in Chapter 2, I use the concept of a “metastructure” (as the opposite of “infrastructure”) to show how the definitions, scopes and implications of Belt and Road function like archetypes of a narrative. Finally in Chapter 3, I outline how conflict and infrastructure are intertwined aspects of Sri Lanka’s national politics with a focus on the Chinese-financed and built Hambantota port.

My proposition that Belt and Road is an open-ended global narrative (and not a specific Chinese plan, program, blueprint or even a strategy as commonly interpreted), is primarily based on not being able to identify where Belt and Road infrastructure is located in space after years of research and attempts at visually mapping it. Officially, there are no comprehensive maps, list of projects, timeframe or financial costs associated with Belt and Road. This is not to say there is no quantitative accounting of Belt and Road; for there is plenty produced the world over as a cursory online search will reveal. There simply is no published consensus on the part of Chinese or other agents on its material, spatial, temporal or monetary parameters. This leads to contradictory analyses, opportunistic praise and ideological derision using hyperboles and understatements.

Another reason that Belt and Road is more a narrative construct than a new “systematic project”⁴ is that most infrastructure projects that fall under its name have been planned or under construction for years—and sometimes even decades—before its introduction in 2013. Antecedent shipping ports and transportation corridors in particular are reconstituted as Belt and Road projects and framed under new regional, economic and political paradigms. Gwadar port in Pakistan (together with the China-Pakistan Economic

Corridor) for example is considered the “crown jewel” of Belt and Road although the agreement to construct it was signed in 2001 by China’s then premier Zhu Rongji and inaugurated by Pakistan’s then president Parvez Musharraf in 2007. Furthermore, prior to its post-Belt and Road management by China’s state-owned China Overseas Port Holding Company, Gwadar was under the management of the Port of Singapore Authority between 2007 and 2013. Similarly, Sri Lanka’s Hambantota port is retroactively framed as “the center”⁵ of the Maritime Silk Road. The natural harbour of Hambantota was first identified for development as early as 2002 by Sri Lanka’s then prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in the government’s “Regaining Sri Lanka” policy framework; and the completion of the first phase of the port was inaugurated by then president Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2010—three years prior to any Chinese notions of a new “maritime Silk road.” Gwadar and Hambantota are not the exception but the norm in how “old” infrastructure is framed as “new” nodes of a Chinese-led twenty-first century Silk Road.

Towards the end of this introduction, I visualise China’s invitation to virtually all countries in the world (in their belonging to continental groups such as Africa and regional blocks such as ASEAN) to join Belt and Road. Furthermore, I have produced an “A-Z” of countries that have signed memoranda of understanding or expressed enthusiasm to join Belt and Road as of mid 2020. Only 7 of the UN’s 193 member states show no interest, 14 have diplomatic relations only with Taiwan, and US, India and Australia are openly opposed to it (fig. 3). Because Belt and Road has no real geographic limit, it has no scope either. Any project with Chinese involvement anywhere in the world could effectively be considered part of Belt and Road. Lastly, as a narrative instigated by an assertive Communist Party of China, Belt and Road unleashes decades of repressed desires for China to proudly declare its role in the world, “tell China’s stories well” and for others to listen and respond. After facing

criticism of Belt and Road being a Chinese plot, Xi Jinping responded at the 2017 Boao Forum that “It is neither the post-World War Two Marshall Plan, nor is it a Chinese conspiracy. If you had to (call it something), it’s an ‘overt plot’.”⁶ As an overt plot, can Belt and Road actually be read? To contextualise my study, this introduction provides the following:

- A. A retrospect of how Belt and Road became my subject and infrastructure a topic.
- B. A statement on art as a research methodology, artistic precedents, and methods used.
- C. An introduction to the main written component of this thesis (Chapters 1-3).
- D. A background to the conception, announcement and propagation of Belt and Road.

Belt and Road is a(n) ...	As declared by	Found in a text called	And published by
“systematic project”	China	Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road	The State Council of the People’s Republic of China
“project of the century”	Xi Jinping	Xi opens 'project of the century' with keynote speech	China Daily
“an overt plot”	Xi Jinping	Belt and Road Initiative is not a Chinese plot, Xi says	Reuters
“quest to shift the world’s centre of gravity”	Henry Kissinger	Expanding regional ambitions: The Belt and Road Initiative	United States Senate Committee on Armed Services
“international public product”	Barbados Today	China open to deepening cooperation with Barbados	Barbados Today
“almost a philosophy”	György Matolcsy	Hungary – A Key State on the Silk Road	Belt and Road Center
“trade plan”	James Fallows	China is the greatest, growing threat to America	The Atlantic
“global infrastructure project”	Jim VandeHei	America Is Fumbling Its Most Important Relationship	Axios
“development strategy”	Wikipedia contributor(s)	One Belt One Road Initiative	Wikipedia
“cooperation initiative”	CARICOM Today	CARICOM, China discuss strengthened cooperation in margins of CELAC Forum	CARICOM Today
“a smart power strategy”	Andreea Brînză	Redefining the Belt and Road Initiative	The Diplomat
“economic policy”	Peter Cai	Understanding China’s Belt and Road Initiative	Lowy Institute analysis

Figure 1. An index of 101 ways Belt and Road has been defined, described or qualified by various entities (see Chapter 4, pp. 95-102 for full version).

Jegan Vincent de Paul, *101 Definitions/Descriptions/Qualifications of Belt and Road*, 2019.

Figure 2. Cover images of Chinese and English-language books on or with substantial references to Belt and Road published between 2015 and 2017 by officially sanctioned or official publishers of the People's Republic of China.

Jegan Vincent de Paul, *50 Covers of Books on Belt and Road*, 2017.

UN Member State	Indication of Participation in Belt and Road	Source
Afghanistan	"Afghanistan signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the Belt and Road Initiative in 2016"	https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/chinas-belt-and-road-meets-trumps-afghanistan-plan/
Albania	"China, Albania agree to expand cooperation under Belt and Road"	http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-04/18/c_136216224.htm
Algeria	"Algeria set to join China's Belt & Road Initiative"	http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/31/c_137078120.htm
Andorra	NO SPECIFIC BELT AND ROAD RELATIONS	
Angola	"He said Angola highly values the Belt and Road Initiative proposed by China, and stands ready to coordinate development with China under the initiative..."	http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-07/14/c_136442102.htm
Antigua & Barbuda	"Antigua and Barbuda's minister of foreign affairs, tourism and immigration, Charles Fernandez, says that he is optimistic on Caribbean Community (CARICOM)-China relations...Foreign ministers of the nine CARICOM countries that recognise China also gave their support to the "Belt and the Road Initiative..."	https://wp.caribbeannewsnow.com/2018/01/24/antigua-barbuda-foreign-minister-optimistic-caricom-china-relations/
Argentina	"Argentina joins Beijing's OBOR initiative to promote trade and peace"	http://en.mercopress.com/2017/05/16/argentina-joins-beijing-s-obor-initiative-to-promote-trade-and-peace-macri-begins-official-visit-to-china
Armenia	"Manukyan said Armenia is along the ancient Silk Road and has great interest in China's Belt and Road Initiative, welcoming more cooperation with China in all fields."	http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-11/03/c_135803943.htm
Australia	OPPOSED TO JOINING THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE	
Austria	"Xi expressed his appreciation at the way the new Austrian government has prioritised both relations with China and the Belt and Road initiative in its working programme."	https://gbtimes.com/china-and-austria-to-strengthen-cooperation-sign-string-of-economic-deals
Azerbaijan	"Azerbaijan Positions Itself As China Ally In Belt & Road Initiative"	https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/azerbaijan-positions-itself-as-china-ally-in-belt-road-initiative-2018-2-14-8/
Bahamas	"Let China and The Bahamas work together to build a global economy that is more vibrant, open, inclusive, stable and sustainable, and let the Chinese and Bahamian peoples share the fruits of the Belt and Road Initiative"	https://www.bahamaslocal.com/newsitem/180271/The_Belt_and_Road_Initiative.html

Figure 3. An index of every UN member state and its position on Belt and Road as of mid 2020 (see Chapter 4, pp. 105-114 for full version).

Jegan Vincent de Paul, *"Countries along the Belt and Road,"* 2020.

Belt and Road as Subject

My arrival at Belt and Road as a subject began with bewilderment at how the civil war in Sri Lanka (my country of birth and emigration) ended in early 2009. After decades of negotiations, ceasefires and peace accords between the Sri Lankan state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the incumbent government of president Mahinda Rajapaksa executed an abrupt military campaign to bring the conflict to its end. Carried out approximately between November 2008 and May 2009, the campaign resulted in the displacement and internment in closed camps of more than 290,000⁷ civilians, the death of possibly 40,000⁸ civilians and the complete evisceration of the LTTE as an organisation. Like many in the Tamil diaspora across the world, I followed the military campaign's unfolding events (as reported through the very limited coverage of international media, the United Nations, aid workers and others) with shock and dismay and the realisation that Tamil self determination and statehood had reached its nadir. At the time, I was a graduate student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and wrote opinion pieces in the student news papers of Harvard and MIT focussing on Sri Lanka's exploitation of the US-lead War on Terror. Prior to that, I participated in a rally in Washington, DC organised by the Tamil diaspora in the United States. Held in front of the White House, thousands desperately pleaded for the UN and the Barack Obama administration to intervene and stop what many Tamils considered (and still consider) as the final phases of a genocide. Three months later on May 19, Sri Lanka declared victory and proudly claimed that it had successfully eradicated terrorism from the island.

Over the next year, I was trying to come to terms with what had occurred and how an ethnic conflict of nearly three decades could be ended so suddenly and with total disregard for human lives, contempt for international laws, and no international body able to hold Sri Lanka accountable. Eventually in 2010, I stumbled across Sri Lankan anthropologist Malathi

de Alwis's paper "The China Factor in Post-war Sri Lanka," where she writes: "China has lent US\$1.2 billion to build expressways and railways, a coal power plant, a port and an airport, the latter two in the President's constituency of Hambantota."⁹ Through her article, I discovered (for the first time) the collaboration between China and Sri Lanka on general economic and political matters, but more importantly their ideological alignment on "the three evils" of terrorism, separatism and extremism. Equally important was the revelation of China's extensive involvement in Sri Lankan domestic politics through the construction of large-scale infrastructural projects. While war was raging in the north of the country, Chinese state-owned companies were busy constructing a major shipping port in the south. Named by the president after himself, the Magampura Mahinda Rajapaksa Port is a concrete manifestation of the two countries' resolute partnership. Before, during, and after the final phases of the conflict, China provided Sri Lanka with extensive diplomatic and political support, using its veto power at the UN to ensure that no Security Council resolution would be issued against Sri Lanka over human rights violations and war crimes. With China as its patron and protector, Sri Lanka was able to successfully subvert a civil war by recoding it as a national struggle against terrorism.

With my curiosity peaked by Hambantota port's Chinese financing, engineering and construction, I began researching other ports and terminals that Chinese-state owned companies were involved in across Africa and Eurasia, South America and even North America. I began a process of research and eventually produced a map with a rather long title: *Working map of worldwide shipping ports with construction & stakes by the People's Republic of China's state-owned firms* (fig. 4). I identified 52 ports listed alphabetically by country from the Port of Cherchell in Algeria to Saigon International Terminals in Vietnam.

This map and the use of lists became the basis for my subsequent research into China's infrastructural presence across the world.

When I began my research in 2011, China's involvement in the world's shipping infrastructure did not have the frame of a new Silk Road nor a concept of a "belt and road." I had considered using the common, but poignant, shipping industry and military term "sea lines of communication" as a conceptual phrase to describe China's logistics-based political relations with conflict-ridden countries such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Myanmar. I had also considered the then popular theory of "String of Pearls," one that originated within the US Department of Defense in 2005—and circulated in geopolitics and news media as if it was the name of an actual Chinese military strategy—but turned out to be a misleading concept to study China's global infrastructures as I explore in Chapter 2. However, when "The Belt and Road Initiative" was formally announced in 2015, it seemed to be a concrete name and an unambiguous concept for what I had been researching and attempting to critique but unable to articulate in full. While my subject is perhaps traditionally one of political science, international relations or global development, I do not believe studying it is outside the purviews of a research-based art practice.

Infrastructure as Topic

Prior to Sri Lanka, my interests in infrastructure was not in the politics of its construction but its neglect at the local level. As a graduate student of architecture at the University of Toronto, my thesis in 2006 examined the decay of transportation infrastructure at the eastern fringes of the city of Toronto. Home to large immigrant and working class communities, many of its subway and light rail stations were in a state of general disregard. I focused my attention on Kennedy Station in Scarborough (an administrative division

of Toronto), a major hub and terminal that is one of the most used in all of Toronto and even Canada, but uninspiring in its design and lacking any serious municipal attention or concern. The consoles within one of the control rooms of the station were dusty, unused and looked like remnants from the 1980s. A single, clunky swing door was used by passengers both entering and leaving each of its busy bus platforms; its underground connections to the adjacent train station and community centre are convoluted; and the station's interior spaces were left unheated in the winter. Its overall feeling was uninviting with its management admitting to play classical music over the telecom to pacify teenagers who lingered too much. The station simply did not foster a sense of place, belonging or community pride. When asked by Canada's national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, for my opinion on its condition, I had summarised with the single word "abject."

My architecture thesis was a call to redesign the station to properly serve and represent the people whose livelihoods are dependent on it, rather than view them as random commuters on the way to somewhere else. Considering the diverse ethnographic and cultural makeup of Scarborough, my hypothetical design was based on the concept of *machine as monument*: an icon whose form is derived entirely from its function and not specific cultures or histories (fig. 5). My design-focused study of infrastructure, ultimately fostered critical readings of its promises and perils; how it is used by states as a form of legitimacy, as a physical medium of power, and as efficient systems of population management.

As a graduate student at MIT's Visual Arts Program from 2007 to 2009, I produced a number of works using infrastructure as the ideal substrate of artistic intervention into public space. One series used the concept of contamination to insert sculptures that mimic the colourful symbols of transportation and pedestrian safety (to warn, guide and permit) into urban infrastructure (fig. 6). While the visual language of safety is ubiquitous in urban space,

it hardly registers as the means by which state bureaucracies regulate our very movements. Working against this regulation, the insertions are intended as a subversion of authority that is weaved into the physical fabric of cities. In another series of interventions titled *Displacing Domesticity*, I was interested in the dichotomy of public and private spaces and the extent of their separation in contemporary American cities. Working against this separation, I inserted domestic objects such as a lamp, mirror and TV onto public infrastructure (fig. 7).

Finally, for my thesis at MIT, I looked at how the flow of energy (electricity, oil, labour, etc.) determines the structure of societies and human relations in general. Amongst a series of art and design projects, one was a concept for a socio-economic energy network to generate and move small quantities of electricity in social communities without a power grid. Drawing parallels with the movement of water from wells, the design is centred on an energy bucket (a battery) that can be filled (charged) at stations such as a small windmill or a rooftop solar panel located within a village. The concept imagines energy to be bartered, sold, purchased or function as a unit of exchange in the absence of money or as an alternative to it. Called the Human Grid, the concept is premised on energy as currency (fig. 8).

My artistic preoccupation with energy eventually converged with my interest in Hambantota port as a new node on China's logistics network to move oil from the Middle East to the Middle Kingdom. In her video work *Black Sea Files* (2005), artist Ursula Biemann investigates the flow of people parallel to the flow of oil through the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline running 1,768 kilometres from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. In a text describing the work, Biemann writes: "Given the importance of energy in our society today, it is surprising how few cultural analyses are available on the subject, in comparison with research topics such as technology, virtuality and velocity."¹⁰

Towards Systems and Networks

In 2012, I produced a work titled *Compare & Contrast: Codes of Conduct* for the ZERO1 Biennial (with the theme of “Seeking Silicon Valley”) in San Jose, California. The project applies Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman’s propaganda model of communication to read how US mainstream media covers Silicon Valley (a center of technology) compared to Washington DC (a center of politics). I collected media headlines for 100 days prior to the 2012 presidential election to show media bias in the way Washington is presented as stagnant and ideological and Silicon Valley as fast and innovative, as if to suggest they are antithetical to each other. In reality, the interests of both centers of power are closely aligned and collude to perpetuate the myth of free markets and entrepreneurship and obfuscate decades of state subsidies and tax-payer funded research to create large technological networks such as the internet, with Google, Facebook and others being byproducts. My research involved in-depth interviews with prominent voices on the relationship between technology and government. These include Noam Chomsky, John Perry Barlow (founder of the Electronics Frontier Foundation) and Susan Crawford (former policy advisor to Barack Obama on science and technology).

Compare & Contrast gradually led to an increased curiosity of the extent to which aspects of large-scale state and corporate networks are hidden from view. The dominant ones in place today were not emergent but were planned, named, openly declared and the product of intentions. Twentieth-century governance, trade and finance systems such as Bretton Woods, the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund continue to exert tremendous political and economic control over most of the world’s nations and populations and their lineages can be traced back to war and systems of empire, slavery and colonisation. In the twenty-first century, intelligence networks (i.e. NSA, Five-Eyes), censorship systems

(i.e. China's Great Firewall) and transnational corporate networks (i.e. Google, Amazon, Alibaba) transgress individual privacy and national sovereignty in innovative new ways. Regardless of competition and apparent divisions between states or between corporations, there appears to be a universal consensus to increase big data, artificial intelligence, surveillance, marketing, militarisation, resource extraction, and ultimately the concentration of power and wealth. I believe these are new twenty-first century frontiers for artistic research and representation.

Map #	Port Name	Country	Locale	PRC Involvement
1	Port of Cherchell	Algeria	Cherchell	Construction by China Harbour Engineering Company and China State Construction Engineering Corporation
2	Port of Lobito	Angola	Lobito	Extension of container terminal and mineral terminal by China Harbour Engineering Company
3	North Abaco Port	Bahamas	North Abaco	Construction by China Harbour Engineering Company
4	New Mooring Container Terminal	Bangladesh	Chittagong	Construction by China Harbour Engineering Company
5	Antwerp Gateway	Belgium	Antwerp	49% stake by China Merchants Holdings Company Ltd.
6	APM Terminals Zeebrugge	Belgium	Zeebrugge	25% stake by China Shipping Terminal Development Company
7	Zeebrugge Container Terminal	Belgium	Zeebrugge	49% stake by China Merchants Holdings Company
8	Kyaukpyu Deep Sea Port	Burma	Kyaukpyu	Construction by China Harbour Engineering Company; consortium with CITIC Group Corporation China Merchants Holdings Company
9	Kribi Deep Sea Port Project	Cameroon	Kribi	Construction by China Harbour Engineering Company; financing by Export-Import Bank of China
10	Port of São Vicente	Cape Verde	São Vicente	Construction by China Road and Bridge Corporation

Figure 4. Map and index of 52 ports and terminals with Chinese involvement prior to the announcement of Belt and Road (see Chapter 4, pp. 9-16 for full version).

Jegan Vincent de Paul, *Working map of worldwide shipping ports with construction & stakes by the People's Republic of China's state-owned firms*, 2015.

Figure 5. Jegan Vincent de Paul, *The New Kennedy Station: Machine as Monument*, 2006.

Figure 6. Jegan Vincent de Paul, *Contaminants Series*, 2008.

Figure 7. Jegan Vincent de Paul, *Displacing Domesticity*, 2008.

Figure 4. Everyday modes of transporting energy vessels.

It is a kind of wireless 'smart grid' that grows and evolves based on the choices and abilities of community members to take on the roles of filling and moving parcels of energy.

'The ability to do work' is the most commonly accepted scientific definition of energy. Energy is a *quality*. As a quantity, it can be measured, transferred, and used, but is non-existent otherwise. Framing energy as a qualitative relation has a profound socio-economic implication: value is created when it is exchanged. Charged parcels of energy can essentially function as currency; within a fully developed human grid, energy can be traded, sold, loaned, purchased, or bartered, backed by real value (potential energy) in the absence of or as replacement for money (Figure. 5 and 6).

In an analysis of the linkages between energy, economy, and social development, the UN and the World Energy Council point out that "it is access to energy services, not energy supply per se, that matters" [World Energy Assessment 2004]. In a human grid, social energy in the form of labor and time overlaps and flows simultaneously with that of electrical energy – at any given moment, social and electrical energy cannot be

Figure 5. Power stations are set up as exchange services where empty vessels can be traded for charged ones for a fee. Charged vessels can be readily available or dropped-off and picked-up at a later time. The station may be part of another business or service.

Figure 6. Energy vessels can be traded, sold, loaned, purchased, or bartered between members of a community. Empty vessels for example, can be traded for charged ones with goods such as produce.

Figure 8. Research on energy-as-currency published as "The Human Grid: Concept for a Transitional Energy Network" in *Acoustic Space - Energy: Scientific and Artistic, Utopian and Critical Visions* in 2011.

Jegan Vincent de Paul, *The Human Grid Project*, 2009.

Art as Methodology

As a dissertation in art, my methodology is non-disciplinary and rooted in introspection, experimentation and creative practice. Over the last five years of studying Belt and Road and developing a critical perspective of large-scale infrastructures, art has gradually become a methodology and less of a subject. Art as a methodology aligns with my actual subject interests, education, lived experience and creative capacities. In this sense, I do not have a fixed set of approaches, theories or established methods common to disciplines. Artists, especially into the twentieth century, have appropriated and synthesised knowledge and techniques from other fields, disciplines or spheres of society such as data collection, modes of representation and technologies.

Particularly in relation to the political, art can be used to critique or comment without a priori assumptions, pretense of objectivity, argumentation or reductive reasoning. In this sense, art is not theoretical and a work of art does not become invalidated at some time in the future once new facts become available and ways of reasoning change. While art can have explanatory powers and function as a warning, I do not believe it is a method to predict outcomes or future trends in society as theoretical models in most disciplines attempt to do. In this dissertation, I use it primarily as a methodology to reflect on the past and the concrete present. Art can raise questions without the need to answer them and make propositions without the need to prove them. At the same time, art as a methodology can produce knowledge to clarify, inform and reveal otherwise hidden sociopolitical relations at the micro and macro levels. Lastly—and perhaps most importantly—knowledge about the world produced through artistic methods can be broadly accessible and understood without the need for disciplinary expertise.

Precedents

My own methodology relies on the process of *collecting* and using *text* as a form of artistic representation. Before outlining my specific methods, it is worthwhile to comment on the work of the following artists who have influenced my approach: Hans Haacke, Mark Lombardi, Banu Cennetoğlu, Trevor Paglin and Ai Weiwei. These artists expose nefarious governmental, corporate or institutional policies and practices through specific cases using methods that are oriented in research, documentation and text as representation.

At the initial stage of this thesis, I examined Haacke's body of work, writing an essay titled "Outside the Object: The Aesthetic of Hans Haacke's *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Board of Trustees*" (fig. 9). The essay proposes that the aesthetic of Haacke's text-based works in the early 1970s is largely not of a formal or visual dimension. Using Haacke's *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Board of Trustees* of 1974 as a case study, I show that what is to be experienced, and more precisely seen and perceived in these works lie outside of the work itself. That is, the aesthetic of the work is the set of relations it exposes; an aesthetic that is not purely 'retinal' but one that produces knowledge and awareness of the corrupting corporate influences within cultural institutions. With *Trustees*, Haacke uses the format of simple framed documents to make an exposition of the Guggenheim Museum trustees' close ties to large multinational corporations. The work, for example, reveals that three of the trustees also served as the board of directors of the Kennecott Copper Corporation; Kennecott is revealed as a multinational mining company that challenged Chilean president Salvador Allende's nationalisation of Chile's El Teniente copper mine. Although Haacke did briefly exhibit the work in a small New York gallery, *Trustees* was (and could still be) reproduced and its message transmitted through print media such as newspapers and books (and this thesis) without losing its aesthetic as a work of art.

Like Haacke, Mark Lombardi collected, composed and published in the format of exhibitions and printed reproductions. Working with both easily available sources such as news and extensive research of publicly available material such as declassified government documents, Lombardi produced detailed diagrams as large ink and graphite drawings, revealing the global network of actors in supranational domains such as drugs, energy and finance. His series of drawings chronicle almost all major scandals from the mid 1970s to the early 90s involving American political and financial actors, such as the Iran-Contra affair and the Harken Energy scandal involving alleged insider trading by George W. Bush (fig. 10). Expansive in scope and breadth, Lombardi dwells into minute details of shell corporations, offshore banking and arms transfers. In his drawing process, Lombardi worked with coloured index cards (producing over 12,000) that he called a “data base” containing the names of famous and infamous politicians, businessmen, mobsters, sheiks, terrorists, as well as cartels, corporations, institutions, and government agencies. More than visualising information or conveying data, Lombardi’s drawings on corporate-state networks evoke a deep sense that something is profoundly wrong in the world and is evident in the way certain entities are affiliated to one another.

Specific projects by Banu Cennetoğlu, Ai Weiwei and Trevor Paglen demonstrate the immediate ethical and social relevance of artistic methods to research, frame and present information. Since 2002, Cennetoğlu has brought attention to a detailed catalog of names, age, gender, place of origin and the cause of death of thousands of migrants who have lost their lives on their way to (and often within the borders of) the European Union since 1993. Compiled and updated every year by United for Intercultural Action, the catalog contains 40,555 cases as of June 2020 (fig. 11). Framing the compilation simply as *The List*, Cennetoğlu has facilitated the display of translated and updated versions of it across Europe

through printed handouts, poster campaigns, newspaper supplements and projections (fig. 12). She has made clear that she does not consider *The List* an art piece and that "You cannot represent this kind of darkness through art."¹¹ At the same time, *The List* is consistent with (and perhaps even constituent of) Cennetoğlu's artistic method of unearthing and making public data, facts and information. Similarly, in 2009, Ai Weiwei (an artist I had worked for as a designer over several years in Beijing) and a "citizen investigation team" undertook a multi-year long project that discovered the name, date of birth, grade and gender of 5219 children that died in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake (fig. 13). Eventually titled *Names of the Student Earthquake Victims Found by the Citizens' Investigation (2008-2011)*, the work is a response to the Chinese government's refusal to account for and publicise the names and number of deaths, many of whom died in school buildings shoddily built by corrupt construction practices involving government officials. Similar to Banu Cennetoğlu and Ai Weiwei, Trevor Paglen has used listing as part of his methods to research and represent. His ongoing (since 2001) work *Code Names* is a list of words, phrases and terms related to US military programs whose existence or purpose is classified (fig. 14). Although it is a list of mostly nonsensical and opaque terms (such as PoloHat, Owl and SprayPaint), their sheer quantity (numbering in the thousands) reveals the massive scope of covert, classified and active US intelligence programs. The work is continuous with Paglen's body of work bringing attention to the concrete dimensions (such as buildings and drones) of the pervasive but invisible US surveillance state.

SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

CORPORATE AFFILIATION OF TRUSTEES

Kennecott Copper Corporation

FRANK R. MILLIKEN, President, Chief Exec. Officer & Member Board of Directors

PETER O. LAWSON-JOHNSTON, Member Board of Directors

ALBERT E. THIELE, past Member Board of Directors

Multinational company mining, smelting, refining copper, molybdenum, gold, zinc and coal. Copper based mill products.

Operates in the U.S., Australia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, England, Indonesia, Italy, Netherlands Antilles, Nigeria, Peru, South Africa.

El Teniente, Kennecott's Chilean copper mine, was nationalized July, 1971 through Constitutional Reform Law, passed unanimously by Chilean Congress. Chilean Comptroller General ruled profits over 12% a year since 1955 to be considered excess and deducted from compensation. His figures, disputed by Kennecott, in effect, eliminated any payments.

Kennecott tried to have Chilean copper shipments confiscated or customers' payments attached. Although without ultimate success in European courts, legal harassment threatened Chilean economy (copper 70% of export).

President Salvador Allende addressed United Nations December 4, 1972. The New York Times reported:

The Chilean President had still harsher words for two U.S. companies, the International Telephone & Telegraph Corp. and the Kennecott Corp., which he said, had "dug their claws into my country", and which proposed "to manage our political life."

Dr. Allende said that from 1955 to 1970 the Kennecott Copper Corp. had made an average profit of 52.8% on its investments.

He said that huge "transnational" corporations were waging war against sovereign states and that they were "not accountable to or representing the collective interest."

In a statement issued in reply to Dr. Allende's charges, Frank R. Milliken, president of Kennecott, referred to legal actions now being taken by his company in courts overseas to prevent the Chilean Government from selling copper from the nationalized mines:

"No amount of rhetoric can alter the fact that Kennecott has been a responsible corporate citizen of Chile for more than 50 years and has made substantial contributions to both the economic and social well-being of the Chilean people."

"Chile's expropriation of Kennecott's property without compensation violates established principles of international law. We will continue to pursue any legal remedies that may protect our shareholders' equity."

President Allende died in a military coup Sept. 11, 1973. The Junta committed itself to compensate Kennecott for nationalized property.

1973 Net sales : \$1,425,613,531 Net after taxes : \$159,363,059 Earn. per com. share : \$4.81

29,100 employees

Office: 161 E. 42 St., New York, N.Y.

Figure 9. Hans Haacke, *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Board of Trustees* [Panel 4 of 7], 1974.

Figure 10. Mark Lombardi, *Oliver North, Lake Resources of Panama, and the Iran-Contra Operation*, ca. 1984–86 [4th version], 1999.

List of 40 555 documented deaths of refugees and migrants due to the restrictive policies of "Fortress Eu

Documentation by UNITED as of 11 June 2020

Death by Policy - Time for Change!

Campaign information: Facebook - UNITED Against Refugee Deaths, UnitedAgainstRefugeeDeaths.eu, listofdeaths@unitedagainstracism.org, Twitter: @UNITED_Network #AgainstRefugeeDeaths
 UNITED for Intercultural Action, European network against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants and refugees
 Amsterdam secretariat: Postbus 413, NL-1000 AK Amsterdam, Netherlands, tel +31-6-48808808, listofdeaths@unitedagainstracism.org, www.unitedagainstracism.org

The UNITED List of Deaths can be freely re-used, translated and re-distributed, provided UNITED is contacted in advance and source (UnitedAgainstRefugeeDeaths.eu) is mentioned. Researchers can obtain this list with more data in xl

found dead	number	name, gender, age	region of origin	cause of death	source
03/05/20	1	Ahmed Mahmoud Omar (man, 53)	Kurdistan-Iraq	died after fight at Usivak migrant centre, Sarajevo (BA); it is alleged a security guard was involved	InfoMigrants/Rudaw
18/04/20	1	N.N. (woman, 47)	Iraq	died of unclear causes without medical help at overcrowded Vial refugee camp on Chios (GR)	Guardian/InfoMigrants/EFSYNRF/20MFR
17/04/20	9	N.N. (men)	Syria/Iraq/Yemen/Palestine	1 drowned, 8 missing after boat capsized in Danube river trying to cross from Romania into Serbia	DW/Zei/IOM/Romania
15/04/20	1	Mohamed Youssef (man)	Egypt	drowned during attempt to return to Melilla (Spanish enclave), body recovered on beach near border to Nador (MA)	AMDI/Nador/IOM
14/04/20	1	Nohom Mehar (young man)	Sub-Saharan Africa	died on a migrant boat when Malta and Italy failed to properly rescue; survivors pushed back to Libya	AlarmPhone/LM'SeaWatch/AVV/MomStar
14/04/20	1	Kidus Yohannes (young man)	Sub-Saharan Africa	died on a migrant boat when Malta and Italy failed to properly rescue; survivors pushed back to Libya	AlarmPhone/LM'SeaWatch/AVV/MomStar
14/04/20	1	Filmon Hasbu (young man)	Sub-Saharan Africa	died on a migrant boat when Malta and Italy failed to properly rescue; survivors pushed back to Libya	AlarmPhone/LM'SeaWatch/AVV/MomStar
14/04/20	1	Filmon Desale (young man)	Sub-Saharan Africa	died on a migrant boat when Malta and Italy failed to properly rescue; survivors pushed back to Libya	AlarmPhone/LM'SeaWatch/AVV/MomStar
14/04/20	1	Debesay Rusom (young man)	Sub-Saharan Africa	died on a migrant boat when Malta and Italy failed to properly rescue; survivors pushed back to Libya	AlarmPhone/LM'SeaWatch/AVV/MomStar
14/04/20	1	Filmon Mengstab (young man)	Sub-Saharan Africa	died on a migrant boat when Malta and Italy failed to properly rescue; survivors pushed back to Libya	AlarmPhone/LM'SeaWatch/AVV/MomStar
14/04/20	1	Mogos Tesfamichael (young man)	Sub-Saharan Africa	died on a migrant boat when Malta and Italy failed to properly rescue; survivors pushed back to Libya	AlarmPhone/LM'SeaWatch/AVV/MomStar
14/04/20	1	Hidu Yemane (young man)	Sub-Saharan Africa	died on a migrant boat when Malta and Italy failed to properly rescue; survivors pushed back to Libya	AlarmPhone/LM'SeaWatch/AVV/MomStar
14/04/20	1	Hunyu Yohannes (young man)	Sub-Saharan Africa	died on a migrant boat when Malta and Italy failed to properly rescue; survivors pushed back to Libya	AlarmPhone/LM'SeaWatch/AVV/MomStar
14/04/20	1	Omer Seid (young man)	Sub-Saharan Africa	died on a migrant boat when Malta and Italy failed to properly rescue; survivors pushed back to Libya	AlarmPhone/LM'SeaWatch/AVV/MomStar
14/04/20	1	Teklay Kifle (young man)	Sub-Saharan Africa	died on a migrant boat when Malta and Italy failed to properly rescue; survivors pushed back to Libya	AlarmPhone/LM'SeaWatch/AVV/MomStar
14/04/20	1	Kidus Yohannes (young man)	Sub-Saharan Africa	died on a migrant boat when Malta and Italy failed to properly rescue; survivors pushed back to Libya	AlarmPhone/LM'SeaWatch/AVV/MomStar
08/04/20	1	N.N. (boy, 16)	Afghanistan	died after being stabbed in a fight at the overcrowded Moria refugee camp on Lesbos (GR)	InfoMigrants
06/04/20	1	Amadou (man)	Mali	died after fight in migrant sum of Taurianova (IT), where irregular migrants live in terrible conditions	QuotidSud
03/04/20	40	N.N. (incl. 2 women)	Sub-Saharan Africa	2 drowned, 38 missing in migrant shipwreck off Tan-Tan (MA) on way to Canary Islands; 21 rescued	LeMonde/ElDiar/Caminando/La12/IOM
03/04/20	1	Alseny Koula (young man)	Guinea	missing in migrant shipwreck off Tan-Tan (MA) on the way to Canary Islands; 21 people rescued	LeMonde/ElDiar/Caminando/La12/IOM
01/04/20	1	N.N.	unknown	presumed drowned, body found on Al Maya Shore, Zawiya (LY)	IOMLibya
in Apr 20	6	N.N.	unknown	drowned in the Mediterranean, according to survivors, when >20 ships left from Libya the same week	AlarmPhone
30/03/20	3	N.N.	Sub-Saharan Africa	drowned in migrant shipwreck off Sidi Mejdoub beach, near Mostaganem (DZ); 13 people rescued	Ref/Oan/LibAlgerie/IOM
26/03/20	22	N.N. (incl. woman)	Sub-Saharan Africa	1 drowned, 21 missing in migrant shipwreck between Dakhla (MA) and Canary Islands; 4 rescued	2MA/IOM
16/03/20	1	N.N. (girl, 6)	unknown	died in fire in container at overcrowded Moria migrant camp on Lesbos (GR)	AlJazeera
12/03/20	8	N.N. (incl. child)	unknown	3 drowned, 5 missing in a migrant shipwreck off the coast of Larache (MA); 39 people rescued	Caminando/IOM
10/03/20	18	N.N.	Algeria	3 drowned, 15 missing in migrant shipwreck off coast of El Hacueria, Nabeul (TN) on way to Italy	EsSalam/IOM
09/03/20	1	Bequer (teenage boy)	Iraq	hit by train near Metz (FR), trying to reach UK; had been unaccompanied minor in Dunkirk camps (FR)	CMS
08/03/20	1	N.N.	unknown	decomposed body found on banks of the Evros river near Feres (GR) at Turkish-Greek border	KI/IOM
04/03/20	1	Muhammad Gultari (man, 43)	Pakistan	shot by Greek border guard while trying to cross Turkish-Greek border at Kastanies/Pazarikula crossing	BBC/AusBC/Fatb/Sveriget/AlIOM
03/03/20	2	N.N. (men)	Syria	shot by Greek border guard while trying to cross Evros River from Turkey at the Ipsala crossing point	BBC
02/03/20	1	Muhammad al-Arab (man, 22)	Syria	shot by Greek border guard while trying to cross Turkish-Greek border at Ipsala/Kipi border crossing	Indigo/Agenzia/rova/Telegraph/DailyBaa/A
02/03/20	1	N.N. (young boy)	unknown	drowned, migrant boat from Turkey capsized off Lesbos (GR) in unclear circumstances; 47 rescued	Indigo/Telegraph/NYTimes/VanMK/InfoMig
02/03/20	3	N.N. (2 children, 1 woman)	unknown	drowned off Sivrice Beach near Ayvalik (TR) on the way to Lesbos (GR); 46 people rescued	IOI/Turkey
01/03/20	10	N.N.	unknown	1 drowned, 9 missing when boat sank between Anjouan (Comoros) and Mayotte (FR); 15 rescued	Ouest-France/IOM
29/02/20	1	Fatma (woman)	Syria	shot by Greek border guard crossing Evros River to Greece near Edirne (TR); husband & 6 kids survived	AJ/IOM
28/02/20	3	N.N. (men)	unknown	suffocated during trafficking, bodies found abandoned on rural road near Volvi, Thessaloniki (GR)	Ethnos
27/02/20	1	N.N. (man, 19)	Morocco	suicide, hung himself at Beyenne prison (FR) after escaping from detention centre at FRIES border	Cnnade/ActuFR
27/02/20	1	N.N. (man)	unknown	body found in boat that arrived at a beach near Castillo del Romeral, Gran Canaria (ES); 34 survived	SigloXXIIOM
22/02/20	2	N.N.	Syria	car accident, driver lost control and careened off a cliff near Gramsh (AL); 7 survived	NYTimes/IOM
22/02/20	1	N.N. (man)	Algeria	presumed drowned, body in state of decomposition found by fishermen off isle Palma de Mallorca (ES)	Hora/IOM
19/02/20	53	N.N.	unknown	missing at sea on 2 migrant boats between Dakhla (Western Sahara) and the Canary Islands (ES)	AlJazeera
18/02/20	14	N.N. (incl. 2 children)	Guinea/Ivory Coast	drowned off Morocco when migrant boat sank on the way to the Canary Islands (ES); 14 survivors	AlJazeera/Provincia/AlarmPhone/Caminando
17/02/20	1	Mustafa Ramadan (man, 33)	Syria	frozen, trying to cross in winter Ser Mountains (North Macedonian - Kosovo border) near Tetovo (MK)	VCA/IOM
15/02/20	1	N.N.	unknown	presumed drowned, body found in advanced state of decomposition in waters of Menorca (ES)	Hora
14/02/20	18	N.N. (incl. 3 young men)	Algeria	4 drowned, 14 missing from migrant boat from Annaba (DZ); bodies found washed up in Tunisia	InfoMigrants/EW/IOM
14/02/20	1	M.J.D. (man, 20)	Algeria	body found floating off the coast of Collo (DZ) was on way to Spain, parents identified his body	EW/IOM
10/02/20	1	N.N. (man)	unknown	body found in advanced state of decay in Evros river near Thouri (GR) on border with Turkey	AftMag/IOM
09/02/20	1	N.N. (woman)	West Africa	died in hospital after rescue from boat from Western Sahara drifting south of Canary Islands (ES)	EP/Caminando/EFE/ElDiar/IOM
09/02/20	90	N.N.	Sudan/Niger/Mali/Iran	their boat disappeared in Mediterranean Sea on way from al-Qarabouli (LY) to Italy; 2 bodies found	AlJazeera/AP/IOM/Libya
09/02/20	1	Mohamed Idris (man, 27)	Sudan	his boat disappeared in the Mediterranean Sea on the way from al-Qarabouli (LY) to Italy	AlJazeera/AP/IOM/Libya
09/02/20	1	N.N. (young man)	unknown	body in state of decay found in fishing net off the coast of Benabdelmalek Ramdane (DZ)	Ref/IOM
08/02/20	10	N.N.	Afghanistan/Pakistan	died in snowstorm in mountains of Saroman, Van region (TR) after crossing border from Iran	RedHaber/EurPress/Hurriye/CNN/Turk/IOM
08/02/20	1	Sheikh Abdulrahman Abdo (man)	Syria	died in snowstorm in mountains of Saroman, Van region (TR) after crossing border from Iran	RedHaber/EurPress/Hurriye/CNN/Turk/IOM
08/02/20	1	Hendreen Ibish (man)	Syria	died in snowstorm in mountains of Saroman, Van region (TR) after crossing border from Iran	RedHaber/EurPress/Hurriye/CNN/Turk/IOM
08/02/20	1	Azed Henze (man)	Syria	died in snowstorm in mountains of Saroman, Van region (TR) after crossing border from Iran	RedHaber/EurPress/Hurriye/CNN/Turk/IOM
07/02/20	1	N.N. (man)	West Africa	died on migrant boat from Western Sahara found drifting south of El Hierro (Canary Islands, Spain)	EP/Caminando/EFE/ElDiar/IOM
07/02/20	7	N.N. (1 woman, 6 men)	West Africa	5 jumped into water out of despair, 2 died during journey on boat drifting south of Canary Islands (ES)	Caminando/EFE/ElDiar/IOM
02/02/20	2	N.N. (women 15-25)	unknown	bodies found in river Evros near Gemistoi (GR) near border with Turkey	AftMag
02/02/20	1	N.N. (man)	Bangladesh	died of hypothermia, found in a barn near Hacibey river in Derecik (TR) on Iraqi border; 3 survived	Miliye/HaberT/IOM
01/02/20	5	N.N. (young adults)	Algeria	1 found in state of advanced decomposition, 4 missing off Mostaganem (DZ), he tried to reach Spain	EW/Oan/IOM
01/02/20	1	Faycal (man)	Algeria	body found in advanced state of decomposition off Mostaganem (DZ), he tried to reach Spain	ElM/Oan/IOM
in Feb 20	1	N.N. (young man, 20-25)	unknown	frozen to death, body found in forest in Evros in north-eastern part of Greece near border with Turkey	AftMag
in Feb 20	1	N.N.	Algeria	body recovered on the coast of Kerkira, less than 10 km east of Collo (DZ), was on way to Spain	EW
25/01/20	5	N.N.	Syria/unknown	3 drowned, 2 missing off the coast of Mersin (TR); 1 person rescued	TurkCoastGIOM
23/01/20	1	N.N.	unknown	car accident, vehicle overturned between Kavala and Amigdaleonas (GR); 8 survivors	Kavala Web News/IOM/Greece
21/01/20	1	N.N. (man, 28)	Somalia	found dead inside his tent in clandestine migrant camp in Paris (FR); he was seeking asylum	InfoMigrants
18/01/20	1	Vakhtang Enukidze (man, 38)	Georgia	died in Gredisco (IT) after fight at detention centre; not clear if police beating or painkiller overdose	ILP/TriestePrima/Giornale/Umanita/NovA/I
18/01/20	1	N.N. (young man)	Syria	stowaway, run over by train after falling off one near Thessaloniki Bridge (GR) on way to Central Europe	Karftsa/IOM
16/01/20	1	N.N. (man, 20)	Yemen	stabbed to death during an altercation at the overcrowded Moria refugee camp on Lesbos (GR)	KI
15/01/20	1	N.N. (man, 20)	Congo	died in hospital 15 days after being stabbed in fight at overcrowded Moria refugee camp, Lesbos (GR)	KI/InfoMigrants

Deaths are listed if they can be attributed to the fatal policies of 'Fortress Europe'
 (border closure, asylum laws, accommodation, detention policy, deportations, carrier sanctions...)

1

Figure 11. UNITED for Intercultural Action, *List of 40 555 documented deaths of refugees and migrants due to the restrictive policies of 'Fortress Europe', 2020.*

Figure 12. Banu Cennetoğlu, *The List*, 2007-present.

(Poster installation at Basel SBB railway station of list containing 13,824 documented migrant deaths as of 2010, in Basel Switzerland from January 31 to February 8, 2011)

Figure 13. Ai Weiwei, *Names of the Student Earthquake Victims Found by the Citizens' Investigation*, 2009-2011.

(Installation view at exhibition Ai Weiwei: *According to What?* at Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, DC, from October 7, 2012 to February 24, 2013)

T LOOK	HAVE QUICK	ISTAF
SHADOW	HAVE SHADE	JABBE
VOICE	HAVE SIGHT	JACKA
STER	HAVE SLICK	JAGUA
GUEUE	HAVE SOUND	JEDI KNI
LLER	HAVE STAR	JEFFERS
AVE	HAVE STARE	JOGGE
IDE	HAVE TERRA	JOLLYRO
ARCHER	HAVE UNION	JUGGERN
L CAJUN	HAVE VOID	JUGULA
L CRUISE	HAWK	JUMPSE
GUARDIAN	HAYSTACK	JUNIPER C
HARVEST	HEARTLEAF	JUNIPER FAI
L HAWK	HEAVY KEY	JUNIPER
IGHTNING	HELPING HAND	JUNIPER ST.
SHADOW	HERALD STARS	JUSTICE AS
L STORM	HERALD STORM	KEELA
THUNDER	HERALD SWITCH	KEEN SA
L VISION	HERALD WEATHER	KEENS WC
L REACH	HERCULES	KEESE
Y TRIP	HERITAGE	KENNA
MINER	HEXAGON	KETCHU
POINT	HIDDEN TREASURE	KEY PLA
DBYE	HIGH POINT	KEYCAI
AMER	HIGHLAND WIND	KEYHO
ACE	HIGHTIDE	KEYHOLE D

Figure 14. Trevor Paglen, *Code Names*, 2001-present.

(Installation view at exhibition *Code Names* at Van Abbemuseum in the Netherlands from September 19, 2013 to January 19, 2014)

Methods: Collection, Composition, Transmission

Months after I began my dissertation at NTU, “The Belt and Road Initiative” was formally announced by China in March 2015. After an initial period of confusion at the extent of discussions on it, I eventually began collecting content being generated on it (including under “New Silk Road” and its other official name “One Belt One Road”) from both Chinese and non-Chinese sources. I framed these materials as a kind of “contemporary archive” of Belt and Road being produced in real-time and myself as the “archivist” collecting and indexing them. English historian Vivian Hunter Galbraith metaphorically described archival records as the “secretions of an organism,” referring to the mundane and regular administrative output of organisations, in contrast to that which is consciously produced to communicate a historical message.¹² In the case of much Chinese material on Belt and Road, the regular output is not mundane but a conscious historicising of Belt and Road as if it is already a major part of world history and not an active project contingent on the present. A saga constructed not for future historians, but present-day consumption. Books with titles such as *One Belt One Road: China’s Civilizational Rise* and *Wanting to be Bodhisattva’s Orchid: Dunhuang One Belt, One Road Paintings* are continuously published by state-owned or state-endorsed publishers (fig. 15). Other books such as *Legal Dimensions of China’s Belt and Road Initiative*, *Belt and Road Initiative: What Will China Offer the World in its Rise?* and *One Belt One Road: Change, Innovation, Idealism, Freedom* present it as a definitive program that can be held accountable, even though this is not the case as I show in Chapter 2. Anachronistic memorabilia conflating Belt and Road with Silk Road are handed out at official events and sold by banks and post offices across China and enterprising online vendors. They show images of camel caravans, sailing ships or iconic historic architecture, not oil pipelines running through conflict zones, container ships docked at securitised ports or

migrant labourers pouring concrete (fig. 16). The materials are largely self-referential, caught in a bizarre cycle of repetition and produced at an unprecedented regularity for a singular project.

I have indexed and created bound volumes of Belt and Road's material output and have also produced my own materials, such as maps and posters (fig. 17). Furthermore I have published writings, given talks as well as shipped and exhibited my research and works on Belt and Road (fig. 18). The methods I use can be divided into three general kinds:

Collection, Composition, Transmission. These methods are sometimes sequential, but for the most part they function as a non-linear system, as I use them simultaneously to interpret, produce and represent. The final chapter of this thesis, Chapter 4, is a comprehensive visual documentation of the outputs generated by my methods of Collection, Composition and Transmission. This includes documentation of my archive of Belt and Road and its exhibit at Eastern University in Sri Lanka, a prototype for a semi-fictional newspaper called *The Belt and Road Times*, and various art works I produced in the process of my research and writing.

The following is an outline of my methods:

Collection:

A method used to obtain physical objects, digital materials and printed text and images. I have collected the following kinds: Books, Maps, Posters, Visualisations, Infographics, Memorabilia, Articles, Papers/Studies/Reports, Speeches/Talks/Interviews.

Composition:

A method to produce my own materials based on collections. I have composed the following: Texts, Indexes, Lists, Bound volumes, Artist Book, Maps, Posters, Photographs, Shipping Crates and Newspaper.

Transmission:

A method of making my collections and compositions public. I have used the following forms of transmission: Exhibitions, Publications, Talks, Presentations and (this) Dissertation.

Figure 15. Cover of book conflating Belt and Road with images of ancient Buddhist murals from the Mogao Caves near the city of Dunhuang, considered as a stop on the historic Silk Road.

Guan Xi Science and Technology Publishing House, *Wanting to be Bodhisattva's Orchid: Dunhuang One Belt One Road Paintings*, 2016.

Figure 16. Obverse and reverse sides of a “One Belt One Road” commemorative metal plate in the form of a 100-yuan currency note. The obverse side has the words “Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road” with an image of Xi Jinping and Silk Road imagery. The reverse side has the words “People’s Republic of China” and an image of the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests at the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, China.

Unknown producer, “One Belt One Road” commemorative plate, 2017.

Figure 17. One of twelve campaign posters for a fictional project called “One Belt One Road One World” (see Chapter 4, pp.119-142 for all posters and descriptions).

Jegan Vincent de Paul, *One Belt, One Road, One World: A New Silk Road Project*, 2017.

Figure 18. Above: Chinese camphor chest modified into a shipping crate, containing my collections and compositions for exhibition in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. Below: image from MarineTraffic tracking ship (NYK SWAN) containing the crate shipped from Singapore to Colombo on March 4, 2019 (see Chapter 4, pp. 78-93 and pp.276-293 for details).

Jegan Vincent de Paul, *The Proposed System Suffers From a Set of Internal Contradictions: A Belt and Road Archive* [Archive], 2018-2019.

Background to Written Component

In mid 2017, Sri Lanka handed over majority ownership of its Chinese-built Hambantota port on a 99-year lease to China's state-owned China Merchants Port Holdings. Through the deal, Sri Lanka was paid just over a billion US dollars and China gained a major port and a century of land use in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Soon after the handover, *Xinhua*, China's official state-run press agency, released a video on social media with the heading "Another milestone along path of #BeltandRoad. Sri Lanka officially hands over southern port of Hambantota to China on 99-year lease."¹³ It is a rare, and perhaps unintended, revelation of China's desire to access foreign ports on a long term basis. International responses to Hambantota port's new Chinese ownership was extensive and focused on economic coercion by China with a popular argument that China practices "debt-trap diplomacy." Initiated by Indian analyst Brahma Chellaney in late 2017¹⁴, the argument circulated like a rumour throughout 2018, only to be questioned and dismissed almost entirely in 2019 by the very media sources that promoted it and by expert analysis of debts incurred by economically developing countries (see Chapter 3). The "debt-trap" is an example of the many narrative elements that emerge and propagate as attempts to define the contours—and in the process extend the narrative—of the rather elusive Belt and Road. Amidst the accusation that Belt and Road is a debt-trap, China's vice minister of foreign affairs Le Yucheng had the opportunity to assert that Sri Lanka's debt to China (as of 2018) is only 10% of the \$50 billion the country owes to foreign lenders and that "if you want to get rich, build roads first."¹⁵ The constant discursive push and pull between critics and proponents of China's infrastructure-based foreign actions are absorbed into Belt and Road and ultimately negated, with actual infrastructure construction by China progressing rapidly and unimpeded regardless of how it is framed.

Well before the arrival of Belt and Road in 2013, Chinese state owned banks and construction firms have already funded and built nearly every kind of physical infrastructure at land and sea across world: hydro electric dams, power plants, wind farms, electrical grids, oil refineries and pipelines, telecommunication networks and satellite systems, bridges, rail lines and stations, water and sewage systems, tunnels, shipping terminals and ports, airports, roads, as well as the expanded spaces of economic corridors, special economic zones, free trade zones, industrial zones, resource extraction zones and port cities. In the case of China today, we can speak of infrastructural politics or a kind of infrastructuralism whereby the construction of physical nodes and lines such as ports and pipes serve to harden Chinese presence in nations in Africa, Eurasia, Oceania and Latin America. Chinese-built transnational infrastructures create connectivity and exchange across regional nodes, such as countries, cities and ports, but also the partial or complete severing of relations between other nodes— including between peoples and rights, between governments and law and between nations and sovereignty. Belt and Road frames China’s continuity of expansion under a cultural-historical and geopolitical paradigms that obfuscates its ongoing practice of infrastructuralism. In Chapter 1, I examine the politics of infrastructure common to all states and not just China.

With statist politics in general, infrastructure is always expressed as a matter of practical necessity and modernization, not an ideological category. Although China is a logistics empire,¹⁶ infrastructure as a tool of governance is distanced from Communist Party doctrine. With Belt and Road, infrastructure is instead rooted in a universalist Silk Road mythology that excludes the realities of historic Eurasian trade routes which were expanded by imperialism and—along with trade— facilitated conflict, disease, death and violence.¹⁷ Condensed in the deceptively simple phrase “Silk Road” is millennia of world historical

imaginaries and the very essence of infrastructure: “Silk” conveys all that is produced and desired by civilisations and “Road” in turn conveys transport and the triumph of organisation and cooperation. Unlike distinct and exclusive national myths, the Silk Road myth is transnational and inclusive, serving as the ideal pre-text for Chinese infrastructure to transgress not only national, but regional, continental and oceanic boundaries. Large-scale infrastructure allows China to exert significant territorial influence over many economically developing and even industrialised European countries such as Greece.

Epitomised by roads, infrastructure as a practical physical necessity holds significant narrative power. It is the basis on which Belt and Road is popularised in an on-going cycle of criticism and defense. At the same time, critique of the political exploitation of infrastructure itself within the Belt and Road are marginal or non-existent. Current analyses—particularly geopolitical ones oriented in “strategic” and “security” implications—of Belt and Road overlook the agency of domestic leaders in their use of infrastructure as a political opportunity more than for their economic and social viability. Governments, weak or strong, democratic or authoritarian, are inclined to propose infrastructure as a panacea to the major developmental problems of their nations. With Belt and Road, infrastructure is the rhetorical device for China and a host country’s government to establish mutual political legitimacy, regardless of that country’s economic failures, fragile and corrupt governance structures, ongoing internal conflict or general instability. Through funding, engineering, constructing and/or overseeing infrastructure in such countries, China strengthens its diplomatic ties, extends its influence and creates a long-term physical (and perhaps irrevocable) presence in them. Chapter 3 is an exposition of China’s construction of Hambantota port in Sri Lanka starting in 2008 and its role in the violent end of the country’s 27-year old civil war. Is China’s involvement in Sri Lanka through infrastructure construction a fundamental

contradiction of its foreign policy principle to not interfere in the internal affairs of other nations?

What is it about infrastructure that has a stronghold on the imagination of states and nations? While the topic of infrastructure may be banal in the popular consciousness, actual built infrastructures, such as large bridges and dams, verge on the sublime and are celebrated as national monuments. Like iconic personalities or natural wonders, infrastructures are part of a nation's history, appearing on stamps, currency notes and other forms of national memorialisation. They are feats of engineering serving technical functions and embody the very essence of nation building itself. In a speech given three years after the Bolshevik Revolution, Vladimir Lenin proclaimed that "Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country."¹⁸ Lenin's implicit logic on the value of electrification of course applies to any modern nation with any system of government, but what is universal in Lenin's claim is that large-scale infrastructural undertakings are inseparable not only from the identity of a nation, but from the very function of a state. Within all modern nation-states, infrastructure is a category of power, and like violence, the state has the right and responsibility to use it, but also monopolise it for self preservation.

From 1997-2007, China's Ministry of Rail (since dissolved) implemented a series of "speed up campaigns" and increased the average speed of the country's passenger railways from 43 km/h to 70 km/h. One year after the campaigns—and days before the opening of the 2008 Beijing Olympics—China introduced its first high-speed rail and set a record for the fastest conventional train service in the world with a top speed of 350 km/h. This inaugural high-speed line of just over a 100 kilometres, running from the capital Beijing to the adjacent metropolitan area of Tianjin, would expand to 29,000 kilometres in total length by 2018 and span nearly all of China, constituting two-thirds of the world's total high speed rail. The

phenomenon of China's infrastructure growth is not limited to train lines alone. From the early 1990s to 2018, China's national system of expressways reached a total length of over 142,000 kilometres, by far the world's biggest, surpassing the United State's interstate highway system. Implemented with more than economic rationale, China's infrastructure programs are energised through the politics of national rejuvenation and closer integration with its autonomous and special administrative regions. For example, since China extended its high speed rail network into Hong Kong in late 2018, Chinese immigration officers have been stationed in the city's new Kowloon West terminal and Chinese laws, including criminal law, can be applied in Hong Kong for the first time. Almost a decade earlier, China's plan for the rail link and the site of the future Hong Kong terminal were heavily contested and condemned by the "anti-high-speed-rail movement" with support from the city's pro-democracy law makers. Is China's use of infrastructure for national development, governance and political incursion into its own laws, lands and peoples a parallel to its use of infrastructure at the global scale?

Local oppositions such as Hong Kong's and across the world have long been carried out with the understanding that infrastructure is a matter of hierarchical decision making and the exercise of authority on locality and sociality. "Infrastructure is a terrain of power and contestation" as pointed out by anthropologists Hannah Appel, Nikhil Anand, and Akhil Gupta in their introduction to *The Promise of Infrastructure*. The critical essays in this recent volume—published in 2018—represent a new anthropology of infrastructure that has emerged in the last decade. One of the authors, Dominic Boyer states (albeit cautiously): "Thus, the turn to infrastructure could be viewed as something like a conceptual New Deal for the human sciences—a return of the repressed concerns of public developmentalism to an academic environment that has, like much of the rest of the world, become saturated with

market-centred messages and logics over the past three decades.”¹⁹ Ethnographic in detail and conceptual in scope, anthropology’s recent “turn to infrastructure” views it as a socio-spatial substance in-itself. This is categorically different to analysis of infrastructure as an instrument of neoliberalism, capitalism in general or developmentalism as a whole. In his essay “The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure” anthropologist Brian Larkin surveys contemporary anthropological works that study infrastructure through the lens of technopolitics and writes: “Infrastructures, in this work, are interesting because they reveal forms of political rationality that underlie technological projects and which give rise to an ‘apparatus of governmentality’.”²⁰ Although Larkin does not elaborate, his association of infrastructure to Michel Foucault’s concept of governmentality is fertile ground for further enquiry. Foucault’s concept describes the organised practices, rationalities and techniques through which populations are governed in liberal societies. Can governmentality also apply to non-liberal governments in relation to infrastructure, and in the case of China, a *governmentality with Chinese characteristics*? In his paper “Chinese Governmentalities: Government, Governance and the Socialist Market Economy,” Gary Sigley outlines the shift in the nature of the Communist Party from being based on a concept of ‘government’ in the 1970s to one of ‘governance’ today. He argues that the governmentality of non-Western societies has been overlooked and the “‘socialist arts of government’ or ‘Chinese governmentality’, which governs not through familiar tactics of ‘freedom and liberty’, but through a distinct planning and administrative rationality, and which is nonetheless a product of the same processes that Foucault partly outlines in the governmentality lecture.”²¹ Furthermore, in the case of Belt and Road where multiple governments are involved, can we speak of an intergovernmentality?

In a rare comment on criticism of Belt and Road, *Foreign Policy* contributors Joshua Eisenman and Devin T. Stewart write in their article “China’s Global Critics Are Helping It Win”: “It is ironic that the Belt and Road, Beijing’s signature foreign-policy initiative, has benefited from the same critical foreign voices that it would prefer to see silenced. The critiques of the project, some better-intentioned than others, have actually strengthened the initiative far more than the self-serving statements of sycophants ever could.”²² In an equally rare comment, political scientist Nick Bisley, in his article “Seeing what you want in Belt and Road” writes: “In the growing analysis and commentary about BRI it is becoming increasingly obvious that, whatever you may think about the benefits and costs of infrastructure building on an epic scale, it has become a test for one’s views about the PRC and its place in the world. Put more simply, analysis of BRI tells us more about what the observer thinks about China than it tells us about BRI.”²³ Taken together, these comments point to a central quality of Belt and Road: it absorbs and reflects all criticism and praise. Perspectives on Belt and Road, whether accurate or inaccurate, adversarial or promotional, enthusiastic or dismissive, politicised or depoliticised, are produced with the belief that Belt and Road is meaningful and must be discussed. This in turn produces a kind of “ideas industry”²⁴ that simultaneously use, reproduce and propagate Belt and Road like a meme. It is essentially manifested by fragmentary and rhizomatic re-presentations, events and organisations. A poignant example of this are “Belt and Road” maps. Since the first map published by *Xinhua* in 2014 (fig. 19) suggested where the Belt and Road might be, hundreds of other maps have been created and published online and elsewhere. In retrospect, *Xinhua*’s original map is virtually meaningless in its arbitrary specificity of countries and routes; the map for example excludes Sri Lanka but includes Kolkata, which have opposite significance to projects and routes declared as “Belt and Road.” The map appears as the broad strokes of

calligraphy rather than the “blueprint” it was initially celebrated as by pundits and China watchers. Nonetheless, with a visual gesture on Eurasian land and sea routes, it provoked the necessary geographic imaginations for the birth of a new Silk Road mythology. The confounding type and quantity of Belt and Road expressions can be simplified as a metastructure (as everything above) in contrast to infrastructure (as everything below). In media theory, a metastructure is “where meaning is not just 'decoded' within one structure, but transferred to create another.”²⁵ In physics and material science, metastructures give integrity and rise to other structures. As a concept, I use metastructure to frame the totality of inputs and outputs of Belt and Road that have nothing to do with infrastructure but Belt and Road itself. In Chapter 2, I use the concept of a metastructure to describe how Belt and Road is constructed into a narrative with identifiable archetypes. Maybe this very thesis is a part of the metastructure, but that is perhaps an ontological problem that cannot be avoided.

Figure 19. Earliest known published map of Belt and Road accompanying an online series titled *New Silk Road, New Dreams* on the website of Xinhua News Agency. It shows an overland route (in red) with stops in China, Kazakstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Germany, Netherlands and a maritime route (in blue) with stops in China, Malaysia, India, Kenya, Greece, Italy.

Xinhua Finance Agency, “New Silk Road, Maritime Silk Road” [Map], 2014.

Silk Road to Belt & Road

The use of Silk Road as a cultural and economic concept is not new in modern Eurasian foreign policy discourses and strategies. Ever since ancient Eurasian trade networks were conceptualised as *Seidenstraße*—meaning “Silk road”—by German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877, they have gained monumental historic weight and cultural currency. Mythologized as one of the greatest achievements in human civilisation, Silk Road has come to represent the very essence of cooperation amongst peoples and nations. Into the late twentieth-century, the proverbial concept gained geopolitical relevance after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since then, China, Japan, the United States and others have considered or created policies under the umbrella of Silk Road to engage with the newly independent post-Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Early on, Chinese foreign minister Qian Qichen considered a possible reemergence of Silk Road during his visit to Uzbekistan in 1992; and in 1994, Chinese prime minister Li Peng saw the concept as important for China’s relations with Central Asia.²⁶ In 1997, Japan launched its “Silk Road Diplomacy” to engage the region in the areas of political dialogue, economic cooperation, peacebuilding, nuclear nonproliferation and democratisation.²⁷ This was followed up in 2002 by the “Silk Road Energy Mission” to facilitate cooperation in the energy sector between Japan and Central Asia. Concurrent to Japanese interests, the United States congress passed the Silk Road Strategy Act in 1999 to support the “economic and political independence” of the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia.²⁸ The US act was updated and modified in 2006 to recognise political and economic changes in these countries since the original act and following the attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States.²⁹ In 2008, the Asian Development Bank went further in geographic scope and called for the creation of “the New Silk Road” to “boost trade

between Beijing and Brussels, and create extraordinary economic opportunities for the people of Kazakhstan and their neighbors.”³⁰ Then in a 2011 speech on India-US relations in Chennai, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton—evoking India’s connections to Silk Road—called on the country to “work together to create a new Silk Road.”³¹ Clinton’s emphasis was on north-south Eurasian interactions, unlike the normative east-west ones such as the ADB’s. The US’s agenda is more pronounced in Clinton’s follow up speech at the New Silk Road Ministerial Meeting in New York City in the same year where she calls for establishing strong economic and political ties between Central Asia and South Asia through Afghanistan as a regional hub. Clinton concludes the speech by stating “I look forward to working with all of you to realize the vision of the New Silk Road.”³² That vision was little known and failed for various reasons. Although the US spent billions of dollars on roads in Afghanistan and energy projects in the broader region, Clinton’s Silk Road vision lacked the broad support of the Barack Obama administration and desire for any long-term commitment by the US government in general.

Two years after the US proposal, China announced its own regional ideas that would transform into the Belt and Road Initiative and effectively override a quarter century of Silk Road revivalism. Sharing the genealogy of Japanese, ADB and US attempts and monopolising on China’s centrality in Silk Road histories, Belt and Road unequivocally supersedes all previous attempts in its global relevance and narrative supremacy. At the national level, the Belt and Road Initiative is enshrined in the Chinese constitution and closely linked to China’s “March West” strategy and the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. At the international level, Chinese state agencies and firms have established “Belt and Road” relations with the majority of the world’s countries through cultural exchanges, tourism, foreign aid, trade deals, investments, institution building, business-to-

business partnerships, financing, memorandums of understanding and other formal and informal agreements. The first Belt and Road Forum hosted in Beijing by Xi Jinping in 2017 saw the attendance of representatives from 130 countries—including 29 heads of state—and 70 international organisations. At the United Nations, China has declared that pursuing cooperation on Belt and Road is one of its top priorities and accordingly signed memoranda of understanding with nearly all UN agencies.³³ A 2017 UN Security Council resolution on Afghanistan called on all neighbouring countries to strengthen regional cooperation through initiatives such as the Belt and Road in the “spirit of win-win cooperation” and “a community of shared future for mankind,” two of China’s defacto foreign policy mottos consistently applied to Belt and Road.³⁴ Most significantly, China has positioned Belt and Road as mutually intrinsic to achieving the goals of the UN’s high-priority 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Liu Zhenmin, the UN’s Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and China’s former vice minister of foreign affairs has stated that “Both of them [Belt and Road and 2030 Agenda] serve the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.”³⁵

From Kazakstan to the World

Based on pronouncements of Chinese officials and agencies, the potential geographic area covered by Belt and Road is the entire planet (fig. 20). The following is an account of the main events over a five-year period where China methodically invites nearly every country in the United Nations to participate in Belt and Road but under the guise of specificity.

In September, 2013, Chinese president Xi Jinping was in Kazakstan on a state visit and delivered a speech at the country’s Nazarbayev University titled “Promote People-to-

People Friendship and Create a Better Future.” Published on the same day on the website of China’s foreign ministry, Xi’s speech briefly mentions the idea for “an economic belt along the Silk Road”³⁶ This “belt” Xi was speaking of is focused strictly on regional affairs and the building of a prosperous community of Central Asian countries with China as a partner.

Although there is passing mention of establishing new transportation links between East Asia, West Asia and South Asia, it was emphatically addressed to Kazakhstan and the countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (which at the time did not include India and Pakistan) and the now defunct Eurasian Economic Community (row 1 of fig.20).

Xi’s speech is significant because there is no mention of a “one belt, one road” or a “belt and road” and was not captured by international headlines, but quietly laid the foundation for what would become a global behemoth. The “belt” was introduced but not the “road.” The “road” would be announced separately several weeks later on October 2, 2013 during Xi’s address to the Indonesian parliament—as the first foreign leader to do so— on the occasion of the annual APEC Summit.³⁷ After elaborating on the close friendship between China and Indonesia in his address, Xi expands the scope to discuss the importance of strategic China-South East Asia relations. Stating that China will increase maritime cooperation using its China-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation Fund, Xi declares that China will “vigorously develop maritime partnership in a joint effort to build the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st century.”³⁸ With that, Xi introduces the “road” of Belt and Road, independent of and without reference to the “belt” he introduced in Kazakhstan just weeks earlier. (row 2 of fig. 20).

With a formal link between Xi’s two routes yet to be established, the concept of a “belt and road” temporarily remains dormant. Instead, the phrase “new Silk Road” enters the lexicon of Chinese foreign policy news and the opinions of China watchers around the world.

Perhaps like the independent evolution of similar features in unrelated biological organisms, the generic label of a “new silk road” is used separately by different voices to refer to either or both of Xi’s two routes. One of the first published appearances of the term was in a *Washington Post* article of October 14, 2013 titled “China bypasses American ‘New Silk Road’ with two of its own.” Then on October 29th, the *South China Morning Post* published its article “New Silk Road starts with Xian,” referring to the oldest city of China’s ancient capitals and considered as the starting point of the historic Silk Road. Since such early articles, the term began to appear in discussions and publications into the first half of 2014 although it was never formally announced by any official Chinese agencies. Instead, the phrase “One Belt One Road” (一带一路, Yi Dai Yi Lu) began circulating, first in the Chinese language, and eventually popularised internationally by Xi Jinping in a speech titled “Promoting Silk Road Spirit and Deepening China-Arab Cooperation” on the occasion of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum in Beijing in June 2014.³⁹ Xi’s speech formalises and acknowledges the “belt” and “road” as a singular concept and expands the scope to include the Arab countries of west Asia and north Africa from the initial group of central and south-east Asian countries (row 3 of fig. 20).

After an incubation period of seventeen months of spoken but officially unpublished pronouncements and corresponding criticism and praise, Xi’s original “economic belt along the Silk Road and “maritime Silk Road of the 21st century” are pronounced as policy in a paper published on the website of China’s National Development and Reform Commission in March 2015. Titled *Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road*, the document (published in multiple languages) serves as a kind of founding document and for the first time introduces the English-language term “Belt and Road Initiative” (fig. 21). Laying out a path of “cooperation” and “connectivity”, the paper

expands the territorial scope of Belt and Road to now fully include Eurasia and Africa (row 4 of fig. 20). One month later, going even beyond the Afro-Eurasian supercontinent, China's CCTV news agency published a map showing a "south line" extending from the South China Sea into the South Pacific.⁴⁰ Eventually at the 2016 APEC summit in Peru, Xi Jinping announced that "China welcomes all parties" to join this initiative to meet challenges, share opportunities and seek common development"⁴¹ (row 5 of fig. 20). Within a two year span from 2016 to 2018, the South Pacific island countries of Papua New Guinea, Micronesia, New Zealand, Fiji, Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu all signed memorandums of understanding with China for cooperation on Belt and Road. Xi's extension of Belt and Road into the Pacific Ocean was followed up by Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi's invitation to the thirty three member countries of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States to join the Belt and Road at the second CELAC-China Forum in 2018. The forum resulted in the "Special Declaration on the Belt and Road Initiative"⁴² (row 6 of fig. 20). Since then, all South American countries have expressed interest or created formal agreements to participate in the initiative. Going beyond the geographies of countries, a January 2018 official white paper on China's Arctic policy calls for international cooperation to build a "Polar Silk Road" under the Belt and Road Initiative.⁴³ Perhaps as the final frontiers, Belt and Road also extends into the virtual and communication spheres in the form of the Digital Silk Road and the Space Silk Road.⁴⁴

<p>1</p> <p>SEPTEMBER 2013</p> <p>“an economic belt along the Silk Road” for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation & Eurasian Economic Community</p>
<p>2</p> <p>OCTOBER 2013</p> <p>“a Maritime Silk Road of the 21st century” with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations</p>
<p>3</p> <p>JUNE 2014</p> <p>“Promoting Silk Road Spirit” with the Arab League</p>
<p>4</p> <p>MARCH 2015</p> <p>“Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road” for Eurasia and Africa</p>
<p>5</p> <p>NOVEMBER 2016</p> <p>“China welcomes all parties” of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation</p>
<p>6</p> <p>JUNE 2018</p> <p>“Special Declaration on the Belt and Road Initiative” with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States</p>

Figure 20. The gradual inclusion of the world’s countries (based on continental groupings and regional blocks) as potential participants of Belt and Road according to official Chinese speeches, documents and declarations (see Chapter 4, pp. 2-3 for details).

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Chapter 1

INFRASTRUCTURE

Chapter 1

Infrastructure

"We have the strength of our ancestors within us. We have the solidarity of our Indigenous relatives and allies with us. We have the power of people shutting down railways, highways, ports, and government offices all around this country."

—Unist'ot'en Camp

Infrastructures are ideal sites of protest. On February 6, 2020, members of the Mohawk First Nation blockaded a major rail corridor running through their territory in the Canadian province of Ontario. After the blockade halted passenger and freight transport for nineteen days, the provincial police arrested the protesters and cleared the tracks. Parallel to the Mohawk blockade and since the arrests, other First Nations groups of Canada and supporters blockaded other rail lines as well as major roads and ports at more than twenty sites across Canada causing a national crisis (fig. 1.1). These transportation sites, however, were not the immediate contentions of protest and were not used by the groups to express grievances specific to their own local communities. Rather, they were collectively occupying national infrastructure in solidarity with a campaign to stop the construction of a pipeline in an Indigenous territory in the remote regions of the province of British Columbia. Called Coastal GasLink and costing \$6.5 billion, the pipeline would carry fracked natural gas from extraction sites in the province's east to the Pacific ocean port of Kitimat 670 kilometres away in the west. Once at the port, the gas is to be liquified at a new \$40 billion terminal and exported to Asian markets, including China and India (fig. 1.2).

As approved by the provincial government, 190 kilometres of the pipeline cross the traditional territory of the Wet'suwet'en First Nation, whose members have opposed all

pipelines projects since 2010. The hereditary chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en, correctly maintain that their territory of 22,000 square kilometres was never ceded to the government of Canada and the construction of the pipeline would violate their sovereignty, damage their lands and harm the environment.¹ In December 2018, members of the Wet'suwet'en set up a fortified check point on their own territory to block road access to pipeline construction companies. Within weeks and using a court-ordered injunction, a tactical unit of Canada's federal police (RCMP) dressed in military fatigue and armed with assault rifles, arrested fourteen people and dismantled the checkpoint. Members resettled at Unist'ot'en Camp, a permanent base and healing centre located at a vital bridge crossing deeper within Wet'suwet'en territory. The bridge has long been used as a border crossing and symbol of resistance against extractive industries on Indigenous lands. Led by the hereditary chiefs, the Wet'suwet'en stood their ground throughout 2019 until the RCMP again used a court-ordered injunction to raid the camp, clear the bridge and arrest members, including matriarchs who refused to grant access to pipeline workers based on the universal principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (fig. 1.3).² The RCMP promptly imposed a "temporary exclusion zone" with its own check points and arbitrary boundaries where the free movement of the Wet'suwet'en on their own territory was restricted. The year long series of events and failed negotiations between the hereditary chiefs and the provincial government of BC triggered the occupation of infrastructure across Canada.

In their nation-wide protest of a remote pipeline, Canada's First Nations peoples do not see rails, roads and ports as disparate nodes and lines of transport, but as a singular state-sponsored system of infrastructure that has long functioned as a tool of colonial dispossession. Kenneth Deer, a Mohawk leader representing one of the blockades of a Canadian Pacific Railway track, remarked to the media that "The railways got very wealthy

on our land. The railways had more right to the land than we did.”³ Deer’s sentiment that railways were built to the detriment of Indigenous life is deeply rooted in the realities of Canada’s formation in the late nineteenth century, when much of the rail lines were constructed. By the late 1880’s, CPR had already completed the main line of Canada’s transcontinental rail network with severe consequences to Indigenous land and livelihoods (fig. 1.4). In his book *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life*, Canadian historian James Daschuk provides a glimpse of that sordid history:

“Recent Completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway not only marked the beginning of large-scale agrarian settlements but also brought a host of new infectious diseases to the indigenous population of the northwest. For many on reserves, the railway proved to be a fatal disease vector. In short order, mortality from the synergy of chronic tuberculosis and other infectious diseases, especially measles and influenza, brought the indigenous population of the Canadian plains to its demographic nadir.”⁴

It is a history of domination and death through infrastructure not forgotten by Canada’s Indigenous populations; a history where infrastructure destroys one nation to construct another. Canada’s support for the Coastal GasLink pipeline is a recent example in a long history of governments, judicial systems and police forces acting in tandem to protect the interests of corporations, private property and “critical infrastructure” over Indigenous treaty rights, land titles and unceded territories. The court-ordered arrests of Indigenous protesters is also part of a more recent pattern of land defence being depoliticised, de-historicised and criminalised to advance a narrative of national security and public safety. In the Coastal GasLink saga, infrastructure is at the nexus of settler colonial history, racism, territoriality, security, legality, trade and ecology. Inherent to the logic of blockading multiple sites of Canadian infrastructure to protest a single pipeline is the fact that all infrastructure is central to national economies and thus a sacred object of governance. It is a logic of protest where the orderly movement of people and things across the physical space of a nation is

understood to be in the interest of state power. To disrupt infrastructure is to disrupt that power and violence against infrastructure is violence against the state. Like police forces, infrastructure is a physical symbol and force of power that can be provoked and confronted and thus ideal sites where political demands can be made. In the case of the Wet'suwet'en, the national blockades of infrastructure did not definitively stop the construction of the pipeline, but it did force the provincial and federal governments to recognise hereditary governance and Wet'suwet'en claims to their land. While the Coastal GasLink pipeline and its circumstances are specific to the Canadian context, the underlying political dimensions of infrastructure, I believe, are universal.

The enthusiasm, planning, approval, execution and protection of large-scale infrastructure is common to all modern nation-states. With Belt and Road, the commonality of infrastructure engenders new forms of cooperation and dialogues but also new national and global narratives. The possibility to participate in Belt and Road infrastructure offers countries the opportunity to recalibrate relations with China and each other. In this chapter, I discuss infrastructure as a term and as form: As a term, it is used to depoliticise and necessitate large scale systems and processes, and as form, it functions as a physical map of the state.

Figure 1.1. Above: Map shows the locations of infrastructure blockades across Canada in February 2020. Below: Members of the Gitksan Nation and supporters blockade the main railway tracks of CN Railway in New Hazelton, British Columbia on February 11, 2020.

(above) *The Globe and Mail*, “Locations of anti-pipeline blockades across Canada in February” [Map], 2020.

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Figure 1.2. An advertisement by the Canadian Energy Centre promoting the Coastal GasLink pipeline in Canada's national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail* on March 7, 2020. The CEC is a provincial corporation that receives funding from the province of Alberta and claims to challenge "domestic and foreign-funded campaigns against Canada's oil and gas industry."

Canadian Energy Centre, "The world needs more Canadian Energy" [Advertisement], 2020.

Figure 1.3. Above: The Royal Canadian Mounted Police approach to arrest Chief Howilthkat (Freda Huson) to enforce a Coastal GasLink injunction at the Unist’ot’en healing centre on February 10, 2020. Below: RCMP officers stand guard after dismantling a Unist’ot’en check point and making arrests on Indigenous territory, ignoring the universal principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent.

FOR the comfort and convenience of settlers going to the CANADIAN NORTH-WEST, the
CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY

PROVIDES A SPECIAL FORM OF PASSENGER EQUIPMENT, KNOWN AS

COLONIST CARS

Which are run through to MANITOBA and BRITISH COLUMBIA on the regular Express Train leaving MONTREAL each week day. They are really "SLEEPING CARS," modelled after the style of the first-class "PULLMAN," with upper and lower berths, closets, lavatories, &c., &c., the only difference being that the seats and berths are not upholstered. Occupants may supply their own bedding, or can purchase of the Company's Agents at QUEBEC, MONTREAL, or TORONTO, a mattress, pillow and blanket for \$2.50 (10 shillings), which they can retain at the end of their journey.

The accompanying cut shows the interior of a Colonist Car, with a portion of the berths made up for sleeping purposes.

Holders of COLONIST or SECOND-CLASS TICKETS are allowed FREE USE OF THESE CARS FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE END OF THEIR JOURNEY OVER THE CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY.

Figure 1.4. A 1888 Canadian Pacific Railway advertisement for its "Colonist Cars" on trains running from the province of Quebec in central Canada to the province British Columbia in eastern Canada.

Canadian Pacific Railway, "Colonist Cars" [Advertisement], 1888.

1.1 Infrastructure as Term: Apolitical Necessity

The functions and properties of common things such as a road or chair can be described in detail, but difficult to communicate the essence of. Words are defined with other words, parts determine the whole and meaning is found in context and the medium of expression (fig. 1.5). The term “infrastructure” is enormously complex, but we seem to know what it refers to. The latin prefix *infra*, meaning below, and the French word *structure* were first conjoined in the context of late nineteenth century French engineering as a technical term to describe the actual material substrates placed before the laying of roads and railway tracks. In its conceptual clarity as a necessary substructure to something else, the term infrastructure has come to be exploited by nearly all sectors of society and fields of study to communicate fundamental relations. Science and technology historian Rosalind Williams commented that “Infrastructure, like technology, tends to be a recent term, a promiscuous term, one that has no clean definition and is very liable to reification.”⁵ Depending on who is using the term, for what reason and what context, the connotation of infrastructure varies enormously. The meaning of infrastructure in a government legislation will not be the same as in a book on economics, a business glossary, a military strategy, a civil engineering textbook, a think tank report or a lecture on landscape architecture. A commentary from the Brookings Institution, a prominent US-based public policy organisation, titled “Why Infrastructure Matters,” states: “Infrastructure enables trade, powers businesses, connects workers to their jobs, creates opportunities for struggling communities and protects the nation from an increasingly unpredictable natural environment.”⁶ How can the same thing that helps struggling communities also protect a nation from being harmed by the environment? In such expressions, infrastructure is a miraculous solution to virtually all societal problems. This

kind of reification is possible because there is no consensus to the term's meaning and no correlation in the function of things called infrastructure. In spite of being a very vague term, it evokes very specific things and thus prone to be instrumentalised. In his essay "Key Word: Infrastructure - How a Humble French Engineering Term Shaped the Modern World", Ashley Carse remarks on its post-war use in supranational military coordination and international development: "Infrastructure was more than a word. It was world-making. Military projects and economic theories were enacted through the coordination of physical installations shaped by specific visions and theories of political and socioeconomic organisation."⁷ Carse points out that NATO's Common Infrastructure Program of 1949 (fig. 1.6) had used the new term not in spite of its vagueness, but because of it. NATO's Secretary General at the time, Lord Ismay, recognised the term's potential, stating:

"It has been adopted by NATO as a generic term to denote all those fixed installations which are necessary for the effective deployment and operations of modern armed forces, for example airfields, radar warning and navigation aid stations, port installations and so forth."⁸

Since NATO set the precedent of using it as a generic term to denote the specific, infrastructure today refers to an uncountable category of things. The "so forth" in Ismay's statement no longer applies to a list of military installations, but all installations of society. The walls between Palestine and Israel are called infrastructure as much as Gaza's tunnels⁹ and Israel's highways. A city park, a nuclear power plant, a financial network, and a road are equally infrastructure but of different ontological categories otherwise. Infrastructure can denote things that divide, connect, confine, relieve, support, build, and destroy; things that are mobile, fixed, fast, slow, transmit, transact and block; in the air, under water, on water, on land, underground, visible, and hidden; private, public, national, and transnational; at the scale of neighbourhoods, towns, cities, regions, countries, earth, and space. Since

infrastructures are things and the relation between things, infrastructure is a matter of language as much as matter made out of concrete and steel.¹⁰

My goal here is not to produce a working definition or trace the evolution of the term, but consider whether it is used to depoliticise and necessitate the things and relations under its name. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines “infrastructure” as:

“A collective term for the subordinate parts of an undertaking; substructure, foundation; spec. the permanent installations forming a basis for military operations, as airfields, naval bases, training establishments, etc.”¹¹

This definition is a direct reference to the term’s original use in engineering and subsequent adoption in the Anglophone world to denote military installations. Although the OED is the “definitive record of the English language,” its only entry for infrastructure is archaic and not indicative of the term’s contemporary use. In today’s common use in business, media or policies, infrastructure is largely a civil matter and not a military one; the military meaning is an exception and not the norm. It is also peculiar that the entry does not actually define infrastructure as a real thing, but states that it is a “collective term”; it does not state that “infrastructure is the subordinate parts of an undertaking.” The OED encounters the real difficulty of producing an actual definition, but it does reveal infrastructure’s conceptual meaning in common usage with the analogy “foundation” and the synonym “substructure.”

In traditional Chinese, infrastructure is expressed as 基础设施; the first two characters (基础) can be interpreted as “basics” and the last two characters (设施) as “things used to achieve goals.” Such characterisations induce a feeling of infrastructure as a stabilising force, something to accept rather than question, much like the foundation of a building. Other definitions (in English) extend such connotations to the scale of countries. The Cambridge Dictionary defines it as “the basic systems and services, such as transport and

power supplies, that a country or organization uses in order to work effectively.”¹² With such standard definitions leading the way to convey infrastructure as a foundation, large in scale and basic, government definitions emphasise infrastructure as essential and critical for the whole of society. This is explicit in the US President’s Commission on Critical Infrastructure Protection of 1996, where it defines “infrastructure” as:

“The framework of interdependent networks and systems comprising identifiable industries, institutions (including people and procedures), and distribution capabilities that provide a reliable flow of products and services essential to the defense and economic security of the United States, the smooth functioning of governments at all levels, and society as a whole.”¹³

Here terms such as *interdependent*, *reliable*, *essential* and *security*, convey infrastructure as everything important for everything else to function. It is a standard expression where *infrastructure = necessity*. Because infrastructure conveys necessity it also depoliticises things called infrastructure. The construction of a dam can be necessary, but calling that dam infrastructure (particularly critical infrastructure) can frame contentions over land or the environment as an interference to the “smooth functioning” of society. Definitions, as a form of apolitical communication, do not describe certain definitive aspects of infrastructure such as its universal tendency to generate controversy or that infrastructure built by the state is a defacto subsidy of free markets; or that infrastructure is essential for maintaining political systems as much as economic and social ones. Definitions of infrastructure obscure crucial aspects of it.

With definitions being the forerunners, the term infrastructure is in general used to depoliticise and necessitate systems and networks by emphasising their physicality. We may speak of a public school system, but if framed as infrastructure—as in education infrastructure—it becomes a physical and technical construct with a clear administrative function. Education and schools are part of a broader social dynamic of knowledge

formation, work forces, labour markets, employment and aspirations, but education as infrastructure deemphasises and obfuscates this dynamic. Under the rubric of infrastructure, education becomes a matter of what can be easily facilitated through apolitical administration such as the actual facilities of classrooms, sports fields, science labs and the allocation of funds. Education infrastructure prioritises the maintenance of the physical school system and the technologies that support it over what is being taught and for what reason.

That infrastructure is a conveyor of necessity and apoliticism is perhaps most revealed in that it is not used to describe natural systems.¹⁴ A river system only becomes infrastructure—as in natural infrastructure—if it is intentionally managed and used by human beings, such as for transport or the mitigation of floods. In the opening paragraph of his voluminous textbook-like *Infrastructure: A Guide to the Industrial Landscape*, scientist Brian Hayes states that “the subject matter is everything that isn’t nature.”¹⁵ Hayes’s list of infrastructure is: mining, waterworks, food and farming, oil and gas, power plants, power grids, communications, roads, railroads, bridges, tunnels, aviation, shipping, wastes, and recycling. Hayes’s interest is actually in giving an overview of large scale industrial systems, and he frames them as infrastructure to convey their commonality as things and processes necessary to modern societies. Infrastructure is used as an overarching typology to relegate political dimensions to the background and foreground the material aspects of industry as technological marvels that sustain civilisation. It is not trivial that Hayes has written his book on infrastructure as (he notes) a “nature guide,” a purely apolitical format. It is a typical presentation where industrial systems are “naturalised” under the banner of infrastructure.

The use of the term infrastructure to necessitate and depoliticise is obvious when it is qualified, such as in “critical infrastructure.” Here, “critical” super depoliticises infrastructure making it a matter of extreme necessity. It is a powerful linguistic construct appearing in laws

and policies to legitimise everything from increased security and emergency measures (such as anti-terror response) to the construction of a pipeline by private corporations in the national interest. The term is found in laws, legislative texts, policy reports and other literature that legitimise and inform the actions of states at the broadest levels of governance. For example, in 2009 Canada instituted its National Strategy for Critical Infrastructure “to build a safer, more secure and more resilient Canada.”¹⁶ The description of critical infrastructure from the strategy can be easily mistaken for a description of the technocratic administration of Canada in general:

“Critical infrastructure refers to processes, systems, facilities, technologies, networks, assets and services essential to the health, safety, security or economic well-being of Canadians and the effective functioning of government. Critical infrastructure can be stand-alone or interconnected and interdependent within and across provinces, territories and national borders. Disruptions of critical infrastructure could result in catastrophic loss of life, adverse economic effects, and significant harm to public confidence.”¹⁷

The document proceeds to list ten “critical infrastructure sectors”: energy and utilities, finance, food, transportation, government, information and communication technology, health, water, safety and manufacturing. These are sweeping categories that include all large-scale systems and processes (like Brian Hayes’s list from above), but framed in terms of safety and security. To exemplify the “hazards” to critical infrastructure the document lists past floods, ice storms, blackouts, the SARS outbreak of 2003 as well as the non-Canadian cases of the 2005 bombings of London’s transport system and the attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States. Premised on such crisis events, Canada’s critical infrastructure strategy became the primary legal basis to depoliticise opposition to any proposed infrastructure. Since being instituted in 2009, it has been used to criminalise environmental activism and Indigenous land defence to protect the interests of the private sector, particularly Canada’s large energy industry. The essence of this practice is captured by Andrew Crosby

and Jeffrey Monaghan in their book *Policing Indigenous Movements: Dissent and the Security State*:

“Critical infrastructure” is an organizational mechanism of the security state that redirects the vast resources of the “war on terror” toward a broad spectrum of domestic actors. It was used to characterize the Gateway pipelines proposal.... Given these affinities, the banner of critical infrastructure has been a prominent category by which Indigenous communities that assert their rights and self-determination can be labelled as national security threats, which then allows the security state to intensify the surveillance and policing of these movements.¹⁸

The Gateway pipelines were a dual set of pipelines proposed by Canada’s multinational gas and oil corporation Enbridge in the mid-2000s. They were to run 1777 kilometres between the Alberta tar sands to export terminals at Kitimat port in British Columbia (same as Coastal GasLink pipeline mentioned above), traversing many First Nations territories along the way. Even though the pipeline was imaginary (a proposal that was eventually cancelled) Canada’s security apparatus raced to protect it. Crosby and Monaghan point out that Canada’s main intelligence agency, police forces at all levels, petroleum firms, and private security firms coalesced around the rubric of critical infrastructure to frame Indigenous and environmental activists as security threats and in one case as “violent aboriginal extremists.”¹⁹ It is a logic where the “risks” to future critical infrastructure are social movements and democratic protests as much as ice storms, epidemics and terrorist attacks. Critical infrastructure is a term of law used to maintain the inherent power imbalance between the state and civil society.

More recently, during the 2020 global COVID-19 pandemic, the United States government designated meat processing plants as “critical infrastructure” to keep them open against the wishes of workers and worker’s rights groups. After thousands of plant workers had contracted the virus and at least 20 workers had died by the end of April 2020, nearly two dozen plants were temporarily closed nationwide. Siding with the meat industry and using the country’s Defense Production Act of 1950, the president of the country, Donald J. Trump,

signed an executive order on April 28 to force the plants to reopen regardless of worker safety. The official order signed by Trump states:

“Such closures threaten the continued functioning of the national meat and poultry supply chain, undermining critical infrastructure during the national emergency. Given the high volume of meat and poultry processed by many facilities, any unnecessary closures can quickly have a large effect on the food supply chain. For example, closure of a single large beef processing facility can result in the loss of over 10 million individual servings of beef in a single day.”²⁰

While Trump’s use of critical infrastructure for beef servings in the middle of a pandemic may be esoteric, it is a glimpse into the broader culture of critical infrastructure that permeates all levels and departments of the US government. The Department of Homeland Security, for example, has a dedicated agency called the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency that has declared the month of November as “Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience Month”. According to the agency, it is “observed” once a year as “a time to shine a light on the vital role that these systems and places [16 sectors from clean water to voting machines to places of worship] play in keeping the nation and our communities safe, secure and prosperous.”²¹ After the concept of critical infrastructure first appeared in the United States in the late 1990s, it was subsequently exploited by Canada, Australia, United Kingdom and Europe and eventually appropriated by non-Western countries. Unlike in liberal democracies, China’s exploitation of critical infrastructure is applied uniquely to safeguard information and communication from internal and external threats. In 2017, the Cyberspace Administration of China drafted a regulation called Critical Information Infrastructure Protection that was eventually incorporated into China’s Cybersecurity Law. Although the qualification of critical infrastructure with “information” seems like a narrow application, the law frames any “infrastructure that, in the event of damage, loss of function, or data leak, might seriously endanger national security, national welfare or the livelihoods of the people,

or the public interest.”²² In China’s case, critical infrastructure prioritises information flow, data security and cyber attacks over industrial systems or infrastructures that move other things and people, which are protected by other stringent domestic laws. Just as all infrastructure can be interpreted as “critical” in Western security laws, Chinese law can interpret all information as critical, including information held by private individuals, transmitted by internet companies, and published by media organisations. Given the country’s extensive use of digital technologies in daily life, growth of telecommunications, and push for a Digital Silk Road, critical infrastructure is wielded by China to centralise and securitise (including through censorship and surveillance) all information that result from these new innovations.

With critical infrastructure being the immediate example of how infrastructure’s qualification amplifies its power to depoliticise and necessitate, more specific examples are financial infrastructure, economic infrastructure, security infrastructure and police infrastructure. These are semantic constructs used to obfuscate the political understructure of societies and defend existing hierarchies. Financial infrastructure, for example, applies to banks and other finance institutions and not individual exchanges or informal economies. Financial infrastructure frames the systems used by institutions such as the World Bank as standard and necessary and those not part of such a system as aberrations. A 2009 World Bank policy report titled *Financial Infrastructure: Building Access Through Transparent and Stable Financial Systems* states: “Financial Infrastructure broadly defined comprises the underlying foundation for a country’s financial system.”²³ The tautology of this statement is obvious: “Financial infrastructure,” “underlying foundation” and “financial system” all refer to the same thing. Financial infrastructure is redundant to financial system, but is not useless as a discursive tool; it is used to reduce financial system’s common association to instability,

profiteering or corruption and increase its association to order and stability. It is more tenable for the World Bank to associate financial systems to infrastructure than to the instability of global capitalism, which is the real underlying structure of finance. Using infrastructure and foundation as the key words, the report communicates that finance is not abstract but a physical construct designed by experts with a lot of resources and oversight and thus can be trusted to manage the flow of money. This is revealed in the next sentence of the paragraph:

It [financial infrastructure] includes all institutions, information, technologies, rules and standards that enable financial intermediation.

Once financial infrastructure is declared as indeed well organised, the paragraph continues:

Poor financial infrastructure in many developing countries poses a considerable constraint upon financial institutions to expand their offering of financial services – credit, savings and payment services – to underserved segments of the population and the economy.²⁴

How can financial infrastructure in developing countries possibly be “poor” if it is already declared to comprise the “underlying foundation” of a country’s financial system and “includes all institutions, information, technologies, rules and standards that enable financial intermediation”? It reveals the report’s duplicitous use of the term to support the World Bank’s goal of positioning finance as a technical problem rather than a social one specific to the countries it operates in. Financial infrastructure is used as a term of policy to negate the social, cultural and historical contingencies of heterogeneous economies in favour of a homogeneous system the World Bank can regulate and influence. Exemplified by the World Bank, the use of infrastructure to emphasise one thing and hide another is a common practice of powerful institutions.

The term “infrastructure” is exploited to frame existing systems and processes as necessary and therefore should be strengthened or expanded, not doubted. Outside of critical analyses and the study of infrastructures in social theory, the singular and vague noun

“infrastructure” is used as an instrument of discourse (to legitimise agendas, programs, ideologies, etc.) under the appearance of apolitical necessity. Even the term “social infrastructure’ does not refer to actual social relations (in the sense of sociality, cooperation, community formation or antagonisms), but the structures in place that maintain existing social orders; North Korea and Denmark in this sense both have equally strong social infrastructure. While the etymology of infrastructure may still be evolving like all complex words, it is a term used to accept existing hierarchies as necessary, regardless of whether they are legitimate or not. Infrastructure did not always have a depoliticised usage. In the 1960s Marxist analyst Louis Althusser used “infrastructure” interchangeably with “base” in contrast to the “superstructure.”²⁵ In the 1980s, sociologist Michael Mann used it as a conceptual term of analysis to speak about the kinds of power possessed by the state and its elites. Mann used it to contrast “despotic power” (which ignores civil society) to “infrastructural power” as the ability of the state “to penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm.”²⁶ Mann was talking less about physical infrastructures and more about the political bureaucracies of a state that underpin large scale social organisation. Also, in stark contrast to Althusser, Mann uses infrastructure to describe the state and not the economy. More recently, sociologist and activist Alan Sears uses the term “infrastructure of dissent” as “the means through which activists develop political communities capable of learning, communicating and mobilizing together.”²⁷ Such variations in use (especially as a metaphor or concept) is rare because of the unavoidable conflation with the now hardened use of the term to mean things like roads, prisons and data networks.

Since Nato’s adoption of the term in 1951 to denote both the specific and the general, infrastructure has evolved into a potent concept deployed in every part of the world to frame the political as apolitical, the social as technical and perhaps ultimately, the wants of states as

the needs of populations. With Belt and Road, the term is at a pinnacle of instrumentality where infrastructure means nothing less than a newfound opportunity for countries to create a new order between China and each other. In 1919, Sun Yat-sen, the founder of modern China, envisioned a transnational network of railways as a way of preserving international peace and facilitate mutual economic development.²⁸ A century later, in his opening speech at the 2017 Belt and Road Forum, Chinese president Xi Jinping remarked that “Infrastructure connectivity is the foundation of development through cooperation.”²⁹ Encapsulated in this short statement is the entire world of diplomatic, economic and political relations existing at the nexus of infrastructure. It is, however, easy to overlook that Xi does not state “cooperation through development,” which has been the mantra of Western developmental thought since the second World War. When former US president Bill Clinton made the case for China to join the World Trade Organisation in 2000, he argued that China’s economic liberalisation would also mean its political liberalisation. He remarked in his well known speech that:

“By joining the W.T.O., China is not simply agreeing to import more of our products; it is agreeing to import one of democracy's most cherished values: economic freedom. The more China liberalizes its economy, the more fully it will liberate the potential of its people — their initiative, their imagination, their remarkable spirit of enterprise.”³⁰

With Belt and Road, China’s approach is development through cooperation made possible by infrastructure as a new category of international relations. Eschewing Western developmentalism (cooperation through development), China’s ostensive empire building does not rely on exporting its mantra of socialism with Chinese characteristics, its domestic economic model or its form of communism as universally appropriate. Rather, it is infrastructure that China is exporting as a universal value system irresistible to all states regardless of political ideology, type of government or geographic location. At the same time,

when China builds infrastructure in another country, it is more than an economic transaction or the transfer of expertise and materials; it is a defacto political alliance outside of ideological or intergovernmental associations. China uses infrastructure as a maxim of group identity formation and belonging whose declared values are pragmatism, apoliticism, and non interventionism. By using infrastructure to rally states, China can lead as a constructive power rather than a destructive one, but perhaps more importantly as one that is interested in expanding and sustaining states rather than causing their downfall. China operates on the premise that unlike military hegemony, infrastructure is enticing to democracies, autocracies, monarchies and theocracies alike. Whether authoritarian or liberal, left or right, competent or incompetent, corrupt or principled, states and their non-state collaborators (such as private firms) reflexively gravitate towards infrastructure with varying intentions but similar reverence. States as diverse as Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Kazakstan, Kenya, Iran, Greece and Italy are willing to hop on Belt and Road as the “express train that cannot be missed.”³¹ Within the political calculus of Belt and Road, infrastructure both built and imagined is the “common denominator”³² of the new technopolitical world China aspires to create and others seek to benefit from.

Figure 1.5. Joseph Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs*, 1965.

(Installation view at exhibition Information at the Museum of Modern Art from July 2, 1970 to September 20, 1970. Text component of the work is a dictionary definition of 'chair')

Infrastructure Committee 2001

Figure 1.6. NATO's Infrastructure Committee in 2001 from a publication issued by NATO to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the committee (1951-2001).

North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *50 Years of Infrastructure*, 2001.

1.2 Infrastructure as Form: Map of the State

In his 2013 essay, “The Poetics and Politics of Infrastructure,” anthropologist Brian Larkin surveys recent studies of infrastructure in anthropology and observes that if examined through the concept of technopolitics (as recent anthropology has done), infrastructures are “forms of political rationality that underlie technological projects and which give rise to an ‘apparatus of governmentality’”.³³ He continues:

But infrastructures also exist as forms separate from their purely technical functioning, and they need to be analyzed as concrete semiotic and aesthetic vehicles oriented to addressees. They emerge out of and store within them forms of desire and fantasy and can take on fetish-like aspects that sometimes can be wholly autonomous from their technical function. Focusing on the issue of form, or the poetics of infrastructure, allows us to understand how the political can be constituted through different means.³⁴

In his assessment of the “poetics and politics” of infrastructure, Larkin is highlighting a key aspect of infrastructure: *form*. It is as form that infrastructure is at once technical, concrete, semiotic, aesthetic and simultaneously an apparatus of governmentality. Like form in art, infrastructure is form that produces meaning and implication beyond the material. Roads, railways and electrical grids serve societal needs but they are also made possible by power centralised within the state. Our dependence on infrastructure to sustain organised life is an opportunity for the state to justify its relevance as the singular entity capable of orchestrating or authorising its planning and construction. In this sense, infrastructures are simultaneously arteries for the movement of people and things and formal appendages of the state. Because the state must construct infrastructure if it has the capacity to, it is the ideal medium to manifest itself in material form. Without the physicality of military installations, police headquarters, roads, bridges, dams and school buildings, the state is nearly invisible, abstract and at the risk of evaporation. Physicality combined with the inherent necessity and

longevity of infrastructure is an insurance against the state becoming irrelevant and a guarantee of its long term survival. The state maps its territory and population through surveys, census collections, taxation and of course cartography, but maps itself directly with infrastructure. Unlike statistics or cartographic maps, infrastructure is not an interpretive representation of the state, but a kind of literal map of its physical extent into matters within and without its domain. Whereas the internal structure of the state (bureaucracy, legality, political rationality) are largely hidden from view, most infrastructures are openly expressed and have a legibility and rationale that makes them readable in space. Like geoglyphs, they are lines and nodes drawn on terrain that reveal the state as a spatial entity (figs. 1.7 & 1.8).

During the 2019 and 2020 mass demonstrations in Hong Kong, protestors blocked roads and halted the operation of the city's public transportation systems (fig. 1.9). The protests started over an unpopular extradition bill and demonstrators expressed broad social discontent over erosions of civil liberties, but the city's infrastructures were specific targets of intense violence. The city's Mass Transit Railway (MTR) stations were set on fire, walls graffitied and security cameras, turnstiles, water sprinklers and other elements destroyed³⁵ (fig. 1.10). The demonstrators were obviously aware that the stations are technically useful but to attack them is an efficient tactic to gain the attention of the Hong Kong government and provoke the Chinese state. The heads of MTR Corporation (the private firm that operates the MTR) wrote an open letter stating that the MTR is a "home grown Hong Kong public transport operator" and for Hong Kong society to "treasure and safeguard this railway network, which has been carrying our collective memories over the past few decades."³⁶ Mass transit may be "home grown" and represent the history of the Hong Kong people, the protestors knows it represents the interests of the state even more and in particular. Like the First Nations protesters in Canada, Hong Kong's protesters have made explicit their

awareness that the state is embodied only obtusely in government buildings or symbols and acutely in the infrastructures of the nation. Hong Kong's mass demonstrations were initially limited to peaceful sit-ins at sites of government, particularly the Central Government Complex, prior to their expansion onto sites of infrastructure. Recalling moments when governments edifices have been seized by protesters, The Invisible Committee, an activist collective, makes a poignant remark in its text "Power Now Resides in Infrastructures":

The places of institutional power exert a magnetic attraction on revolutionaries. But when the insurgents manage to penetrate parliaments, presidential palaces, and other headquarters of institutions, as in Ukraine, in Libya or in Wisconsin, it's only to discover empty places, that is, empty of power, and furnished without any taste. It's not to prevent the "people" from "taking power" that they are so fiercely kept from invading such places, but to prevent them from realizing that power no longer resides in the institutions.

It continues:

Power is indeed somewhere else, somewhere other than in the institutions, but it's not hidden for all that. Or if it is, it's hidden like Poe's "purloined letter." No one sees it because everyone has it in plain sight, all the time—in the form of a high-voltage line, a freeway, a traffic circle, a supermarket, or a computer program. And if it is, it's hidden like a sewage system, an undersea cable, a fiber optic line running the length of a railway, or a data center in the middle of a forest. Power is the very organization of this world, this engineered, configured, purposed world. That is the secret, and it's that there isn't one.³⁷

The occupation of infrastructure to call attention to social issues tangential to infrastructure is not specific to countries and nor are they isolated events, but worldwide and frequent. In December 1955, US civil rights activist Rosa Parks occupied a seat on a public bus to protest racial segregation. In 2006, a student-led mass movement in France blockaded roads, train stations, airport runways and disrupted public transportation and mail services to protest a new employment bill. In May 2009, protesters of the Tamil diaspora in Canada occupied Toronto's Gardiner Expressway to call attention to the war in Sri Lanka (fig. 1.11). In September 2020, farmers in the India's Punjab and Haryana states occupied railways and

national highways to protest a new farm bill (fig. 1.12). Such actions on infrastructure are global because the relationship between the state and infrastructure is universal: they are political corollaries and co-extensive in space. When forests or neighbourhoods are cleared and a road is paved with asphalt, the state is asserting its jurisdiction by physically inscribing itself on it. The chances of the road being moved somewhere for any reason is practically non and so it is a permanent mark (fig. 1.13). Unauthorised street demonstrations perturb the state because the population is trampling over a mark it considers to be sacred and belonging to itself only. When infringed upon, riot police must be sent in to disperse the population of that mark before any discussion can take place on demands. When protests are authorised, the state is lending the road to the population knowing that it will be returned shortly with no material impact on itself. Granting authorisation to use a road for protest can itself be enough of a concession that the state can forgo addressing the actual political demands of protest.

If the state can be said to exist in space, then infrastructure determines its location and size. This is different to the way that territory is understood to be co-extensive with the state in terms of location and size. A state can extend outside of its territory such as with Israel's occupation of Palestine; Israel extends itself with military and civilian infrastructure on Palestinian territory (fig. 1.14). Also, a territory such as the island of Singapore can be very small but have a pervasive state; Singapore expands itself with extensive of infrastructure to the point that its entire territory becomes an object of infrastructure as a port city, smart city or financial hub. Both Israel and Singapore use infrastructure to subvert territory in different ways. Israel subverts the contiguity and integrity of Palestinian territory and occupies it, and Singapore subverts the relevance of territorial size by intensifying transportation, communication and financial infrastructure. In many ways, infrastructure is more revealing of the desired physical extent of a state than territory.

How can infrastructure be read as a map of the state if we can only perceive fragments of it? In Lewis Carroll's 1895 novel *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, the narrator and the character Mein Herr have a conversation on the usefulness of maps in relation to scale:

"What a useful thing a pocket-map is!" I remarked.

"That's another thing we've learned from your Nation," said Mein Herr, "map-making. But we've carried it much further than you. What do you consider the largest map that would be really useful?"

"About six inches to the mile."

"Only six inches!" exclaimed Mein Herr. "We very soon got to six yards to the mile. Then we tried a hundred yards to the mile. And then came the grandest idea of all! We actually made a map of the country, on the scale of a mile to the mile!"

"Have you used it much?" I enquired.

"It has never been spread out, yet," said Mein Herr: "the farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out the sunlight! So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well."³⁸

This passage demonstrates the absurd logic of a 1:1 map and taking the representation for the thing being represented, summarised in well known axioms such as "the map is not the territory." But is there a logic to Mein Herr's point if the country is used as a map of itself, not by a single observer but by the whole of the population? Where the country is perceived at different locations by different inhabitants to form a collective interpretation of what constitutes it? This collective reading becomes more appropriate and less absurd than a cartographic representation if a country means a territory on which many subjects are addressed by a state. The state's desire to map itself on a 1:1 scale and always be read in space is expressed in a one-paragraph short story by Jorge Luis Borges. Titled "On Exactitude in Science" (written as if its an extract of a larger history of a fictional empire), Borges references Carroll and writes:

...In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography.³⁹

Borges is not talking about infrastructure but captures the essence of how a literal map can be imagined and rationalised in the “mind” of the state. The state’s desire for a map to correlate with its extent is less about territory and more about overlaying something else on top that is both useful and legible to all observers at all times. Territory is central to the state only as much as its topography and contours can be shaped, delineated, defined and extended to manifest itself as directly and widely as possible. In his satirical short story “On the Impossibility of Drawing a Map of the Empire on a Scale of 1 to 1,” Umberto Eco expands on Borges’s anecdote, and Carroll’s original map-country problem becomes specifically a map-empire problem. Eco elaborates in detail on the severe consequences for an empire if a 1:1 map were to exist over its territory: problems with physics, logistics, weather, semiotics, the map itself becoming a part of the territory, etcetera. He concludes that if all the difficulties and conundrums are overcome, “every 1:1 map of the empire decrees the end of the empire as such and therefore is a map of a territory that is not an empire.”⁴⁰

Whereas the state can successfully map its territory cartographically and its populations statistically, Borges and Eco reflect on the impossibility of the state mapping itself through representational means. Perhaps this is because the state is already abstract and cannot be abstracted further. I think infrastructure solves this problem by taking the abstract state and giving it concrete form. With infrastructure, the state can show itself with

indisputable coordinates on its territory and other terrains it is interested in. As a map addressed to all interested viewers, infrastructure is much more legible than the political rationality, bureaucratic reasoning or legal frameworks that underpin the state but are esoteric and kept as murky as possible. Even if infrastructures can never be perceived in their entirety, we know they make real connections, are not digressive or accidental but planned with extreme intent. Without a cartographic map, it is not difficult to understand that an electrical power line originates at a generation source and connects to thousands of households hundreds of kilometres away. Even if we only have glimpses of an electrical power line or sewer system, we know they must be part of larger whole, both because they function and are overseen by a state which has gained our trust to connect things at broad scales of time and space. The material, spatial and temporal properties of infrastructure that conquer terrains and establish relations between disparate things can easily be read as properties of the state itself. This is especially obvious when infrastructures are celebrated as monuments, icons and even as objects of worship.

When postcolonial India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru inaugurated the construction of the Bhakra gravity dam in the country's north in 1955 he remarked that it should be dedicated as "a gift to the people of India and to the future generations from the workers who built this dam."⁴¹ Then during the opening of the dam in 1963, he emphasised that "This dam has been built with the unrelenting toil of man for the benefit of mankind and therefore is worthy of worship. May you call it a Temple or a Gurdwara or a Mosque, it inspires our admiration and reverence."⁴² If India's modern infrastructures are built by the toil of the population, is a benefit to mankind and a gift to the nation, for whom is it a temple for, if not the state that makes them possible? Nehru had, in fact, insisted that a memorial be built to honour the workers who built the dam, implying that the dam itself is not a memorial to

them. By the logic of acknowledging the state through infrastructure, when infrastructures are clandestine (such as surveillance networks), fail or are absent, it is synonymous with the opacity of the state, its failure and absence in space.

Regardless of the many other aspects of a state, such as the type of government or the size of a population, the total extent of infrastructure relative to land area is an indication of its extent over space. Singapore has around 10,000 km of paved roads for a land area of only 725 km². Sri Lanka has a similar length of paved roads, at 12,000 km, but for a land area that is nearly one hundred times bigger at 65,610 km². In this comparison, Singapore is a much bigger state than Sri Lanka, because its infrastructure is much bigger even though its territory and population are much smaller. Infrastructure in Singaporean is a perfect index of the state's effectiveness and legitimacy as well as an apparatus of spatial domination. In 2018, Singapore's Government Technology Agency announced its "Lamp-post-as-a-Platform" project to equip the country's 95,000 lamp posts with a network of wireless sensors and cameras for facial recognition, "closer monitoring of the environment," "better incident response and public safety," and "urban planning and operations."⁴³ Singapore may deploy fancy new technologies but the use of infrastructure as a "platform" to extend the state in veneration of safety, security and convenience is not exceptional. As I explore in Chapter 3, infrastructure both imagined and built becomes a central theme in the Sri Lankan state's attempt to gain legitimacy and political control over the island before and after the end of the country's civil war in 2009. It is of course not incidental that infrastructure is dense within so called "strong" states such as Singapore, the United States or Japan and diluted in "weak" states such as Sri Lanka, Somalia or Papua New Guinea. Historically and now, infrastructure—regardless of whether it is for military or civilian use—is inseparable from the growth of a state, its capacity to "project power" and resilience over very long spans of space and time.

Furthermore, where territory confines, infrastructure liberates. For nearly a century, the Dutch East India Company, with the blessing of the Dutch state, was preoccupied not with the wholesale control of territories (like the British Empire) but trade routes, forts, ports and enclaves (fig. 1.15). From the early to the late seventeenth century, the company maintained armed forces, traded slaves, coined money, signed treaties, commanded thousands of ships and was a dominant sea power stronger than many territorial powers. It functioned as a kind of empire residing almost entirely on a network of maritime infrastructures and critical coastal nodes; to the extent that it is regarded as the model for today's transnational corporations. Similarly, after the second World War and the formation of NATO's Infrastructure Program in 1949, the United States rapidly expanded itself at a global scale by expanding the reach of its military infrastructure. As is the case with the growth of empires, the US's military infrastructure in the latter half of the twentieth century was expanded in parallel to securing global trade routes and advancing the technologies of trade logistics. The ubiquitous corrugated shipping containers used in today's intermodal freight transport can be traced to the US military's experiments with standardised containers in the second World War and more directly to its CONEX box developed in 1952 to store and transport supplies during the Korean War (fig. 1.16).

In her book *The Deadly Life of Logistics*, geographer Deborah Cowen traces the military and imperial roots of trade logistics and points out that: "logistics space contrasts powerfully with the territoriality of the national state....Indeed, the supply line or chain is the geography of transnational flow but also of imperial force. The resurfacing of the supply line at the center of contemporary geopolitical economy with the echoes of empire connects present war with past forms and indicts the era of national territory as the historical anomaly."⁴⁴ As a superpower, the US is not confined by territory and is the most extensive

state because all of its military, intelligence, financial and trade infrastructure is the most extensive in the world. As we go deeper into the twenty-first century, it is China that is becoming paradigmatic of how infrastructure is used by the state to override territory and assert itself directly within broader domestic and global geographies.

Figure 1.7. Above: “Spider,” Nazca Lines, Peru, 500 BCE-500 CE. Below: Edward Burtynsky, *Pivot Irrigation/Suburb* [South of Yuma, Arizona, USA], 2011.

Figure 1.8. “The Tree” and “The Lizard,” Nazca Lines, Peru, 500 BCE-500 CE. “The Lizard” is intersected by the Pan-American Highway.

Figure 1.9. Above: Furniture and bricks dug up from pavements used as road blocks near Baptist University in Hong Kong's Kowloon Tong area on November 16, 2019. Below: Armoured police vehicle set on fire on a flyover near Hong Kong Polytechnic University on November 18, 2019. .

Figure 1.10. Above: Barricades set on fire block the entrance to Hong Kong's MTR Central Station on September 8, 2019. Below: Police pepper spray protesters inside a subway train at MTR Prince Edward Station on August 31, 2019.

Figure 1.11. Above & Below: Members and supporters of Canada's Tamil community occupy Toronto's Gardiner Expressway to call Canada's attention to Sri Lanka's escalation of violence during the final phases of the country's civil war on May 10, 2009 .

Figure 1.12. Farmers and supporters block the Jalandhar-New Delhi railway track at Jalandhar Cantonment station in the Indian state of Punjab on September 24, 2020. The state-wide “rail roko” protests demanded the reversal of a recently passed national farm bill. Below: Farmers and supporters block train tracks at Devi Dasspura village in Punjab on September 24, 2020.

Figure 1.13. Robert Smithson, *Asphalt Rundown*, 1969.

(Installation near Rome, Italy)

Figure 1.14. “Route 4370” in the occupied West Bank constructed by Israel between 2005 and 2017 and opened in 2019. The highway runs 5 kilometres between Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Although the highway does not run along a border, its lanes are separated by an 8-metre high concrete and metal barrier along the entire length. The eastern side serves Israeli citizens and does not require a permit to enter Jerusalem and the western side can be used by Palestinians of the West Bank with a permit and does not connect to Jerusalem.

Figure 1.15. An eighteenth century Dutch map of Ceylon showing 22 forts of the Dutch East India Company along the island's coasts.

Baltus van Lier, *Kaartje van het eyland Ceylon* [Map], 1751.

Figure 1.16. The CONEX (Container Express) box shown above was developed by the US Army in 1952 to transport and store supplies during the Korean War and later during the Vietnam War. It served as the model for the intermodal shipping container.

1.3 Infrastructure In China: Map of Control

Since its Food-for-Work Program in the early 1980s, when the State Planning Commission mobilised the population in poor rural areas in the construction of roads, drinking water systems and irrigation works in exchange for grain and cotton stocks, China has grown into an infrastructural empire. It now spends more on domestic infrastructure as a percentage of GDP than any other country, especially in transport and energy. Annually, it spends more than North America and Western Europe combined.⁴⁵ Already having more high speed rail lines than the rest of the world at a total length of 35,000 kilometres, in mid 2020 state-owned China Railway Group announced its plan to double that by 2035.⁴⁶ This is regardless of the environmental footprint, safety record or financial viability of the already existing high-speed lines. Studies that have examined China's domestic infrastructure programs have emphasised economic viability. A major 2016 study in the *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* of China's domestic infrastructure over the last thirty years concludes that it is a myth that it creates economic value and predicts that "unless China shifts to a lower level of higher-quality infrastructure investments, the country is headed for an infrastructure-led national financial and economic crisis."⁴⁷ But do non-economic and non-metrics oriented factors such as national pride and state power play a larger role in China's preoccupation with infrastructure? Is China compelled to build infrastructure at the scale it does because it can?

If infrastructure is a readable map of the state and its power as I claim, then China's infrastructure is an unambiguous demonstration to its own population and the world of its will to connect, capacity to construct and its rise to the center of the twenty-first century world system. Realising infrastructure (including police and military) after is all one of the dominant—if not the dominant—function of any state and China as an authoritarian, but not

despotic, state is particularly good at it. If China's infrastructure is not seen through a purely economic or financial lens but that of spatial politics, infrastructure takes on a more ascendant purpose and China's political rationality and other interests become clear. It is precisely because of infrastructure's capacity to increase speed and convenience and serve as a promise of a better future that makes it a justifiable medium for the Communist Party to extend itself far and wide. If infrastructure is present across the vastness of China's landscape so too is the competence and authority of the Chinese state. Infrastructure as a monopoly of the state is extra acute with China's one-party system where it is easily wielded as a tool of territorial control and consolidation of diverse populations.

It is not uncommon for China to invest in extremely complicated infrastructural connections between far flung autonomous regions in the country's north and west and core areas in the east and south. In 2006, China Railway completed the construction of a railway between Golmud in Qinghai province to Lhasa in Tibet. Involving over a 100,000 workers and running at 1,142 kilometres, it is the world's highest railway (reaching over 5000 meters above sea level), winding through incredibly long tunnels, permafrost and the Kunlun Mountains (fig. 1.17). When construction began in 2001, China's then president Jiang Zemin made his intention for it clear, stating that "Some people advised me not to go ahead with this project because it is not commercially viable. I said this is a political decision, we will make this project succeed at all costs, even if there is a commercial loss."⁴⁸ Although Tibet has been under Communist Party rule for over half a century, the railway brings Tibet into the fold of China's national rail network and hardens its physical connection to the rest of Chinese territory, including through intensified migration of Han Chinese into Tibet.

As if the Golmud-Lhasa railway was not enough to project itself onto Tibet, in 2015 China started construction on yet another monumental railway running 1700 kilometres from

Chengdu in Sichuan province to Nyingchi in Tibet (fig. 1.18). As with the first railway, the political reasons for building the Sichuan-Tibet line are openly declared with no reservations on its intended purpose. A November 2020 article in *Xinhua* states that the project is a "historic task, which is arduous but glorious"⁴⁹ and conveys Xi Jinping's thoughts on it:

Xi identified the project as a major measure in facilitating the Party's general plan for governing Tibet in the new era, and stressed the project's important role in safeguarding national unity, promoting ethnic solidarity and consolidating stability in border areas.⁵⁰

Responding to Xi's emphatic views on the railway, Palden Sonam, a researcher at Tibet Policy Institute, writes that "Xi's euphemism of 'safeguarding national unity' means to further the integration of Tibet into the Chinese system and big infrastructures, like the railway lines, are often seen as powerful tools to project power to far periphery regions and govern them from the metropolis."⁵¹ Costing a staggering US\$37 billion, when complete in 2030, the Sichuan-Tibet railway will cross 14 major rivers, pass over 21 snowcapped mountains and more than 80% of the line will run through tunnels and bridges. It is an exemplary case where financial cost and technical challenges are not obstacles that block China's use of infrastructure to project power from the center.

China's infrastructure as a map of control is perhaps most obvious at its far western province of Xinjiang, officially and misleadingly called the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. It is the largest region of China, borders eight countries, and has long been the natural frontier for China's post-Soviet plans to expand land-based trade and economic integration with Central Asia, South Asia and beyond to West Asia. Well before Xinjiang was officially declared a "core area on the Silk Road Economic Belt"⁵² in 2015 it was already a focus of multiple centrally orchestrated development campaigns. These include Open up the Northwest of 1992, Western Development of 2000 and the Xinjiang Work Forums of 2010.

Lastly, in 2012—one year prior to the announcement of Belt and Road—prominent Peking University professor Wang Jisi articulated the now well known concept of “March West” (or “march westwards, 西进), a “geostrategic” proposal for China to shift attention away from East Asia and focus on the countries west of China where the United States was “pivoting” away from.⁵³ March West categorically positions Xinjiang as the indispensable terrain between Central Asia and China at large. A 2017 report by the Uyghur Human Rights Project titled *End of the Road: One Belt, One Road and the Cumulative Economic Marginalization of the Uyghurs*, observes that centrally-orchestrated plans for Xinjiang from the early 1990s to Belt and Road “serve national and party needs to consolidate territorial control of East Turkestan [officially Xinjiang] and assimilate Uyghurs into the dominant culture of China while projecting Chinese influence into the Eurasian continent.”⁵⁴

In my visit to the region in 2017, the most conspicuous aspects of the major cities of Kashgar and Urumqi were police stations, militarised police vehicles and personnel on street corners, city-wide surveillance cameras and checkpoints at the ordinary spaces of markets and public transportation (fig. 1.19). In 2017 alone, it is estimated that the government spent over US\$8 billion on security infrastructure in Xinjiang, close to three times the national average.⁵⁵ It is the most securitised and surveilled region in China and one of the most policed areas in the world.⁵⁶ Since 2018, one million people are known to be in involuntary and extra-legal detention in “re-education centers” across Xinjiang, most of whom belong to the mostly Muslim Uyghur ethnic group.⁵⁷ The Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples of Xinjiang have long been concerned with the erosion of their cultural autonomy and have resisted homogenisation with the dominant Han Chinese culture and politics since being incorporated into the PRC in 1949. Especially following the US-led War on Terror, China has exploited “counter-terrorism” and in 2017 formalised its Regulation on De-extremification targeted at

Xinjiang's Muslim population to manage the "Three Evils" of terrorism, separatism and religious extremism.⁵⁸

What ever "geostrategic," "march west," "belt" and other concepts may refer to, it is old and new infrastructure that are clear evidence of the Chinese state's acute presence in and domination of Xinjiang, a transitory nexus whose population can be pacified with infrastructure-led development. Among the high-priority transnational infrastructures that traverse Xinjiang, the most recent is the Yiwu-London freight rail route that began operating in 2017 and celebrated as a prime example of Belt and Road cooperation.⁵⁹ Running 12,000 km between the city of Yiwu on China's east coast and the city of London in the United Kingdom, the rail carries freight in both directions passing through Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Poland, Germany, Belgium and France. The first train loaded with Chinese-made household goods arrived in London on January 3, completing the entire journey in 18 days compared with the 40 days it would have taken by sea. Making the route technically feasible are transfer stations that straddle the border on either side of Kazakhstan and China. On the Kazakh side, containers on freight trains coming from China on "standard gage" tracks are transferred onto trains running on 5-foot "Russian gage" tracks headed towards Eastern Europe; the reverse process occurs in Xinjiang for trains coming into China. These are not obscure technical sites, but part of a broader spatial cooperation between China and Kazakhstan to turn the furthest location in the world from any ocean (the "Eurasian Pole of Inaccessibility") into the key logistics hub of the so called New Eurasian Land Bridge. The Kazakh transfer station located in the town of Khorgos is the key component of Khorgos Gateway, now considered the biggest dry port in the world⁶⁰ (fig. 1.20). The similarly named adjacent town of Horgos of the Xinjiang transfer station is emerging as a major manufacturing and trade center. Parts of both towns share a visa-free, cross-boarder territory

known as the Khorgos/Horgos Free Trade Zone and referred to as "a huge new city of the future at the intersection of two civilizations" in a 2012 promotional video.⁶¹ Given Xinjiang's relevance to projects of such magnitude, it is not a region that can exist without China exerting total control over its restive population.

The same border area is also where the Western Europe-Western China Expressway passes through in its 8,445-kilometre span from the port of Lianyungang on the Yellow Sea, through the Xinjiang city of Urumqi, and all the way to Russia's St. Petersburg on the Baltic Sea. During the early phase of its construction in 2012, Kazakhstan's president Nursultan Nazarbayev called the expressway the "construction of the century"⁶² and it is claimed to transport goods even faster than rail. Intensifying Xinjiang as China's intermediary with the rest of Eurasia is the Central Asia-China natural gas pipeline inaugurated in 2009 by China's then president Hu Jintao. From gas fields in Turkmenistan, the pipeline passes through Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and terminates in Xinjiang, from where it connects to China's domestic grid extending as far as Shanghai. Similarly, a crude oil pipeline from Kazakhstan's Caspian shore completed in 2009 connects through Xinjiang towards the Yellow Sea at China's northeastern coast.

Furthermore, in November 2016 a convey of 60 shipping containers loaded with Chinese commercial goods left Kashgar on the Karakoram highway, entered Pakistan through the Khunjerab pass, traversed the length of Pakistan on new and rehabilitated roads and arrived at the newly built Gwadar port on the Arabian sea. From there, the containers were loaded onto Chinese ships and transhipped to Africa and the Middle East. The seemingly ordinary logistical event was the first time cargo was transported directly from Kashgar to Gwadar through the newly emerging China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, officially declared as the critical link between the "Belt" and the "Road" (fig. 1.21). The transshipment marked

the official opening of Gwadar port and was celebrated by Pakistan's prime minister Nawaz Sharif with army chief Raheel Sharif, Chinese ambassador Sun Weidon and fifteen other ambassadors. Whether CPEC will be successful or not on economic terms, it is the mutual use of logistics infrastructure to strengthen long-term political cooperation (including on anti-terrorism) and a physical manifestation of a deeply rooted friendship between the two countries. A friendship that in 2010, Pakistan's former prime minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani has said "is higher than the mountains, deeper than the oceans, stronger than steel, and sweeter than honey."⁶³ On China's side, CPEC is the intensification of infrastructure into Xinjiang's southern frontier as a force of domestic stability. Along with a road connection, the corridor will directly connect Kashgar to the Chinese-operated Gwadar port with a new freight train by 2030. The 3000-km multimodal corridor effectively opens up landlocked Xinjiang to the vast logistical space of the Indian ocean. Wang Peng, a researcher at Beijing's Charhar Institute, writes in the *Global Times* that CPEC is "key to developing western China and consolidating regional security"⁶⁴ and "Xinjiang and Tibet are China's inherent territories over which the government has full sovereignty. Therefore, as long as western China gets access to Indian Ocean [through CPEC], it will likely take advantage of the surplus capital to support those areas where funds are needed for development."⁶⁵ With China's roads, rails and pipes, security and economic imperatives converge into infrastructure as a means to legitimise repression and counter the inherent political fragility of authoritarian governance.

Infrastructure is a tool of physically administering territory. China's National Highway Network alone defines the contours of its territory (resembling a rooster) and thus the shape of the Chinese state which makes such infrastructures possible (fig. 1.22). The island of Taiwan is completely erased from the shape of China, because the Chinese state does not construct infrastructure there, but an extreme desire to do so exists. In 2019, China

completed the first section of a bridge into the Taiwan Strait earmarked for Taiwan (fig. 1.23). It is China's first dual purpose sea bridge with a 6-lane expressway and high speed rail lines. Extending 16 kilometres from the "mainland" it stops on the island of Pingtan, the closest location on land to Taiwan. The bridge comes after previous unilateral Chinese plans (including a tunnel) to connect the "mainland" to Taiwan did not materialise because of Taiwanese resistance. Of course the Taiwanese state opposes all such plans as hard infrastructure is defacto political continuity with China and thus a risk to its independence. For the Chinese state, the unfinished bridge is a momentary compromise while it waits patiently to extend itself in the future. As with the shape of China, the world's roads alone can outline the shape of countries and continents (fig. 1.24).

Like other powerful states, China uses infrastructure to substantiate and openly communicate its transgression into its own populations and its interests outside of its accepted territorial boundaries. It is infamous for building military installations on the disputed islands, atolls, shoals and reefs of the South China Sea. Using infrastructure as form, China is making a kind of spatial "solemn representation" to other countries who dispute its claims. The ports, runways, aircraft hangers, radar systems and other installations on the Paracel, Spratly and Woody islands are for potential military conflict ("necessary defense facilities"⁶⁶), but equally serve as visual markers of its desired extent in space. Chinese military planners know these infrastructures will be clearly visible in the surveillance images of foreign intelligence and use that visibility to communicate China's claim and for the world to come to terms with it (fig. 1.25). Much like the planting of a flag, permanent installations on the islands justify China's claim to them. Using infrastructure to flag itself on land, the Chinese state further stretches out over a 200 nautical-mile radius of sea area surrounding the islands (an exclusive economic zone in international law), effectively expanding itself well

past internationally recognised boundaries. Although China asserts ownership of the islands through political, diplomatic and legal arguments, it is the materiality of infrastructure that give it visibility in space and ultimately strengthen the legitimacy of its claims. The location of China's infrastructure in the South China Sea reveal it in relation to resources (including major oil and fish reserves), naval proximity to Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines, US military patrols and bases (in the Philippines) as well as sea lanes on which trillions of dollars worth of goods are transported a year. The "rise of China" is only as meaningful as where it is rising and that can be mapped by its infrastructure at the domestic, regional and global scales.

With the exception of its military base in Djibouti, China's infrastructure construction in other countries is oriented towards trade and the movement of goods, resources and people. Unlike the United States, which has military infrastructure at nearly one thousand locations across the world (in the form of bases and other installations), China's physical extent outside of itself is in the form of commercial transportation, communication and energy infrastructure, financed, constructed and or managed by its state-owned companies. That infrastructure is enabled by China's economic power, but it also entrenches China's political power onto other terrains and secures it in the long term. As China continues its expansion using infrastructure, Belt and Road becomes the story to frame that expansion and not the driver of it. As I explore in the next chapter, Belt and Road is a subversion of real infrastructure in favour of a fragmented but recognisable global narrative on China and its place in the world.

Figure 1.17. The geographic position and environment of the Golmud-Lhasa Railway in a 2012 geological survey conducted after the construction of the railway. It identifies the extreme terrains and conditions the railway passes through and notes "Construction of a railway from Golmud to Lhasa has to overcome difficulties caused by shortage of oxygen, fierce climate conditions and extreme cold winter, permafrost and other geological hazards in Tibetan Plateau along a route as high as 4500-5000m."

China Geological Survey, *Golmud-Lhasa Railway Geological Survey*, 2012.

Sichuan-Tibet Railway: China builds world's most challenging railway

GLOBAL
TIMES

Editor and Graphic: Globaltimes.cn
Source: Xinhua

Figure 1.18. Infographic showing the features of the Sichuan-Tibet Railway.

Global Times, "Sichuan-Tibet Railway: China build's world's most challenging railway," 2018.

Figure 1.19. Above: A unit of the Chinese People's Armed Police Force patrol the streets of Kashgar city in China's western province of Xinjiang in March 2017. Below: A common armoured police vehicle in Kashgar.

Jegan Vincent de Paul, Xinjiang field visit photographs, 2017.

Figure 1.20. Khorgos Gateway dry port in Kazakhstan near the border with Xinjiang, China. Gantry cranes transfer shipping containers between trains on standard gauge Chinese tracks and Russian gauge tracks on the Kazakh side.

Figure 1.21. One of hundreds of maps that depict different aspects of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. This one shows the corridor in relation to violence.

Center for Strategic and International Studies, “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Terrorist Violence in Pakistan,” 2015.

Figure 1.22. Between 2013-2030 China is to increase the total length of highways from 173,000 to 400,000 kilometres. The map shows a future extension of the highway network to the island of Taiwan. Below: The lines of China's existing National Highway Network reveal the general outline of China's territory where the island of Taiwan is absent.

National Development and Reform Commission of the People's Republic of China, *National Highway Network Planning (2013-2030)*, 2013.

Figure 1.23. Above: Aerial view of the Pingtan “cross-strait bridge” under construction in November 2017. The dual purpose bridge (road and rail) extends 16 kilometres from the town of Changle to the island of Pingtan in China’s Fujian Province. Pingtan is the closest Chinese-controlled land to the island of Taiwan and the bridge is intended to connect to it in the future. Below: View of the construction from highway deck showing the enormity of its size.

Figure 1.24. Graphic shows the world's major roads creating the shape of countries and continents.

Peter Atwood, *We live in A WORLD OF* [Series], 2019.

Figure 1.25. A satellite image analysis of China’s construction of infrastructure on Fiery Cross Reef in the South China Sea.

IHS Jane, “Satellite Imagery Analysis—Fiery Cross Reef in the South China Sea,” 2015 .

Chapter 1 Notes

¹ Delgamuukw v. British Columbia [1997] 3 S.C.R. 1010 SCC 23799, <https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/1569/index.do>.

In 1997, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en peoples, as represented by hereditary leaders, have title to 58,000 square kilometres of land in northwest British Columbia based on ancestral right protected by section 35(1) of the Constitution Act of 1982.

² United Nations, *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (New York: United Nations, 2007).

Article 19 states: "States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the Indigenous Peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them."

³ Eric Andrew-Gee, "'The railways got very wealthy on our land': How rail's colonial past made it a target for blockades," *The Globe and Mail*, March 3, 2020, www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-the-railways-got-very-wealthy-on-our-land-how-rails-colonial-past/

⁴ James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2013), 164.

⁵ Rosalind Williams, "Infrastructure as Lived Experience" (keynote address, Landscape Infrastructure, Harvard Graduate School of Design, Cambridge, MA, March 23, 2012).

⁶ Robert Puentes, "Why Infrastructure Matters: Rotten Roads, Bum Economy," Brookings Institution, January 20, 2015, www.brookings.edu/opinions/why-infrastructure-matters-rotten-roads-bum-economy/.

⁷ Ashley Carse, "Keyword: Infrastructure: How a Humble French Engineering Term Shaped the Modern World," in *Infrastructures And Social Complexity*, eds. Penelope Harvey, Casper Jensen and Atsuro Morita (London: Routledge, 2016), 31.

⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁹ Toufic Haddad, "Insurgent Infrastructure: Tunnels of the Gaza Strip," *Middle East – Topics & Arguments* 10 (2018).

¹⁰ Brian Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): 329.

Larkin states that "Infrastructures are matter that enable the movement of other matter. Their peculiar ontology lies in the fact that they are things and also the relation between things."

¹¹ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “infrastructure,” accessed July 20, 2019, www.oed.com/remotexs.ntu.edu.sg/view/Entry/95624?redirectedFrom=infrastructure&.

¹² Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. “infrastructure,” accessed July 20, 2019, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/infrastructure>.

¹³ United States President's Commission on Critical Infrastructure Protection, *Report of the President's Commission on Critical Infrastructure Protection* (Washington DC: PCCIP June, 1997).

¹⁴ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “infrastructure,” accessed July 20, 2019, www.oed.com/remotexs.ntu.edu.sg/view/Entry/95624?redirectedFrom=infrastructure#eid.

There are a few exceptional uses of “infrastructure” to describe things in nature. The Oxford English Dictionary points out that within the earth sciences, infrastructure is “A lower part of an orogenic belt, which is more affected by plutonic activity or metamorphism than the part above it. Contrasted with superstructure.”

¹⁵ Brian Hayes, *Infrastructure: A Guide to the Industrial Landscape* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 1.

¹⁶ Government of Canada, *National Strategy for Critical Infrastructure* (Ottawa, Canada: Public Safety Canada, 2009).

¹⁷ Ibid., 2

¹⁸ Andrew C. Crosby and Jeffrey Monaghan, *Policing Indigenous Movements: Dissent and the Security State* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2018).

¹⁹ Andrew C. Crosby and Jeffrey Monaghan, “RCMP files say ‘violent aboriginal extremists’ are undermining pipeline plans,” *Vice*, April 5, 2018, www.vice.com/en/article/mbxyw8/rcmp-files-say-violent-aboriginal-extremists-are-undermining-pipeline-plans.

²⁰ White House, *Executive Order on Delegating Authority Under the DPA with Respect to Food Supply Chain Resources During the National Emergency Caused by the Outbreak of COVID-19* (Washington, DC: White House, 2020).

²¹ Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, “Infrastructure Security Month Tool Kit,” accessed June 4, 2020, www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ISM%202020%20In%20a%20Time%20of%20Transformation_110320_508.pdf.

²² Timothy P. Stratford and Yan Luo, “China Seeks Public Comments on Draft Regulation on the Protection of Critical Information Infrastructure,” *Global Policy Watch*, July 13, 2017, www.globalpolicywatch.com/2017/07/china-seeks-public-comments-on-draft-regulation-on-the-protection-of-critical-information-infrastructure/.

²³ Margaret Miller, Nataliya Mylenko and Shalini Sankaranarayanan, *Financial Infrastructure: Building Access Through Transparent and Stable Financial Systems* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2009), iii.

²⁴ Ibid., iii.

²⁵ Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels used the term “base” or “substructure” to describe the economic structure of society in contrast to the “superstructure” constituted by politics, law, religion and other major aspects of society.

²⁶ Michael Mann, “The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results,” *European Journal of Sociology* 25, no. 2 (1984).

²⁷ Alan Sears, *The Next New Left: A History of the Future* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2014), 2.

²⁸ Sun Yat-sen, *The International Development of China* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1920).

²⁹ Xi Jinping, “Work Together to Build the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road” (speech, Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, Beijing, China, May 14, 2017), *Xinhua*, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/14/c_136282982.htm.

³⁰ Bill Clinton, “Full Text of Clinton's Speech on China Trade Bill” (speech, Washington, DC, March 8, 2000), *New York Times*, <http://movies2.nytimes.com/library/world/asia/030900clinton-china-text.html>.

³¹ Zhang Zhexin, “China’s International Strategy and its Implications for Southeast Asia,” *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2016): 64.

³² National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Commerce, *Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road*.

A section titled “Principles” states: “The Initiative seeks mutual benefit. It accommodates the interests and concerns of all parties involved, and seeks a conjunction of interests and the ‘biggest common denominator’ for cooperation so as to give full play to the wisdom and creativity, strengths and potentials of all parties.”

³³ Larkin, “The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure,” 328.

³⁴ Ibid., 329.

³⁵ *South China Morning Post*, “Entire MTR network closed as Hong Kong protesters go on violent rampage across the city,” October 4, 2019, www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3031515/hong-kong-leader-carrie-lam-announce-introduction-anti-mask.

³⁶ Rex Auyeung and Jacob Kam, “MTR: Open Letter to passengers from MTR Chairman and Chief Executive Officer,” September 8, 2019, www.marketscreener.com/MTR-CORPORATION-LIMITED-1412694/news/MTR-Open-Letter-to-passengers-from-MTR-Chairman-and-Chief-Executive-Officer-29175935/.

³⁷ The Invisible Committee, “Power is Logistic. Block Everything! - Power Now Resides in Infrastructures” in *To Our Friends*, trans. Robert Hurley (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2015), 81-82.

- ³⁸ Lewis Carroll, *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (London: Macmillan, 1895), 169.
- ³⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, “On Exactitude in Science,” in *Jorge Luis Borges: Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (London: Penguin Group, 1998), 325.
- ⁴⁰ Umberto Eco, “On the Impossibility of Drawing a Map of the Empire on a Scale of 1 to 1,” in *How To Travel With A Salmon: and Other Essays*, trans. William Weaver (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 95-106.
- ⁴¹ *Indian Express*, “Labour’s Gift to Posterity” November 18, 1955, news.google.com/newspapers?id=4WlIAAAIIBAJ&sjid=IZQNAAAIBAJ&pg=753%2C1027693.
- ⁴² Quoted in Vandana Asthana and A. C. Shukla, *Water Security in India: Hope, Despair, and the Challenges of Human Development* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 64.
- ⁴³ Government Technology Agency Singapore, “Lamppost as a Platform,” accessed June 19, 2020, www.tech.gov.sg/scwc2019/laap.
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Chapter 2

NARRATIVE

President Xi Jinping addresses the roundtable of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation at the Beijing Huairou International Conference Center at Yangli Lake on Monday. XU JINGXING / CHINA DAILY

MOVING 'HISTORY FORWARD'

Belt and Road Initiative bringing people together in 'pursuit of a better life,' Xi says; 2nd summit set for 2019

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China will host the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2019, President Xi Jinping announced on Monday at a news briefing in Beijing while describing the outcomes of the forum and the Leaders Roundtable.

At the forum this year, held on Sunday and Monday, 29 foreign heads of state and government as well as chiefs of international organizations, corporate leaders, senior officials and scholars gathered to chart the blueprint for the Belt and Road Initiative, which has won positive feedback from more than 100 countries.

Xi confirmed that China has so far signed cooperative agreements with 68 countries and international organizations concerning the initiative, including those signed during the forum.

A list of major outcomes of the forum was approved at the closing ceremony of the forum, with 76 items including more than 270 concrete results in the key areas of

At a glance

Participants at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation agreed on Monday to pursue such concrete measures as:

Cooperation

- Pursuing dialogue and consultation, in order to build synergies in development strategies among participating countries.

Economy

- Conducting in-depth consultation on macroeconomic issues by optimizing the existing multilateral and bilateral cooperation and dialogue mechanisms.

and technological standards when necessary.

Trade

- Expanding trade by nurturing new areas of trade growth, promoting trade balance and promoting e-commerce and digital economy.
- Deepening economic and trade cooperation and upholding the authority and effectiveness of the multilateral trading system.
- Strengthening cooperation on information exchange for customs clearance and on developing mutual recognition of control, mutual assistance on enforcement and sharing of information.
- Advancing global value chains development and supply chain connectivity.

Chapter 2

Narrative

“When I first heard about the Belt and Road Initiative, I thought about something simple and straightforward, like a fragrant cup of tea.”

—Christine Lagarde

Between 1967-1976, China built a railway between the port city of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania and copper mines in land-locked Zambia (fig. 2.1). The 1,860-kilometre long TAZARA Railway is China’s first major infrastructure project in a foreign country and at an estimated value of US\$415 million (close to US\$3 billion today) it was the country’s largest foreign investment. Since then, Chinese state-owned companies, guided by the economic and political imperatives of the Communist Party, have been continuously involved in infrastructure projects across the global South. More recently, a major study published by the development research lab AidData reveals that in the 15-year period between 2000-2014, the Chinese government financed 3,485 projects in 138 countries with a combined value of over US\$273 billion (in 2014 dollars).¹ Nearly half of these are transport infrastructures in the form of roads, bridges, railways, and ports with concentrations in Africa, Central Asia, South Asia, and South East Asia; projects with higher than normal levels of financing are further concentrated along coastal regions.

Since the TAZARA Railway, China’s transnational infrastructures have long been examined by multiple fields in terms of aid, debt finance, foreign direct investments, Communist Party solidarity with anti-colonial struggles, diplomatic relations and economic viabilities. They were, however, rarely conceptualised as part of a larger Chinese geostrategic agenda until recently. Regardless of China’s global transport infrastructure footprint across a

swath of the world, a select few in the Indian Ocean region gained peculiar geopolitical attention in early 2005 when *The Washington Times* published an article on an internal US defense department report produced by the defense contractor and consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton. Based on the article, the report—titled “Energy Futures in Asia”—theorises a “string of pearls” through which “China is building strategic relationships along the sea lanes from the Middle East to the South China Sea in ways that suggest defensive and offensive positioning to protect China’s energy interests, but also to serve broad security objectives.”² According to *The Washington Times*’ account, the report points to current and future Chinese infrastructure—specifically ports called “pearls”—in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, Thailand and the South China Sea. After the newspaper’s account of the internal report was published, the so-called “String of Pearls” became widely propagated in international media, major international relations journals as well as think tank and defense institute reports. Although the actual report was never made public, the theory was reflexively used as an analytic and discursive tool to frame China’s naval and commercial interests in the Indian Ocean region. For instance, in 2008 geopolitical analyst Lisa Curtis testified before the US government’s US-China Economic and Security Review Commission that “As India reaches into the Malacca Straits, Beijing is creating a ‘string of pearls’ surrounding India by developing strategic port facilities in Sittwe, Burma; Chittagong, Bangladesh; and Gwadar, Pakistan to protect sea lanes and ensure uninterrupted energy supplies.”³ Curtis, however, does not provide or cite evidence of Chinese militarisation in the Indian ocean implied by her invocation of String of Pearls. In the same year, Indian analyst Gurpreet S. Khurana (known for coining the term “Indo-Pacific” to describe a geostrategic space) wrote an article for the journal *Strategic Analyses* called “China’s ‘String of Pearls’ in the Indian Ocean and its Security Implications in Strategic Analysis.” Although Khurana begins with the disclaimer

that String of Pearls “remains a speculation, backed by frail and somewhat disjointed evidence,”⁴ he nonetheless proceeds to use the concept as an analytic tool and perpetuates it in the process. A map in Khurana’s article adds Sri Lanka’s Hambantota port—which was planned but not yet under construction at the time of his writing in 2007—as a new “pearl”(fig. 2.2). Articles such as Khurana’s become part of a rambling feedback loop of Indian Ocean geopolitics that gradually absorb Hambantota and other Chinese-built infrastructures along the littorals of Africa and Eurasia into the String of Pearls paradigm. The theory was intensified with Indian geopolitical analyses and exemplified in the work of the Indian Institute of Defense Studies Analyses (a think tank funded by India’s defense ministry) which has published dozens of articles and commentaries on String of Pearls, including Khurana’s, but non provide evidence or cite the actual US defense department report, which presumably remained classified.

String of Pearls made its way into broader geopolitical thought and was even used to predict a new Chinese “Silk Road.” Christina Lin, of the think tank Washington Institute for Near East Policy, produced a report titled “The New Silk Road: China’s Energy Strategy in the Greater Middle East” in 2011—two years *before* Xi Jinping’s announcement of Belt and Road. The report asserts that China views its energy security and supporting infrastructures across Eurasia as a strategic and security matter, rather than only an economic one. Lin states:

China envisions creating a network of ports, logistics centers, and railways to distribute its products to and across Europe—a sort of modern-day Silk Road. And as China increases its economic presence, its military planners are watching with increasing aspirations. In addition to investments in overland pipelines, roads, and railways through the Caspian region, Chinese economic assistance to Burma, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Greece form part of the military’s String of Pearls strategy, aimed at ensuring the free flow of energy and trade in the event of a Taiwan conflict and resultant U.S. naval blockade.⁵

The report tacitly positions “String of Pearls” as an actual Chinese military strategy and includes a map titled “China’s Silk Road Strategy and String of Pearls” juxtaposing ancient trade routes with modern ports that China has stakes in, each of which are labeled a “Chinese strategic ‘pearl’” (fig.2.3). Then in 2013, Robert D. Kaplan, one of the most prominent Western geopolitical theorists, wrote an online commentary directly on String of Pearls for the major geopolitical intelligence firm Stratfor, in the capacity of “Chief Geopolitical Analyst.” Referencing his 2010 book *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power* and suggesting that String of Pearls needs to be interpreted with “subtlety,” Kaplan Writes:

To be sure, we live in a post-modern world of eroding distinctions: a world where coast guards sometimes act more aggressively than navies, where sea power is civilian as well as military, where access denial can be as relevant as the ability to engage in fleet-on-fleet battle and where the placement of warships is vital less for sea battles than for diplomatic ones. China, moreover, has historic roots in the Indian Ocean going back to the Song and early Ming dynasties. In particular, the Chinese regime recently spent a considerable amount of money in a public relations campaign to resurrect the legacy of Ming Dynasty Adm. Zheng He, who plied the seas between China, the East Indies, Sri Lanka, the Persian Gulf and the Horn of Africa in the 15th century.”⁶

Kaplan ends his commentary by adding “As I said, the concept of the so-called string of pearls is true provided it is nuanced.”⁷ In his very call for nuance and by seemingly diluting String of Pearls, Kaplan actually extends it into all matters of China’s foreign relations (and not just covert ports), including historical ones. By evoking Admiral Zheng He, Kaplan insinuates that China has the power of history behind it and therefore its presence in the Indian Ocean region is, perhaps, more severe than it might appear.

Although String of Pearls was not uniformly accepted and was criticised for its conclusions and lack of evidence, prominent voices such as Kaplan’s continued to give it currency. Ostensibly, the “optics” of it was bad for Chinese infrastructure in general: China’s

proud maritime history was being conflated with it, it was written about and perceived as an actual Chinese doctrine and China did not have its own version to counter it. With String of Pearls exemplifying adversarial views of China as a “rising maritime power,” China’s “peaceful rise” and its decades-old, infrastructure-based foreign relations were in question. At the core of it, China was arguably confronted with an infrastructural conundrum: the logistical power of infrastructure is both a promise of trade and a threat of force—the ability of its transport infrastructures to overcome geography can expand global trade and at the same time contain and “encircle” countries. Fundamentally, China’s track record as an internationalist constructive power was being overwritten by an Indo-Western narrative of it as a potential destructive power.

China inexorably needed an infrastructural narrative of its own, not one written by historians in the future, but one it can start using in the present to intensify its practice of infrastructure and tell a convincing story of it in the process. As I discussed in the Introduction, China’s narrative breakthrough came one year after Xi Jinping came to power in 2012 and called for an international revival of “the Silk Road” that belongs to all countries, exculpating itself as the only benefactor of its transnational infrastructures. Regardless of any on-going perceptions and accusations of threats posed by its infrastructure, China assertively and openly declares the ports of Piraeus in Greece, Gwadar in Pakistan and Hambantota in Sri Lanka as stops on a new Silk Road, not secret “pearls on a string”; it uses history to demilitarise its ports and counter the antagonisms, perceptions and accusations. One year after China’s new Silk Road entered the global geopolitical consciousness in 2013, the Washington-based Institute for National Strategic Studies—which is funded by and produces research for the US defense department—conducted a study of how exactly the Chinese navy might carry out overseas operations using six “logistics models,” with one them being the

“String of Pearls Model.” Titled “‘Not an Idea We Have to Shun’: Chinese Overseas Basing Requirements in the 21st Century,” the study finds that there is no physical evidence of China constructing bases for military use and that the String of Pearls thesis also does not support China’s naval behaviour. It concludes that “China appears to be planning for a relatively modest set of missions to support its overseas interests, not building a covert logistics infrastructure to fight the United States or India in the Indian Ocean.”⁸ Since the ascendance of Belt and Road, String of Pearls has become a drastically less active concept in international relations with the exception of domestic Indian geopolitics. Nefarious looking maps such as Khurana, Lin’s and others (fig. 2.4) are eventually overwhelmed by the hundreds that begin to document Belt and Road as a matter of fact and even something to celebrate (fig. 2.5).

As claims of Chinese threats in the Indian Ocean became less fashionable in geopolitical circles, String of Pearls did not disappear entirely however. It merely shifted to land. In his 2016 article “Silk Roads and String of Pearls,” David Brewster writing in the prominent journal *Geopolitics*, examines the “strategic implications” of China’s plans to connect the internal regions of Eurasia to the Indian Ocean through Belt and Road and concludes that “while China’s growing maritime interests in Indian Ocean are strategically important, it is the new overland routes connecting the Eurasian hinterland with the ocean that have the potential to change the entire geostrategic character of the region.”⁹ Brewster’s view is symptomatic of a post-String of Pearls Chinese threat coming no longer from maritime containment, but regional connectivities where China’s new infrastructures are seen as a vehicle for its continental expansion. Getting itself out of the infrastructural conundrum of maritime movement = containment, China is confronted with another one: continental connectivity = expansion. At the first Belt and Road Forum in 2017, Xi Jinping overrides all

such concerns by openly and proudly declaring that Belt and Road “belongs to the whole world”¹⁰ and is a “project of the century.”¹¹ In other words, China’s infrastructure-led agenda for connectivity and cooperation has no real spatial or temporal focus and thus cannot be a threat (fig. 2.6). Ultimately, criticism and endorsement of Belt and Road converge into a singular message: Belt and Road is a way to create a world with China at the center.

Figure 2.1. A 1971 political poster showing a Chinese worker in Tanzania building the TAZARA Railway constructed between 1967-1976.

Sister Wei Revolutionary People Service, *Serve the revolutionary people of the world*, 1971.

4 Strategic Analysis

Figure 1– Chinese “Pearls” in the Indian Ocean: Potential Military Facilities

Figure 2.2. A 2008 map shows alleged Chinese military facilities in Pakistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Myanmar called “Chinese ‘Pearls’.”

Gurpreet S. Khurana, “Chinese ‘Pearls’ in the Indian Ocean: Potential Military Facilities” [Map], 2008.

Fig. 1. China's Silk Road Strategy and String of Pearls

Figure 2.3. A 2008 map shows thirteen sites, each indicated as a “Chinese strategic ‘pearl’” (red circles) juxtaposed with the “Ancient Silk Road and Arab sea routes” as well as existing and proposed oil and gas pipelines.

Christina Lin, “Chinese Silk Road Strategy and String of Pearls” [Map], 2008

Figure 2.4. A Spanish-language map of String of Pearls. Until 2020, it was the dominant image used for the English-language entry for “String of Pearls” in Wikipedia and extensively reproduced elsewhere without citation. The map’s legend lists the following sites as “String of Pearls - Chinese strategic enclaves”: Hong Kong (China), Sanya (Hainan island, China), Wood Island, Spratly Island, Sihanoukville (Cambodia), Kra Canal (Thailand), Coco Islands (Myanmar), Kyaukpadaung and Sittwe (Myanmar), Chittagong (Bangladesh), Hambantota (Sri Lanka), Marao (Maldives), Gwadar and Pasni (Pakistan), Al-Ahdab (Iraq), Lamu (Kenya), Port Sudan (North Sudan).

Wikipedia (unknown author), “Mapa del Collar de Perlas de China” [Map], circa April 2012.

Figure 2.5. One of hundreds of maps that emerged showing corridors and infrastructures with Chinese involvement after the announcement of Belt and Road in 2013 (see Chapter 4, pp. 61-69 and cover image for other maps).

Mercator Institute of China Studies, “One Belt, One Road: With the Silk Road Initiative, China Aims to Build a Global Infrastructure Network” [Map], 2015.

Figure 2.6. Front page coverage of the first Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in *China Daily* on May 16, 2017. The main article quotes Xi Jinping emphasising Belt and Road as a collective enterprise: “Though originating in China, the Belt and Road Initiative belongs to the whole world.”; “Its development goes beyond regions, stages of development, and civilisations.”; “The Belt and Road development does not shut out, nor is it directed against any party.”; “Geese can fly through wind and rain for a long time because they fly in flocks.”

China Daily, “Moving ‘History Forward’,” 2017.

2.1 “Let the History Tell the Future”

Following China’s queue, Belt and Road is often repeated as a “revival” of Silk Road, Silk Roads or Silk Routes, all of which are myths in themselves. Actually reviving ancient trade routes would result in treacherous paths along vast stretches of mountains and deserts, through which few goods would actually be transported.¹² What is indeed transported would include slaves, diseases, weapons and armies. It would mean constructing paths to expedite Chinese conquest deeper into Eurasia into lands outside of *t’ien hsia*—*all under heaven*, or the Chinese empire. Existing borders would be contested or disintegrated as during the Han, Tang and Qing dynasties where “expansion and withdrawal occurred repeatedly as the optimal level of expansion fluctuated in accordance with the power of the center and the power of non-state actors along the frontier zone.”¹³ A revival would mean building the modern equivalent of the Great Wall’s defense system, an inseparable part of Silk Road history. Instead of archers in stone towers, there would be missiles pointed at Central Asia. Silk Road is to Belt and Road as camels are to trains and desert trails are to communication networks—they are not of the same ontological category. An actual revival of Silk Road and its “spirit” would be a disaster of historic proportions.

When Ferdinand von Richthofen coined the term “Seidenstraße” in 1877 to describe ancient routes as a “Silk Road,” he did it in the context of the nineteenth-century orientalism and the European conquest of China. Tasked with finding the most direct rail route from China to Germany, von Richthofen produced the first map (fig. 2.7) of Silk Road and conceived ancient trade routes as a nearly straight and single line, although they were really a network of routes that diverged and converged across the extent of Eurasia.¹⁴ In her book *The Silk Road: A New History*, historian Valerie Hansen writes that:

“Over a hundred years of archeological investigations have revealed no clearly marked, paved route across Eurasia—nothing remotely like the Appian Way of Rome—but instead a patchwork of drifting trails and unmarked footpaths. Because there was rarely a discernible route, travelers almost always hired guides to take them along a particular section, and they frequently shifted to another path if they encountered obstacles.”¹⁵

Like the myth of Silk Road, Belt and Road is storytelling to both simplify and glorify the unimaginable complexity of human actions, thoughts and relations across vast spans of space and time. However, unlike Silk Road, which people at the time did not acknowledge the existence of, Belt and Road is named, constructed and mythologized in the immediate present. Like von Richthofen’s simplification, Xi Jinping’s “belt” is a single line that represents not a physical route across Eurasia, but a fictitious one. Functioning like the prologue of a stage drama, it introduces nations as characters and their potential relations, provoking imaginations of a twenty-first century Eurasian epic. Xi’s subsequent pronouncement of a maritime Road, also a single line from China to Europe, expands the story’s setting from deserts, steppes and mountains to the open oceans with new characters, journeys and fantastic worlds. The title of the story becomes *One Belt One Road* following in the Chinese tradition of constructing duality from unity in the lineage of “one country, two systems” (China’s policy for Hong Kong and Macau) and “One World, One Dream” (the slogan for the 2008 Beijing Olympics). The dual lines of Belt and Road, as land and sea, represent elements of the world itself (fig. 2.8).

Unlike the propagandistic and monolithic national narratives internal to China, Xi’s two lines are open to not only interpretation but interpolation, and expanded not through censorship but overrepresentation. With the emptiness of “connectivity and cooperation”¹⁶ being the central technical premise, Belt and Road can adapt and change to suit the desires and fantasies of anyone willing to take part in its worldbuilding. Like worldbuilding in

science fiction and fantasy writing, Belt and Road contains its own histories, geographies, maps, backstories, conflicts, resolutions and teleologies.

In 2014, China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan jointly applied to gain UNESCO World Heritage status for “the Tian-shan corridor” as the “initial section of the Silk Roads” (fig. 2.9). The corridor is proposed as a 8,700-km “routes network” that developed between the 2nd century BCE and the 1st century and used until the 16th century. It spans the Han and Tang dynasty capital of Chang’an in central China (Xi’an today) and the Zhetysu region of Central Asia overlapping modern day Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The application is an exhaustive 5,715-page document that reads like a multi-volume archeology textbook detailing the cultural and historical relevance of 33 major sites along the corridor categorised into trading settlements, transportation and defense facilities, religious sites, burial sites and entire towns. The sites were nominated together under UNESCO’s Serial Nominations guidelines where “it is the series, and not necessarily each of its components taken individually, which is of outstanding universal value.”¹⁷ The series of the Tian-shan corridor is created by a reconstitution of marginally related ancient sites as part of Silk Road—a modern-day colonial construction that simply applies the truism that humans organise the movement of themselves and things to survive and form cultures and societies. If the 33 sites—ranging from the 2nd-century BCE tomb of the Han dynasty imperial envoy Zhang Qian to the 10th-century city of Balasagun in today’s Kyrgyzstan—are related, it is simply because everything is related within and between adjacent empires, kingdoms and civilisations. Furthermore, positing the imperial Chinese capital of Chang’an as the starting point of Silk Road is tenuous given that exchanges extended much further east towards Japan and the Korean peninsula. If the corridor was in fact a “routes network” as claimed, interactions on ancient nodes and lines would have been too decentralised to actually have an actual point of

origin, especially since Silk Road interactions were largely informal, between an unknown number of groups, and no entity is known to have orchestrated the construction of a Silk Road as such. The corridor's historicism and arbitrary nature is further revealed by the fact that the very idea of a "corridor" was introduced as a practical necessity for UNESCO to manage the vast scale of individual "Silk Road" sites that were being submitted for World Heritage status by China, India, Iran and central Asian countries starting in 2008. China itself originally submitted 48 sites without the framework of a specific connective corridor.

In June 2014, the Tian-Shan corridor became the first, and so far the only stretch of Silk Road to be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, a monumental achievement for China's heritage diplomacy with central Asian countries and wider Eurasia. Although the timing of the inscription coincides with the introduction of Belt and Road, the preparatory work for the coveted UNESCO status started more than a decade prior, with China's State Administration of Cultural Heritage playing an active role in its funding, research and coordination; the roots of which can be traced back even further to 1988 when UNESCO launched the "Roads of Dialogue" project to "highlight the complex cultural interactions which arose from the encounters along the Silk Roads."¹⁸ China's early interest in diplomacy through Silk Road foreshadows Belt and Road, especially in the sense that it is the series and not the component that is of "universal value".

After Belt and Road was announced, China's heritage diplomacy entered an entirely new phase and the two became intertwined with each other. A 2017 report by the China's heritage administration on the state of conservation of the Tian-Shan corridor lists over a dozen events that Chinese agencies have organised to advance Silk Road culture and history. Starting with a forum in May 2016, titled "Exchange and Cooperation Forum on Preservation of Cultural Heritages of the Countries along the 'Belt and Road'," many others¹⁹ use Belt and

Road to promote heritage and heritage to promote Belt and Road. For instance, the theme of China's 2017 Cultural Heritage Day was "cultural heritage and the Belt and Road Initiative" where activities and forums were organised to "fully implement the spirit of President Xi Jinping's keynote speech at the 2017 Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation."²⁰ A section in that report titled "Propaganda and Public Education Activities" states that the sites of the Tian-Shan corridor were oriented around activities such as International Museum Day and Chinese Cultural Heritage Day so that "the value and connotation of heritage sites will be sufficiently propagandized and interpreted to the public."²¹ It further reports that many television programs have publicised the "values and historic influence of the Silk Road" and listed the examples of *China Dream-Silk Roads Dreams*, *Great Migration in Century*, *Homeland Dreamland* and *Let the History Tell the Future*. The latter one is a documentary series with a hundred episodes that was broadcast at outdoor screenings in Xinjiang and "greatly propagandized the knowledge of cultural heritage conservation."²² It concludes with the statement "It [the propaganda] appeals for much social strength to join in the conservation of Chinese legacy and the cultural value [of] broadcast for establishing a profound society foundation to long-term protect the Silk Roads heritages and culture."²³

Since establishing Tian-Shan as the "initial corridor" of Silk Road, Chinese heritage experts assist in the creation of three new overlapping UNESCO corridors²⁴ involving Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Iran, India, Nepal, Bhutan and China. Furthermore, in 2018 (on the 30th anniversary of UNESCO's 1988 Roads of Dialogue project) China's permanent delegation to UNESCO initiated the formal process to gain recognition for "Maritime Silk Roads" between China and the Middle East.²⁵ The ongoing saga of these corridors is quite obscure and rarely reported on by international media in reference to Belt and Road, but reveals a Chinese state agenda deeply interested in

the use of history to promote the future and reconfigure contemporary transboundary relations using heritage as the basis.

Concurrent to China's high-level Silk Road diplomacy²⁶ and the silkroadification of history, Chinese agencies and companies produce memorabilia to celebrate and popularise Belt and Road on historic terms. In 2017, the state-owned Shanghai Mint Company released *The Belt and Road Commemorative Album* containing actual stamps, coins and currency notes from sixty-five countries (fig. 2.10). An event held in Beijing to celebrate the release was covered by CCTV and attended by representatives from the embassies of Algeria, Bahrain, Brunei, Bulgaria, Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Mongolia, Morocco, Palestine, Peru, Poland, Russia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Yemen, and Zambia. The 65 featured countries of Belt and Road are memorialised and validated into a union. However, unlike with conventional grouping of countries into security alliances like Nato, intergovernmental organisations like ASEAN, or even broad political and economic blocks like the EU, Belt and Road does not have formal membership or an institutional structure. It has no constitution, voting, or rules of any kind as to what countries can participate. In this openness, the album constructs its own defacto Belt and Road membership, reenforcing the prevalent notion of "Belt and Road countries"(discussed in detail below). In reality, joining Belt and Road means a country establish an understanding only with China, not any other countries. Japan, for instance, is not considered a Belt and Road country, although it has recently invested more than China on infrastructure in South East Asia in the same countries that are considered part of Belt and Road.²⁷ Because Japan actually advances China's ambitions for regional and national connectivities, it is seen as an interference of Belt and Road and not a compliment to it. In the very act of commemoration—which must be based on inclusion—the album is actually more

revealing than official discourse, because it exposes exclusion; an exclusion that is contrary to the Belt and Road ethos that it is a “public good”²⁸ that “belongs to the whole world.”

By their very nature, memorabilia speak truths that are off-limits in speech and text. Another example is a coin released by the People's Bank of China (China's central bank) to commemorate the 2017 Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (fig. 2.11).²⁹ One side of the coin shows the forum's logo, its name in English and Chinese, and the coin's value of 50 yuen (about US\$7). The other side, however, shows a prominent image of China's national emblem, “People's Republic of China” written in Chinese, and 2017 as the year of issuance. What is revealed here is Belt and Road as a dichotomy: China on one side and the world on the other. Although of course unintended, the coin is an index of separateness in contrast to the insistence that Belt and Road is a mutual effort where—according to Xi—it is “difficult to rely on a single country to manage or solve the global problems.”³⁰ Unless of course that country is China. Appropriately enough, the coins are actually legal tender according to the bank, where China's unique position and centrality is a reason to celebrate and given literal currency within China.³¹

Figure 2.8. Emblem of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. The iconography appears to represent the Sun and Moon temple in Guilin, China interweaved by two ribbon-like forms, presumably symbolising each of the routes of the Belt and Road. The emblem also shares some visual characteristics of duality similar to the ubiquitous symbol for Yin and Yang.

National Development and Reform Commission of the People's Republic of China, "BRF" [emblem], 2017.

1.e Maps and Plans, Showing the Boundaries of the Nominated Property and Buffer Zone

1.e.1 Maps of the Nominated Routes

1.e.1-01 Map of the Silk Roads

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Figure 2.9. Map shows “Routes Network of the Tian-Shan Corridor” as the “Initial Section of the Silk Roads” [in red] nominated for UNESCO World Heritage inscription.

The State Administration of Cultural Heritage People's Republic of China, Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Kyrgyz Republic, “Maps of the Nominated Routes” and “Map of the Silk Roads” [Map], 2014.

Figure 2.10. Flyer accompanying The Belt and Road Commemorative Album. The front side shows a photo of a 2017 event held in Beijing to celebrate the release of the album and its reception by representatives from the embassies of 27 countries. The reverse side shows the albums's content of actual stamps, coins and currencies notes from 65 countries.

Shanghai Mint Company, “The Belt and Road Commemorative Album,” 2017.

Figure 2.11. “Gold coins” issued to commemorate the Belt and Road Forum of May, 2017. The obverse side shows China's national emblem, along with the country's name and the year of issuance. The reverse side shows the forum's logo, the name of the forum in Chinese and English, a face value of 50 yuan (US\$7.2) and lotus decoration in the background.

People's Bank of China, “Belt and Road Forum Commemorative Coin,” 2017.

2.2 Into the Metastructure: Belt and Road Archetypes

Having laid the foundation of Belt and Road using Silk Road, China has instigated something that is equally incoherent, chaotic and ultimately a matter of arbitrary inference. This section is a review of global interpretations and analyses, that while seeming to describe Belt and Road are actually engaged in its construction. Individual expressions of Belt and appear sensible but as a whole they convergence into a kind of singularity where even oppositional views have the same meaning. For instance, Western and Indian qualifications of Belt and Road as “geostrategic” is the same as Chinese qualifications of it as “globally engaged.” It is the same with other aspects such as opportunistic or opportunity and global governance or global domination. Likewise, Belt and Road being worth US\$21 trillion or US\$900 billion mean the same thing—a lot of money. This space of convergence is what I call a metastructure and where Belt and Road is constructed into a recognisable but incoherent narrative. It is the full spectrum of expressions (such as the memorabilia described above) ranging from spoken words to government documents and it is where Belt and Road is in a productive flux between the adversarial and the promotional, the hyperbolic and the understated, the anecdotal and the researched, the official and the unofficial. The metastructure does not represent, explain, defend, advocate or critique existing or potential infrastructure, but is where *the* Belt and Road as the world knows it is born and lives. Actual infrastructures, their very necessity, function and impact on peoples and places lie at the far edges or outside of the metastructure. Discussions on land and labour disputes or ethnic conflicts and territorial dispossession are marginal, negated, or non-existent within it.

If the metastructure is a map of Belt and Road, it is also the territory of Belt and Road. It is not a representation, but the thing itself. It produces a state of cognitive dissonance in the

mind of anyone attempting to read this map, for it cannot be understood with consistency. It is a space of constantly changing contours, landscapes and terrains, of shifting borders and boundaries. It is where facts and figures are incoherent and repeated and recycled for instrumental reasons or simply as a matter of convenience. The metastructure transforms mere communication into knowledge and the medium becomes the message. In the end, the metastructure is where *The Belt and Road* is spoken into existence. Within it, Belt and Road is a fuzzy construct where definitions of it inescapably reference previous ones or are inferences still based on other inferences.

One way to orient Belt and Road as a narrative is to categorise it into several archetypes that are readable from outside the metastructure (fig. 2.12). Because of the enormous scale at which Belt and Road is interpreted and communicated, certain patterns of thoughts, themes, motifs and facts have also emerged. Although Belt and Road cannot actually be read, its archetypes can be and provide a window into how it is constructed as a collective, but disintegrated story. Archetypal representations of Belt and Road are general kinds of critiques, commentaries, statements, views, etcetera, expressed in specific ways. China's infamous "debt trap" for example can be read as an archetypal expression that appears repetitively to discuss why Belt and Road should not be trusted. The same expression also creates the space or opportunity to respond and talk about why in fact it should be trusted. The archetype that "debt trap" is an expression of is *the implication*. The implication of Belt and Road generates volumes of arguments and counter arguments that slowly erode each other within the metastructure. Arguments rise and fall and their validity recedes, but the archetype itself remains intact. The belief that Belt and Road has an implication is what matters, irrespective of what the specific expressions are. I propose that two other major archetypes that create and sustain Belt and Road in a similar way are *definition* and *scope*.

The concept of the archetype is not used here to theorise Belt and Road, but to explore it and unravel the narrative knot it has become. As a tool it is useful because nearly every media article, for example, can be read as a composition of archetypes; they are based on some kind of identifiable a priori assumptions, essences or tendencies. Like the hero, the mother figure or the villain in stories, Belt and Road archetypes are the familiar and constant features of its narrative structure, regardless of what the plot is. I explore these archetypes below.

Structure of Belt and Road

Figure 2.12. Diagram of relation between metastructure, narrative and archetypes.

Jegan Vincent de Paul, *The Structure of Belt and Road*, 2018.

Archetype of Definition: Assumptions, Comparisons and Declarations

A definition of Belt and Road is usually assumed by the author(s) before proceeding to a discussion and common in media articles and even full reports. These will start with a vague phrase, such as “development strategy” followed by more detailed aspects of Belt and Road. During the 2017 Belt and Road Forum, an article in *The Economist* headlined “What is China’s belt and road initiative?” begins with the statement: “Over the weekend Xi Jinping welcomed 28 heads of state and government to Beijing for a coming-out party, which continues today, to celebrate the ‘belt and road’ initiative, his most ambitious foreign policy.”³² Here, Belt and Road as a “foreign policy” is already assumed even before the author attempts to answer the question raised in the article’s title. The assumption of “foreign policy” has no bearing on the article’s content, as its focus is on general matters of finance and investment. In fact, it could be replaced with “economic policy” and not change the message of the article. Another *Economist* article, written two years later during the 2019 Belt and Road Forum, begins with a reference to China’s construction of a railway in Laos and states: “They are celebrating not just their engineering success but also the evidence before them that the Belt and Road Initiative, China’s global infrastructure-building scheme, is making progress.”³³ It continues “But worries about the cost of the BRI, a project closely linked with President Xi Jinping’s foreign policy, have become widespread.”³⁴ Now Belt and Road is an “infrastructure-building scheme” that is only closely linked to Xi’s foreign policy and not actually his “most ambitious foreign policy” as in the 2017 *Economist* article. Even in the same publication, there is no standard for how to label Belt and Road. It is always shifting based on by whom, when and why it is talked about. Such articles are compelled to specify Belt and Road in one way or another, and since an a priori definition cannot be referenced, one must be assumed no matter how dispensable it is. It is the definition itself as an archetype

that the article relies on, not an actual definition. When countless assumptions coalesce and reverberate within the metastructure, Belt and Road becomes defined collectively and not by *The Economist* or any other singular entity.

The definition archetype is also expressed as comparisons. These are more intentioned than assumptions and attempt to define Belt and Road by juxtaposing it with something that is better understood or appears to have similar qualities. The prime example of this is the comparison of Belt and Road to the US's Marshall Plan (officially the European Recovery Program) carried out between 1948-1952 to assist in the rebuilding of Western Europe after the second World War. Nearly all articles and reports using the comparison will take it for granted by stating something to the effect of "some have called it China's Marshall Plan" or "its been compared to the Marshall Plan" and then proceed to explain Belt and Road on terms only vaguely and sometimes completely unrelated to the Marshall Plan. For example, in a December 2014 article in *World Politics Review* titled "China's Marshall Plan: All Silk Roads Lead to Beijing?" Michele Penna states "Some see the project as a Marshall Plan with Chinese characteristics, as financing infrastructure in neighbouring countries would provide Beijing with the influence it needs to consolidate its role as Asia's foremost power."³⁵ That is of course a simple observations of a powerful country investing in other countries and nothing to do with the Marshall Plan in any pointed sense. The author makes no other mention of the Marshall Plan, but uses the comparison to simply avoid having to define China's new Silk Road, which would be a rather monumental (if not impossible) task.

Some make a specific comparison, but still draw generic conclusions. In his early 2016 article "How China's 'Belt and Road' Compares to the Marshall Plan," Simon Chen writing for *The Diplomat* states that "OBOR is still a conception which lacks tangible strategy. However, predicting the hidden strategic goals of OBOR is not complicated – they

can be inferred by combining Chinese official discourse and strategic arrangements in response to the U.S. rebalancing strategy in the Asia-Pacific region.”³⁶ Chen proposes that the goals of Belt and Road overlap with the five “strategic aims” of the Marshall Plan, which he believes are: boosting exports, exporting currency, countering a rival, fostering strategic divisions and siphon away diplomatic support. As in the previous example, Chen uses vague terminology to describe the actions of major powers, not compare Belt and Road to the Marshall Plan in any specific way.

By 2018, opinions in major outlets began to shift and argue that Belt and Road is in fact *not* China’s Marshall plan. In a *Financial Times* article titled “The Belt and Road Initiative is not China’s Marshall Plan,” Gu Bin states that “those suspicious of the project are blinded by an outdated, cold war mindset” and “the Marshall Plan evolved as a means to contain the expansion of communism and the Soviet Union in Europe by uniting 16 western European countries as beneficiaries, and keeping communists out of their governments. In this sense, BRI is more inclusive than the Marshall Plan. It reaches across civilisations.”³⁷ The comparison in this case is expressed to distance Belt and Road from the Marshall Plan and defend it in the process. China itself used the comparison in a similar way when its foreign minister Wang Yi pointed out “that the Belt and Road Initiative is an international public product that China provides for the world. It is neither a ‘Marshall Plan’, nor a geostrategic concept.”³⁸ Also, a January 2019 article in *South China Morning Post* titled “China’s belt and road isn’t like the Marshall Plan, but Beijing can still learn from it,” the authors Richard Kozul-Wright and Daniel Poon point out that unlike Belt and Road in its current form, the Marshall Plan “came with policy conditions and an end date.”³⁹ The authors suggest that for Belt and Road to be a success, it should adopt the Marshall Plan’s “governance approach” which they say consisted of “decentralised administration and

regional coordination, time-limited programmes, and local ownership combined with institutional capacity building.”⁴⁰ Here the comparison is expressed, denounced and then promoted. The authors advance the comparison itself by insisting that Belt and Road should in fact resemble the Marshall Plan, as if to make the comparison a self-fulfilling prophecy. Whether Belt and Road is promoted or derided through the comparison, they all contribute to the Belt and Road’s formation through discursive feedback loops. As an expression of the definition archetype, the comparison waxes and wanes, fluctuating within the metastructure producing contradictory perspectives, which nonetheless define the contours of the Belt and Road and maintain its relevance as an object of discourse comparable to historical models.

The definition archetype is also expressed through declarations. Unlike assumptions tacitly embedded within sentences and comparisons made out of convenience, declarations are assertive positions on what Belt and Road is. They are equally promotional and critical, and Chinese agents are at the forefront of making the boldest declarations. Well before Xi called Belt and Road “project of the century” in 2017, Chinese officials, scholars, state media and institutions have communicated it using strong declarative phrases. In May 2014, *Xinhua* introduced the first online platform dedicated to serial coverage of Belt and Road called “New Silk Road, New Dreams.” The inaugural article in the series declared that the new Silk Road is a “new path for building a world of common development and prosperity,”⁴¹ going well beyond matters of regional infrastructure connectivity led by China. More significantly, the series makes a visual declaration by publishing the first map of Belt and Road from any Chinese agency (fig. 2.13, also in introduction). As called for by Xi, the map shows both a land and a sea route and peaks the interests of observers around the world. Shannon Tiezzi, writing in *The Diplomat*, states that “The maps of the two Silk Roads drive home the enormous scale of the project: the Silk Road and Maritime Silk Road combined will create a

massive loop linking three continents. If any single image conveys China's ambitions to reclaim its place as the 'Middle Kingdom,' linked to the world by trade and cultural exchanges, the Xinhua map is it."⁴² On the contrary, the map does not reveal any new routes or patterns of movement and is in fact an extreme underrepresentation of already existing connectivities that China is a part of across Eurasia, Africa and the Indian and Pacific oceans. These include railways, highways, pipelines, undersea cables and of course an extensive network of sea lanes (figs. 2.14 & 2.15). However, framed by the exciting paradigm of a new Silk Road, the map's suggestive lines are embodied with meaning and purpose and their specific local stops are highlighted as continuous and important, instead of the interchangeable and arbitrary nodes they actually are. The map for example shows that the overland route originates from Xi'an in central China (resembling Silk Road) regardless of the fact that two already existing and celebrated trans-Eurasian rail lines start in Chongqing in south-western China (connecting to Duisburg, Germany) and Yiwu near China's eastern coast (connecting to Madrid and London). Another particular omission in the map is the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (which was already in the planning phase), running along the entire length of Pakistan and now considered "the linchpin of the Belt and Road"⁴³ connecting the overland "belt" in western China with the maritime "road" in the Arabian sea (fig. 2.16).

The *Xinhua* map eliminates all such real lines of movement in favour of fictitious or imaginary ones, which in their very novelty and seduction (as a new Silk Road) entice a new China-centred paradigm of the Afro-Eurasian supercontinent's logistics geography. In the very process of interpreting such a map, Tiezzi and countless others tacitly participate in presenting ongoing Chinese-involved transportation networks as a new phenomenon. Four years after the excitement induced by the *Xinhua* map, Krzysztof Iwanek, also writing for *The*

Diplomat, states that “such a map is often like jewelry to the text’s main body: something pretty, meant to raise the status and arouse curiosity....”⁴⁴ His rare article titled “The New Silk Road Is Old: Why You Should Ignore Belt and Road Initiative Maps” points to the absurdity of maps such as *Xinhua*’s:

Beyond those that slavishly forward the maps are the largely anonymous people who invented them. What they created shows not only a disregard to facts but something more deep and general: how much our understanding of the future is shaped by our perspective of past and geography, a perspective that often changes more slowly than the reality around us.... More importantly, many people seem to imagine the Belt and Road Initiative as the old trade route reborn. It is not envisaged as an elaborate economic chain but as a simple, medieval, point-to-point transfer of goods and coins (which, by the way, was far from being that simple even at that time).⁴⁵

With such insight ignored, the map continues to serve as a template for hundreds of other variations and the basis for conference papers as well as articles and reports on Belt and Road in major Chinese and international publications. The re-presentation of transnational logistics through a particular frame introduced by China undoubtedly surpasses even the expectations of the architects of Belt and Road. As an expression of the definition archetype, the map does not provide information but implies that Belt and Road indeed has parameters.

With Belt and Road gaining momentum into 2014, declarations go beyond matters of logistics corridors and the movement of people and goods. At a September 2014 conference in Beijing, Bao Shixiu, a professor emeritus of China’s Academy of Military Sciences, remarked that China’s new Silk Road is a “concept” that “has reflected the canon of a new global governance theory, and it has provided tangible theoretical support for a new type of world order. Actually we are looking forward to a new type of thinking mode when we are dealing with international or global governance.”⁴⁶ In his use of the past tense, it seems like Bao is describing achievements of Belt and Road (which is only a year old), when in fact he is acting in the capacity of a Chinese exponent of Belt and Road and merely adding new

features to it. More importantly, his very declaration that it is a *concept* to theorise a new world order is also expressed by opponents of Belt and Road. In his 2015 paper, the “Silk Road: a political marketing concept for world dominance,” Werner Fasslabend, former Austrian minister of defense, states that “The new Silk road has to be taken as the central political concept put forward by Xi Jinping....it is the expression of a new, highly self-assured foreign and security policy that is oriented towards obtaining global hegemony.”⁴⁷ Regardless of the obvious ideological difference in their positions on Belt and Road, Bao and Fasslabend both declare that Belt and Road is a Chinese concept that could be used to influence and determine the world as a whole. In the lineage of these examples, nearly all declarations of Belt and Road result from analyses and interpretations that aim to limit its contours but inevitably expand them. It is perpetually aggrandised and spoken of in the grand scheme of things. It has been called a: geo-economic concept, smart power strategy, broad strategic imperative, decisive strategic manoeuvre, flagship foreign policy initiative, international economic ambition, vision of justice, all-encompassing economic development program, guiding framework for international economic statecraft, umbrella initiative, conceptual framework, global megaproject, granddaddy of all megaprojects, almost a philosophy. Belt and Road is not any one of these in particular, but all of them at once.

In 2019—six years into Belt and Road—the head of Japan’s international development agency (the JBIC) Tadashi Maeda, criticised that Belt and Road “is just a political show, and there is no clear definition of what it is exactly... it’s just everywhere.”⁴⁸ Maeda’s claim is actually the same claim made by Belt and Road proponents, except using different frames of references and terminologies. For example, a year earlier, Xi Jinping made the following comments on Belt and Road on three different occasions (emphasis are mine):

“It is neither the post-World War Two Marshall Plan, nor is it a Chinese conspiracy... it’s an ‘*overt plot*’.”⁴⁹

“It must be pointed out that as the BRI is a new initiative, it is perfectly natural for there to be *different views*.”⁵⁰

“Belt and Road is an initiative for economic cooperation, instead of a geopolitical alliance or military league, and it is an *open and inclusive* process rather than an exclusive bloc or ‘China club’.”⁵¹

Within the metastructure, the essence of Maeda and Xi's statements are actually equivalent, where: political show = overt plot; no clear definition = different views; just everywhere = open and inclusive. Such phrases used to describe Belt and Road are like autonyms and Janus words—where a word has opposite meanings, such as the word “sanction.” Within the metastructure, positive and negative declarations have the same value and confront each other, but like heroes and villains, they do not diminish the overall power of Belt and Road as a story worth telling

In an August 2019 article in *The Atlantic* titled “‘One Belt One Road’ Is Just a Marketing Campaign,” Eyck Freymann writes that “China’s signature project is actually a sweeping, poorly coordinated branding effort posing as an infrastructure initiative.”⁵² He points out that “Chinese companies and local governments have used OBOR to brand everything from kitchenware to cosmetics, from opera to blood donations, from soccer to the social-credit system, from art shows to military hardware, and from beer to blockchain.”⁵³ Freymann’s position on Belt and Road as a *brand* is quite critical and expanded on in his forthcoming (2020) book *The Emperor’s New Brand: One Belt One Road and the Globalization of Chinese Power*. Categorising Belt and Road as a brand is not uncommon and has been expressed with differing intents and purposes. In his 2017 article “China’s ‘One Belt, One Road’ Initiative: What A Difference a Brand Can Make” Michael Glantz states that “Strengthening OBOR as a brand can help China to enhance the value of its OBOR-related

goods and services internationally and eventually lead to China's ultimate ascendance as a dominant world economic and political power.”⁵⁴ Glantz argues that although the intention behind Belt and Road was to generate nostalgia about a favorable time in Chinese history, it has become an “accidental” brand that China should indeed benefit from. Glantz is defending Belt and Road as a brand and goes as far as advising China to take this feature more seriously to fend off foreign criticisms in his 2019 book *One Belt One Road: China's Long March Toward 2049*. Freymann and Glantz both express Belt and Road as a brand, but draw completely opposing conclusions on its value. Their specific opinions are neutralised within the metastructure and only the archetype of the definition (expressed as a “brand” in this case) gives Belt and Road any efficacy. It does not seem to matter what Belt and Road is specifically defined as, as long as it is continuously defined as something its relevance is maintained.

Perplexity is a feature of Belt and Road and not lost on those who seek to benefit from it. In 2018, the multinational HSBC was “highly commended”⁵⁵ by the Marketing Society Excellence Awards for its Belt and Road global advertising campaign for “helping the world's businesses know the way to the greatest business opportunity of the 21st century”⁵⁶ (fig. 2.17). HSBC's *We Know the Way* campaign is based on its assessment that: As a global initiative, BRI demands a global marketing solution” and that “Businesses needed someone to inform and inspire them, and more importantly to help them navigate BRI to realise the opportunities it presents. The response to this insight was for HSBC to become ‘the oracle of BRI’.”⁵⁷ By assuming the role of *the oracle*, HSBC operates with the understanding that it can indeed determine what Belt and Road becomes in the very process of analysing and marketing it.

Figure 2.13 (also in Introduction). Earliest known published map of Belt and Road accompanying an online series titled “New Silk Road, New Dreams” on the website of Xinhua News Agency. It shows an overland route (in red) with stops in China, Kazakstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Germany, Netherlands and a maritime route (in blue) with stops in China, Malaysia, India, Kenya, Greece, Italy.

Xinhua Finance Agency, “New Silk Road, Maritime Silk Road,” [Map] 2014.

Figure 2.14. Map of existing and proposed rail routes from Asia to Europe prior to announcement of Belt and Road in 2013. The brown lines denote “ancient Silk Road”.

TD Architects, "Iron Silk Road," [Map], 2011.

Figure 2.15. Visualisation of all commercial cargo ships at sea over a single day prior to the announcement of Belt and Road (the lines colours are based on ship type, where yellow: container, red: tanker, blue: dry bulk, green: gas bulk, purple: vehicles).

ShipMap, “Ship Map,” [Map], 2012.

Figure 2.16. Photo of billboards on the Karakoram highway approaching the China-Pakistan frontier from the Chinese side in the province of Xinjiang. Billboard on bottom reads: “We will fully implement the General Secretary of the Communist Party, President Mr. Xi Jinping’s significant achievement of visiting Pakistan, in order to promote the construction of the ‘the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road’, and deepen China Pakistan Economic Corridor centered layout of cooperation, with the emphasis on Gwadar, transportation infrastructure, energy, and industrial cooperation.”

Jegan Vincent de Paul, Xinjiang field visit photographs, 2017.

Figure 2.17. Page from HSBC's Belt and Road marketing campaign strategy based on "Helping the world's businesses know the way to the greatest business opportunity of the 21st century."

HSBC, "We Know the Way," 2017.

The Archetype of Scope: Geographic and Financial

The scope of Belt and Road is an archetype expressed as facts and figures. If the definition qualifies Belt and Road, the scope quantifies it. The most dominant expressions are of the geographic and financial extents of Belt and Road. Which countries are part of it and how much it is worth are constantly shifting values dependent on which agents are expressing it and for what reason.

Initial global attention was focused on central Asian countries following Xi's announcement of "an economic belt along the Silk Road" in his speech in Kazakhstan where he remarked that "A nearby neighbor is better than a distant relative" and that "China and Kazakhstan are friendly neighbors as close as lips and teeth" (fig. 2.18).⁵⁸ The geographic scope of Belt and Road is expressed by Xi as a matter of proximity via Kazakhstan. However, he also states that "To turn this [the belt] into a reality, we may start with work in individual areas and link them up over time to cover the whole region."⁵⁹ In the course of his speech, Xi gradually overrides the importance of proximity to China in favour of Eurasian regionalisation. This is reinforced when Xi announces the "Maritime Silk Road of the 21st century" in Indonesia and expands the scope to include the littoral countries of the Indian and Pacific oceans. As he did with Kazakhstan, Xi evokes specific ties between China and Indonesia and states that "As early as the Han Dynasty in China about 2,000 years ago, the people of the two countries opened the door to each other despite the sea between them" and that "Over the centuries, the vast oceans have served as the bond of friendship connecting the two peoples, not a barrier between them."⁶⁰ Unlike with central Asia, it is not proximity that is the pretext of a new Silk Road, but overcoming distance and geographic obstacles. After establishing a special bond between China and Indonesia, Xi states that "the sea is big because it admits all rivers" and makes a call for all ASEAN member countries to intensify

cooperation with China under the values of openness, diversity, harmony and inclusiveness. Xi's indifference to the contradiction of proximity and distance as well as the unique and the universal is a model for China's rhetorical logic for considering any country or regions as part of Belt and Road. Henceforth, the scope of Belt and Road expressed by Chinese agents is a result of such indifference. Exemplified by the randomness of countries⁶¹ traversed on the two lines of the *Xinhua* map, expressions of Belt and Road's geographic scope are capricious and always subject to change. As I have shown in the introduction, nearly every country in the world has been invited to participate and therefore constitute its actual scope. Since its geography cannot be delineated (or mapped) in a specific way, what is ultimately communicated is the scope itself in the form of "Belt and Road countries," "countries along the Belt and Road" and other similar phraseological groupings. .

Once this scope of "belt and road countries" was embedded within global discourse starting in 2014, specific pretexts (such as Xi's above) were no longer necessary to consider a country or region as part of Belt and Road. This is fully exemplified in Belt and Road's official founding document, *Vision and Actions* published in early 2015. It opens with the statement "More than two millennia ago the diligent and courageous people of Eurasia explored and opened up several routes of trade and cultural exchanges that linked the major civilizations of Asia, Europe and Africa, collectively called the Silk Road by later generations."⁶² The extent of Belt and Road is confidently conveyed as all of Africa and Eurasia simply by referencing Silk Road, a spatial narrative that does not require justification. In the absence of an explanation of what Belt and Road is—other than that it is a "systematic project" and was introduced by Xi himself—the scope itself is used in the document as the basis to elaborate on its merits. The following sample statements from the document

exemplify the nauseating tautology of Belt and Road as a matter of countries along the Belt and Road.

“Accelerating the building of the Belt and Road can help promote the economic prosperity of the countries along the Belt and Road...”

“The Belt and Road Initiative is a systematic project, which should be jointly built through consultation to meet the interests of all, and efforts should be made to integrate the development strategies of the countries along the Belt and Road.”

“The Belt and Road Initiative aims to promote the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas, establish and strengthen partnerships among the countries along the Belt and Road...”

“The connectivity projects of the Initiative will help align and coordinate the development strategies of the countries along the Belt and Road...”

“The Initiative is an ambitious economic vision of the opening-up of and cooperation among the countries along the Belt and Road.”

“As long as all countries along the Belt and Road make concerted efforts to pursue our common goal, there will be bright prospects for the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, and the people of countries along the Belt and Road can all benefit from this Initiative.”

The document does not provide a list of “countries along the Belt and Road,” but the virtues of Belt and Road are extolled by insisting that there are in fact such countries. This provokes others to produce the list themselves, where surmising what is a Belt and Road country becomes an exercise in determining what is a Belt and Road country.

A long running refrain in mainstream media articles and reports since 2015 has been that Belt and Road consists of 65 countries, although there is no such accounting by any official Chinese agency. Somehow this figure emerged in the popular Belt and Road consciousness and repeated as a mantra to give it a meaningful scope. The origins of it are murky, but the earliest codification is a list produced in August 2015 by China International Trade Institute, a Hong Kong-based research group. The 65 countries on its list are: every

country on the Asian continent with the exception of North Korea, South Korea, Japan and Papua New Guinea; every country on the eastern part of the European continent with the exception of Greece; and Egypt as the only country in Africa. It is a bizarre set of inclusions and exclusions inconsistent with official Chinese pronouncements, policies or practices related to Belt and Road since 2013. The list excludes Greece, where in 2016 Chinese state-owned shipping giant COSCO obtained majority ownership of the country's Piraeus port, considered by Chinese ambassador Zou Xiaoli as the "dragon head" of the New Silk Road's expansion into Europe.⁶³ It excludes Papua New Guinea where China has invested extensively in infrastructure (as I have documented in fig. 2.19) and both countries would agree to strengthen cooperation specifically under Belt and Road agreements in less than a year after the list was published.⁶⁴ At the same time, it includes India which has openly disavowed Belt and Road and would go onto "boycott" the 2017 Belt and Road Forum. It excludes the Netherlands with the major port of Rotterdam shown as the convergence point of the Belt and the Road on the original *Xinhua* map. Furthermore, the full exclusion of Western Europe, Japan and Korea can be read as a political worldview where support for a Chinese-led initiative is not guaranteed. At the same time, the list excludes all of Africa (with the exception of Egypt) where Chinese firms have funded and built an extensive number of large-scale infrastructure, particularly transport and energy infrastructure (fig. 2.20). It even excludes Kenya, shown as the only country in Africa on the *Xinhua* map.

Even a cursory reading of the list reveals it as an arbitrary construction. It does, however, establish a scope for Belt and Road as a short-hand and convenient narrative device. It is adopted as a consensus and used as a hard fact and analytic tool by major international organisations, regardless of how fictitious, arbitrary and convoluted it actually is. A December 2015 commentary on the World Bank website on Belt and Road states "At this

stage, the concept, scope and nature of the initiative are still fluid and the shape of OBOR is likely to evolve over time. How big is it? OBOR can be big, indeed. In its largest definition, OBOR would include 65 countries, 4.4 billion people and about 40 percent of global GDP.”⁶⁵ Even though Belt and Road is acknowledged as fluid, the scope is used reflexively without a doubt of its veracity. The expression of “65 countries” would spread rapidly from such obscure commentaries to the broader research and media landscape, both Chinese and international.

An early 2016 analysis of Belt and Road by PwC, one of the world’s biggest “professional services” and accounting firms, states that “The geographical area that is potentially covered by the B&R initiative is vast. In its current shape, the initiative has close to 65 countries somehow connected, covering more than half of the world’s population.”⁶⁶ A May 2016 study published by the Hong Kong-based Fung Business Intelligence Centre titled *The Belt and Road Initiative: 65 Countries and Beyond* uses the popular scope as a baseline to create its own list. To add 48 more countries, the authors reason that Belt and Road “covers, but is not limited to, the area of the ancient Silk Road”⁶⁷ quoting the *Vision and Action* document and that “Chinese President Xi Jinping has reiterated in many official occasions that the Initiative is an open diversified and win-win project.”⁶⁸ It adds 19 African countries as well as all Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank signatories (as of 2016), which includes most of the countries in western Europe. Perhaps driven by some kind of statistical fetish or desire to hyperbolise Belt and Road, the study forcefully depicts AIIB members as defacto Belt and Road countries. It is a conflation that seems natural (since the AIIB was founded at the behest of China in 2015) but controversial and inaccurate. India as well as more than a dozen countries in western Europe—including France, Germany and the United Kingdom—are AIIB members but have openly disassociated from Belt and Road when

joining the bank. This was made evident when Italy was widely castigated by Western government officials and media pundits for becoming the “first G8 country to join the Belt and Road” in 2019. On the other hand, Greece and most countries in Eastern Europe are not AIIB members but are openly associated to Belt and Road. Using the AIIB as a benchmark for Belt and Road “membership” is equally as convoluted as the original list of 65 countries.

The baseless figures of such reports are repeated as hard facts in other studies, major international journals and media articles. The expression of “65 countries” became common lingo and used without question, especially since the first Belt and Road Forum in May 2017. A *Financial Times* article that month states that “China has identified 65 countries along the Belt and Road that will be home to hundreds of projects bearing the Obor stamp.”⁶⁹ It is a false statement as China has never identified such a list and is an example of the desire to lend the scope authority by attributing it to China itself. So ingrained and accepted is the scope that an article in *Quartz*, a business news website, remarked that “China’s summit for its new Silk Road is missing 44 heads of state from the 65 nations involved.”⁷⁰ It is referring to the Belt and Road Forum where out of the total 29 heads of states attended only 20 were from the 65 countries. This is because there is little correlation between the 65 countries and participation in the forum, which had representatives from over 129 countries, including the heads of state of Switzerland, Argentina and Chile and representatives from the United States, United Kingdom and Japan. Participation in the forum is confused with the 65-country scope even by some of the most prominent commentators of world politics such as the American political scientist Joseph S. Nye Jr., who remarked after the forum that “Chinese President Xi Jinping presided over a highly orchestrated forum for his Belt and Road Initiative, which will involve 65 countries containing some 4.5 billion people.”⁷¹

Furthermore, as with Nye's reference to population, the arbitrary geographic scope is used to extrapolate other statistics, commonly expressed as a variation of the statement "Belt and Road is made up of 65 countries, with two thirds of the world's population and one third of its GDP" (fig. 2.21). An October 2017 *Time* magazine article for instance claims "Belt and Road spans some 65 countries, covering 70% of the planet's population, three-quarters of its energy resources, a quarter of goods and services and 28% of global GDP—some \$21 trillion."⁷² A month earlier, *GB Times*, an English-language media company that promotes everything China, claimed that "With a monumental US\$900bn worth of planned investments to build railways, ports and other infrastructure in 65 countries along the routes, the Belt and Road initiative is historically the biggest foreign investment strategy by any single country in world history."⁷³ As in these examples, the financial scope of Belt and Road is expressed as a range from the hundreds of billions to the tens of trillions. The financial scope of Belt and Road is an entirely different narrative construct operating in parallel to the geographic scope and I discuss it in the next section.

The 65-country scope remains mostly intact even into 2018, regardless of the fact that China had by then officially and openly expanded Belt and Road to every corner of the world, including most of South America through various agreements, formal declarations and memoranda of understanding.⁷⁴ A late 2018 study by the OECD of Belt and Road lists "BRI-participating economies" as 72 countries with the note "This list contains the 65 economies listed in China's Official Action Plan for the BRI launched in March 2015 and seven economies that have been associated with the initiative more recently" (fig. 2.22).⁷⁵ The source here is completely false as there is no such thing as the "Official Action Plan"; it is referring to the *Vision and Actions* document of March 2015 which contains no such list of 65 countries. However, it is not an example of the failure of verification, but the unconscious

and inconsequential (no accountability) use of the scope to statisticise Belt and Road. The OECD study furthermore points to the Mercator Institute of China Studies (MERICS) as one of the sources for adding seven more countries to the 65-country list. MERICS, a prominent German think tank, has a methodology of counting any project that advances China's Belt and Road-based vision for the world, as made unambiguously clear on its website:

The database extends beyond projects that are explicitly characterized as “part of the BRI” by the Chinese government and that are most often related to transport or energy infrastructure in certain parts of Asia, Europe and East Africa. This approach allows for including projects beyond those that are officially labelled as “part of the BRI.” Oftentimes, these labels are chosen for diplomatic and political reasons, without saying much about the nature of a given project. Instead, the MERICS BRI database aims to cover all projects that further BRI policy goals – regardless of how they are marketed. It includes projects worldwide that can be considered within the scope of the categories defined in the Chinese policy documents and that entail a Chinese role in funding or implementation.⁷⁶

Under the guise of being comprehensive, MERICS demonstrates a typically fetishistic obsession to advance China's totalising geographic scope. China's “policy goals” under the Belt and Road can easily be interpreted as altering the global order in every possible way short of war. A mere sample paragraph in the *Vision and Actions* policy document reads: “Reflecting the common ideals and pursuit of human societies, it is a positive endeavor to seek new models of international cooperation and global governance, and will inject new positive energy into world peace and development.”⁷⁷ If MERICS's choice of projects is based on such policy goals, then any project (not just infrastructure) implemented by China in the world can be labeled as “Belt and Road Initiative.” It is a logic where Belt and Road is where China goes and what it does.

MERICS perfectly exemplifies the scope of Belt and Road being created in the process of interpretation and analysis. Regardless of whether they are inaccurate or not, the process of quantification reenforces the idea that there is such a thing as a “belt” and “road”

running through actual countries. It is a collective process where China only needs to instigate and provoke rather than articulate and communicate in precise terms. For China, it simply does not matter whether Belt and Road is counted as having 60 countries, 120 countries or all the countries in the world, as long as there are specific facts and figures that index Belt and Road as existing in the real world. It is the scope itself as an archetype that gives Belt and Road a spatial significance, not specific countries or projects.

In the introduction to the first book published in English on Belt and Road, prominent Chinese international relations scholar Wang Yiwei states: “As written in the Taoist scripture Tao Te Ching, ‘Tao gave birth to the One; One gave birth successively to two things, three things, up to ten thousand.’ Adopting this philosophy, the Belt and Road is by no means only one belt and one road.”⁷⁸ With his reference to the ancient Chinese text, Wang is celebrating the scope of Belt and Road as a spectrum between one and ten thousand, or between a finite beginning and an indefinite end. It is a flexible range that China has introduced for others to choose any number on it to satisfy an analytic compulsions to express how many things make up Belt and Road.

As with geographic scope, the archetype of financial scope constructs Belt and Road as an entity that can be measured using hard numbers. It is constantly in flux from one moment to the next and from one source to another, extending from the billions to the trillions of dollars. Unlike with the enthusiasm to project the geographic scope of Belt and Road far and wide, it is rare for the Chinese government to announce overarching financial values. When it does announce figures, it is usually limited to specific projects, investments or funds overseen by state agencies and enterprises. A case is the US\$40 billion Silk Road Fund created by China in 2014 “designed to promote common development and prosperity of China and other countries and regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative.”⁷⁹ The fund is

a rare explicit association of Belt and Road to a general financial value in an official capacity. Even the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, founded in parallel to Belt and Road, led by China and headquartered in Beijing, actually has no direct relationship to Belt and Road contrary to common belief. It is a 100-member (including most Western countries) multilateral investment bank with US\$100 billion dedicated to infrastructure, but not Belt and Road infrastructure in any specific sense. Its official mission and policies, including “strategic programming” and “thematic priorities” as well as annual reports and financial statements are completely devoid of any mentions of Belt and Road. When actual multilateralism appears, Belt and Road disappears. When the context is non discursive such as with the AIIB (where real money from non Chinese stakeholders are also involved), Belt and Road is no longer promoted unconditionally. In fact, the bank’s Chinese president, Jin Liquin (China’s former vice minister of finance), remarked in 2016 that “We will support the One Belt, One Road project. But before we spend shareholders' money, which is really the taxpayers' money, we have three requirements [promote growth, be socially acceptable and follow environmental laws].”⁸⁰ It is indeed a rare moment when conditions are imposed on Belt and Road by someone acting on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party. Jin’s statement is a critique of Belt and Road as a construct with arbitrary parameters and not necessarily a program to construct socially viable and sustainable infrastructure.

Even the financial scope of Belt and Road (something that should be unambiguous) largely exists in the sphere of rhetorical analysis and interpretation. Dozens of figures are expressed based on varying forms of reasoning. In May 2017, *The Guardian* published an article titled “The \$900bn question: what is the Belt and Road initiative?”⁸¹ Although the very question of Belt and Road is directly tied to a specific figure, the figure itself is quite dubious. The article references the figure to a *Financial Times* article⁸², which in turn references a

January 2017 report published by the credit rating agency Fitch Ratings. That report (which I obtained from the agency and examined) titled *China's One Belt, One Road Initiative Brings Risks*, simply states that "Projects worth more than USD900bn in total are planned or underway."⁸³ That figure is not presented as the result of any accounting and nor is it an object of analysis. As it appears in the report, it has no more a factual basis than a rumour or an opinion. It is not referenced to any sources and only appears in that singular sentence in the short three-page report.

Fitch ostensibly appropriated the US\$900 billion figure from mentions two years earlier in 2015. In May of that year, *China Daily* for example published an article titled "China to invest US\$900 billion in Belt and Road Initiative." It states that "China Development Bank, one of the country's policy banks, said it will invest more than \$890 billion into more than 900 projects involving 60 countries, as part of its efforts to bolster the initiative, the 21st Century Business Herald reported on Thursday."⁸⁴ The article notes that the *Herald* (a mainland Chinese business newspaper) cited the bank's vice-president Li Jiping for investment figures. The trail ends here, as the *Herald* has been defunct since 2015 after it was shut down by the central government for fraud and misinformation; I could not verify that the *Herald* had cited Li Jiping for financial figures and in what context. Regardless, as a policy bank CDB follows central government mandates and indeed does invests in projects labeled "Belt and Road," but it has never itself announced (including publications on its website) that it would invest US\$900 billion on Belt and Road. Nor has it ever released a list of the 900 projects mentioned in *China Daily* and other publications. Even if a list of projects with corresponding financial figures does exist, it is dubious why such a commitment would not be published and even celebrated. It could simply be that the figure was introduced by CDB to Chinese media as a way to attribute a catchy financial scope to Belt and Road. Later

in 2017, *Xinhua* published an article stating that CDB is to “issue B&R project loans in three years” or in 2020 and not in back in 2015; the bank confirms this by republishing the *Xinhua* article on its own website under its “news” section. The article furthermore states that according to a senior figure at CDB, the bank “has more than 500 projects in B&R regions worth over \$350 billion...”⁸⁵ Here it becomes clear that some of the previously mentioned 900 Belt and Road projects include these 500 that the bank had already committed to in “B&R regions”, which could theoretically be any project anywhere in the world the bank has financed, even ones preceding the existence of Belt and Road.

China Daily’s May 2015 article with the US\$900 billion figure reappeared a month later in the major UK newspaper *The Telegraph*.⁸⁶ Published as an “advertisement feature for China Watch [a China Daily insert]” the financial scope of Belt and Road is deliberately induced into Western media. Even major institutions reproduce the scope as a matter of fact. A few weeks after the *Telegraph/China Daily* article, a commentary on the website of the World Economic Forum headlined “China’s \$900 billion New Silk Road. What you need to know” states that “the China Development Bank had set aside almost \$900 billion alone for more than 900 projects”⁸⁷ without citation. Once such a financial scope related to Belt and Road is picked up by prominent agents, it spreads rapidly within the global media and analytic landscape. Tracing these figures to the original sources expose superfluous connections and reveals ambiguous and arbitrary financial links to Belt and Road. They are not errors or misprints that are eventually retracted or corrected once new facts emerge, but expressions that remain integral to the metastructural construction of Belt and Road.

Along with cryptic or unaccountable sources, the scope of Belt and Road is also based on the financing of Asian infrastructure as a whole. A paid 2018 article by HSBC on the business news website *CNBC* states “When adjusted for climate change and adaption costs,

the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has estimated that the Asia-Pacific region will require on average \$1.7 trillion per year of additional infrastructure investment — or \$26 trillion by 2030 — if current economic growth rates are to be sustained.”⁸⁸ This projected need (whether accurate or not) is deliberately conflated with Belt and Road in the article’s very headline “Where is the funding for a \$26 trillion initiative coming from?” Although the ADB report⁸⁹ the article refers to is completely unrelated to Belt and Road, HSBC (as the author) misleadingly projects its findings onto Belt and Road. HSBC, being one of the world’s leading corporate proponents of Belt and Road, has every reason to create the scope as large as possible under the cover of economic analysis. HSBC ends the article with the statement “China’s Belt and Road Initiative is creating enormous business opportunities throughout Asia, Africa and Europe which HSBC could help you exploit.”⁹⁰

Claims such as HSBC’s are possible because there are no repercussions to either overestimating or underestimating the value of Belt and Road. Financial figures are literally used as figures of speech to construct statements that in turn construct Belt and Road as quantifiable. These figures are not deviations or false, for there is nothing to deviate from or falsify. To calculate the monetary value of Belt and Road is to also define its political, geographic and economic parameters, which is an impossibility. These figures rather resemble a “MacGuffin” in fiction (such as a magical relic), an object necessary to the plot and the motivation of the characters, but unimportant in itself.⁹¹ The metastructure erases the need for precision by collapsing all values into the archetype of the scope and only conveys that Belt and Road is indeed real and quite big.

Figure 2.18. Xinhua News Agency web portal for Chinese president Xi Jinping’s visit to Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan between September 3-13, 2013. Image on bottom shows Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev presenting Xi with an honorary doctorate from Nazarbayev University in Astana. Xi afterwards made his now famous speech announcing the idea for “an economic belt along the Silk Road.”

Xinhua, “Xi proposes ‘a new Silk Road’ with Central Asia,” 2013.

Figure 2.19. Jegan Vincent de Paul, *Completed, Ongoing and Proposed Projects Funded And/OR Built by Chinese Firms in Papua New Guinea* [Map], 2017.

Figure 2.20. Online interactive map shows 3,485 Chinese government-financed projects in 138 countries and territories between 2000–2014 with high concentration of projects in Africa.

AidData, “Mapping China's Global Development Footprint,” [Interactive map], 2018.

The Belt and Road Initiative

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Figure 2.21. A typical infographic associating general statistics on populations, infrastructure and trade in Eurasia with Belt and Road.

Center for Strategic and International Studies, “The Belt and Road Initiative” [Infographic], 2019.

Table 3. BRI-participating economies and economic corridors

	Economy	Economic Corridor		Economy	Economic Corridor
1	People's Republic of China	-	37	Singapore	China-Indochina Peninsula
2	Bangladesh	Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar	38	Thailand	China-Indochina Peninsula
3	Bhutan	Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar	39	Timor-Leste	China-Indochina Peninsula
4	India	Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar	40	Viet Nam	China-Indochina Peninsula
5	Myanmar	Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar	41	Belarus	China-Mongolia-Russian Federation
6	Nepal	Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar	42	Estonia	China-Mongolia-Russian Federation
7	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar	43	Latvia	China-Mongolia-Russian Federation
8	Albania	China-Central West Asia	44	Lithuania	China-Mongolia-Russian Federation
9	Armenia	China-Central West Asia	45	Mongolia	China-Mongolia-Russian Federation
10	Azerbaijan	China-Central West Asia	46	Russian Federation	China-Mongolia-Russian Federation
11	Bosnia and Herzegovina	China-Central West Asia	47	Afghanistan	China-Pakistan
12	Bulgaria	China-Central West Asia	48	Pakistan	China-Pakistan
13	Croatia	China-Central West Asia	49	Bahrain	China-Pakistan ¹
14	Georgia	China-Central West Asia	50	Kuwait	China-Pakistan ¹
15	Islamic Republic of Iran	China-Central West Asia	51	Oman	China-Pakistan ¹
16	Iraq	China-Central West Asia	52	Qatar	China-Pakistan ¹
17	Israel	China-Central West Asia	53	Saudi Arabia	China-Pakistan ¹
18	Jordan	China-Central West Asia	54	United Arab Emirates	China-Pakistan ¹
19	Kyrgyzstan	China-Central West Asia	55	Yemen	China-Pakistan ¹
20	Lebanon	China-Central West Asia	56	Czech Republic	New Eurasian Land Bridge
21	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	China-Central West Asia	57	Hungary	New Eurasian Land Bridge
22	Republic of Moldova	China-Central West Asia	58	Slovak Republic	New Eurasian Land Bridge
23	Montenegro	China-Central West Asia	59	Slovenia	New Eurasian Land Bridge
24	Palestinian Authority or West Bank and Gaza Strip	China-Central West Asia	60	Poland	New Eurasian Land Bridge
25	Romania	China-Central West Asia	61	Kazakhstan	New Eurasian Land Bridge ¹
26	Serbia	China-Central West Asia	62	Ukraine	New Eurasian Land Bridge ¹
27	Syrian Arab Republic	China-Central West Asia	63	Egypt	21st-C Maritime Silk Road
28	Tajikistan	China-Central West Asia	64	Ethiopia	21st-C Maritime Silk Road
29	Turkey	China-Central West Asia	65	Indonesia	21st-C Maritime Silk Road
30	Turkmenistan	China-Central West Asia	66	Kenya	21st-C Maritime Silk Road
31	Uzbekistan	China-Central West Asia	67	Maldives	21st-C Maritime Silk Road
32	Brunei Darussalam	China-Indochina Peninsula	68	Morocco	21st-C Maritime Silk Road
33	Cambodia	China-Indochina Peninsula	69	New Zealand	21st-C Maritime Silk Road
34	Lao People's Democratic Republic	China-Indochina Peninsula	70	Panama	21st-C Maritime Silk Road
35	Malaysia	China-Indochina Peninsula	71	Korea	21st-C Maritime Silk Road
36	Philippines	China-Indochina Peninsula	72	South Africa	21st-C Maritime Silk Road

Note: This list contains the 65 economies listed in China's Official Action Plan for the BRI launched in March 2015 and seven economies that have been associated with the initiative more recently.

1. May also be counted as part of the China-Central West Asia Economic Corridor

Source: OECD research from multiple sources, including: HKTDC, MERICS, Belt and Road Center, Foreign Policy, The Diplomat, Silk Routes, State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, WWF Hong Kong (China).

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Figure 2.22. A list of 74 countries participating in Belt and Road compiled by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. A note at the bottom of the page states that China's "Official Action Plan" (which is actually the *Vision and Actions* document) contains 65 economies. This is incorrect as the document does not contain such a list of economies.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "BRI- participating economies and economic corridors," [Table], 2018.

The Archetype of Implication

What Belt and Road implies is a product of what, where and how much it is. If it is defined as a revival of Silk Road, then the implication is transnational connectivities and cross-cultural interactions. If it is defined as China's Marshall Plan, then it is political influence and the formation of alliances through economic aid. If it constitutes 65 countries and worth trillions of dollars, then it is a new market with unprecedented business opportunities. The implication of Belt and Road is the archetypal expression of what the definition and the scope entail. As the definition and the scope are without limits, so too is the implication. Any definition and any scope can be chosen by any agent to state any implication for Belt and Road. An uncountable number of implications are regularly expressed, denounced and advocated. They range from the obscure to the high-profile, from the utopian to the dystopian and generates fears and anxieties as much as calm and comfort.

As a matter of course, Chinese agents are at the forefront of producing, instigating and promoting the implication of Belt and Road on the loftiest terms possible. On the occasion of the first Belt and Road Forum in 2017, *Xinhua* published an article revealingly titled "Quotable quotes on Belt and Road from world intellectual, business personnel."⁹² The article is an inventory of statements from non-Chinese agents on what Belt and Road implies. It is an intense and diverse sample and worthwhile to reproduce here in full:

"It not only brings economic prosperity to all participating countries, but also serves as a true basis for a peace order for the 21st century."

-Helga Zepp-LaRouche, president of the Schiller Institute think tank
in Germany

"The Belt and Road Initiative is the beginning of a new era of development in the region, and in the future this road will be known as the Peace Road."

-Joseph Matthews, director of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations
Education Center

“With the help of new financial institutions, the "One Belt, One Road" initiative opens a new chapter in the course of globalization. This initiative is an extremely important change of the global governance.

-Marc Uzan, executive director of the Reinventing Bretton Woods Committee

“The "One Belt, One Road" initiative can be seen as a reversal of the course of history with a Chinese power that is not only interested in its own development, but which asks what it can do for the rest of the world.”

-Jean-Francois Di Meglio, president of the Asia Center think-tank in Paris

“The China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative exceeded local limits and extended to provide extremely good benefits to a lot of states.”

-Ahmed Sallam, an expert in Chinese affairs and former Egyptian diplomat

“For me, it's a speech about the change of an era. Xi just made a very innovative proposal... which has a panorama perspective, combining the objectives of all countries.”

-Alicia Barcena, executive secretary of Chile-based Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

“Nepal, a birthplace of Buddha and an apostle of peace, always has remained an admirer of this noble Belt and Road Initiative to bring peace, prosperity and brotherhood for the entire world.”

-Suresh Sharma, executive director of the Kathmandu-based private think-tank National Institute of Strategic Studies

“Huge resources are readily available with China and beyond. Asia is now poised to create a more integrated global order, the center of which is no longer in the Atlantic region, but in the Asia region.”

-Rehman Sobhan, chairman of Bangladeshi think-tank Center for Policy Dialogue

Considered together (as *Xinhua* does), these statements express the implication of Belt and Road as nothing short of a new world order that will usher in peace and prosperity for all of humanity. How such an implication is possible for something that is arbitrary in definition and scope is confounding, unless of course the statements are actually mediated statements on the implication of China itself (a concrete entity). That is, the enigma of Belt and Road tempers hyperbole on China's prominence in global affairs. This is true for not only expressions that condone China (such as the *Xinhua* examples), but also those that condemn

it (as explored below). The phrase “The Belt and Road”—and other variations including “One Belt One Road,” “Belt and Road Initiative,” “OBOR,” “BRI” and “B&R”—has evolved into a convenient figurative construct used synonymously to describe contemporary Chinese power, policies and practices at an international level. This synonymity gives agents a way to theorise China’s implication and appear sophisticated, not sycophantic or bellicose. The use of “Belt and Road” lends geopolitical commentary on China a pretext of specificity and an aura of concreteness when speaking of it on otherwise vague and ideological terms.

In his book *The Belt and Road: What Will China Offer the World in Its Rise*, Wang Yiwei states that the “proposal of the Belt and Road Initiative indicates that China has achieved a historical breakthrough in the coordination of space and time, land and ocean, and the five factors of connectivity, namely: policy, communication, road connectivity, unimpeded trade, monetary circulation and understanding between people.”⁹³ These areas that Wang lists as “achievements” of China are in fact the exact five “Cooperation Priorities” of Belt and Road outlined in the official *Vision and Actions* document; the document lists: policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bond. By overlapping Belt and Road priorities with achievements of China, Wang is stating (unintended or not) that what China implies is what Belt and Road implies. The title of Wang’s book could easily be changed to “The Belt and Road: What Does China’s Rise Imply for the World” without affecting the meaning of its content in the slightest way.

At a 2017 conference on China-US relations (attended by China’s vice-premier Liu Yandong), former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger called for greater cooperation between the two countries and made the following statement:

“China’s Belt and Road Initiative, in seeking to connect China to Central Asia and eventually to Europe, will have the practical significance of shifting the world’s centre of gravity from the Atlantic to the Pacific and will involve the cultures of Eurasia,

each of whom will have to decide what relationship to this region they will see, and so will the United States.... They [US and China] must see a concept not of security but of co-evolution in which two great societies can exist side by side, occasionally pursuing different objectives, but merging them in a common protection of the necessities and the opportunities that are the imperative of our age. Our challenge is to find a way for American exceptionalism and China's dreams to produce a new world order for the benefit of all."⁹⁴

Kissinger uses Belt and Road in lieu of having to directly state that Chinese influence is pervasive across Eurasia and that the US must come to terms with this fact. To evoke Belt and Road as a mechanism for cooperation is much more politically savvy for Kissinger than to explicitly suggest the decline of US influence if the country does not recognise and work with China as an equal. A year earlier in 2016, Francis Fukuyama (known for his "End of History" thesis) evoked Belt and Road to make the opposite argument that there is a "historic contest" underway between the economic development models of Western countries (focussing on the US) and that of China. He states:

"The big question for the future of global politics is straightforward: Whose model will prevail? If One Belt, One Road meets Chinese planners' expectations, the whole of Eurasia, from Indonesia to Poland will be transformed in the coming generation. China's model will blossom outside of China, raising incomes and thus demand for Chinese products to replace stagnating markets in other parts of the world. Polluting industries, too, will be offloaded to other parts of the world. Rather than being at the periphery of the global economy, Central Asia will be at its core. And China's form of authoritarian government will gain immense prestige, implying a large negative effect on democracy worldwide."⁹⁵

Whether the argument is to cooperate or compete with China, as Kissinger and Fukuyama respectively make, both deploy Belt and Road as a convenient discursive instrument.

Kissinger uses it to make a call for the world (especially the West) to accept China and its "dream" and Fukuyama uses it to issue a warning on the spread of Chinese authoritarianism.

By suggesting that this spread is because of Belt and Road (rather than in spite of it), Fukuyama's critique of China is actually diluted and not enhanced. Being in step with the geopolitical trend of addressing China via Belt and Road, he avoids directly condemning

China's apathy for democracy, which of course precedes Belt and Road. Rather than seeing Belt and Road as a figurative construct with no actual accountability nor responsibility, Fukuyama is enamoured by it and falls for the metastructural trap of endorsing it in the process of critiquing it. His insistence of Belt and Road as an "infrastructure-based" (as he states in his article) Chinese development model set to change the economic and political arrangements of all of Eurasia is of course the exact same message insisted on by its Chinese proponents. Except, of course, they will clarify that Belt and Road will change not only Eurasia as Fukuyama believes, but the whole world. They will also agree with Fukuyama that it is precisely China via the Communist Party—which is proudly authoritarian and unwavering in its commitment to infrastructure and global connectivity—that is uniquely positioned to introduce a development model for all the countries long neglected or exploited by the West.

The approaches of Kissinger and Fukuyama represent two Western models of using Belt and Road as a medium of discourse to avoid directly talking about China. There is a third kind that does not acknowledge Belt and Road as a Chinese development model based on infrastructure but still sees it as a challenge or threat for the Western world order. It is more conspiratorial in tone and views Belt and Road as a duplicitous or sneaky means for China to expand its power and influence across Eurasia. It is exemplified acutely in the work of Nadège Rolland who has written copiously on Belt and Road from a "strategic" and "security" perspective.⁹⁶ In her 2019 article "Mapping the Footprint of Belt and Road Influence Operations," Rolland describes how specific and newly created Belt and Road organisations carry out "United Front"⁹⁷ work to influence foreign perceptions of Belt and Road. She states:

Even though Beijing presents the initiative as designed to enhance economic prosperity via the creation of physical linkages across the globe, its real purpose is not infrastructure-building but the creation of a new world order in which China thrives and rules. The perception gap between what BRI is in reality (a springboard to achieve the “China dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”) and what Beijing claims it is (an economic cooperation proposal and not a “China club”) is the result of a deliberate Party-State worldwide influence campaign waged since BRI’s inception.⁹⁸

The influence campaign, Rolland argues, is targeted at international media, academia and business communities through a set of “Belt and Road cooperation platforms,” such as Belt and Road Media Cooperation Union (media), University Alliance of the Belt and Road (academia) and Belt and Road Global Forum (business). As insightful as Rolland’s study is, her argument relies on the deemphasis of infrastructure as a priority to emphasise Belt and Road as a “grand strategy”⁹⁹ grounded in propagandistic influence. This distancing of actual infrastructure from Belt and Road, however, is also evident in the very “influence operations” that she identifies. In the majority of these operations, the direct association of infrastructure construction to Belt and Road has drastically declined since its inception. Instead, uncontroversial and ambiguous aspects such as connectivity, collaboration and cooperation are prioritised. A major effect of Belt and Road propaganda is the abstraction of global Chinese infrastructure practiced on real people and places. By dismissing infrastructure (and its promises) as a component of Belt and Road propaganda, Rolland goes beyond abstraction to deemphasise the power of built infrastructure as a geopolitical apparatus in itself and an extension of Chinese power. With Rolland and others keeping Belt and Road as the target of critique and focus of attention, China can intensify actual infrastructure construction as not political but necessarily practical. Belt and Road, paradoxically, keeps unwanted attention away from China’s infrastructuralism which occurs in real space, not the discursive or rhetorical ones that Rolland and others have become lured into. Furthermore, Rolland’s

“perception gap” between “reality” (national rejuvenation) and “claims” (economic cooperation) is a false premise for her argument, as Chinese Belt and Road operatives (United Front or not) as well as non Chinese figures such as Kissinger openly assert that China’s national goals and international economic agenda are not mutually exclusive, but one and the same.

It is not uncommon for ideologues of the Western world order, like Kissinger, Fukuyama, and Rolland to specifically evoke Belt and Road to make generalised statements on China’s significance to twenty-first century geopolitics. In 2017, US defense secretary James N. Mattis remarked that “in a globalized world, there are many belts and many roads, and no one nation should put itself into a position of dictating 'One Belt, One Road.'”¹⁰⁰ Then in 2018, US vice president Mike Pence remarked that “We don’t offer constricting belts or a one-way road.”¹⁰¹ Both comments belie the reality that China is uniquely positioned to offer a cooperation platform as universalist as Belt and Road. China, unlike the United States, does not have a policy of allies, but friends and partners, categories that can shift easily based on what is politically convenient. The United States and Japan may not be friends of China but they are major trading partners. Russia can be a friend, a partner or both. China can maintain cordial relations with both North Korea and South Korea, both Israel and Palestine, both India and Pakistan. The openness of Belt and Road is a reflection of China’s foreign policy to engage with any country that wants to engage with it, especially in economic matters. That engagement is regardless of political animosities or alliances that countries may harbour between each other. The willingness (ambivalent or not) of most countries to consider Belt and Road (as they have) is a reflection of their existing bilateral relations with China and perceptions of it as a relatively neutral country in world affairs. Moreover, Belt and Road is not a trade association, economic block or a grouping of any kind with legally binding

agreements. In this background, Mattis and Pence's value judgement of Belt and Road as "dictating" or "constricting" are invalidated and translated by the metastructure as simply a unique offering by China that countries can accept or not. Erik X Li, a prominent Chinese venture capitalist, remarked in a talk that with Belt and Road China is proposing a new form of globalisation that is "liberated from ideological shackles...a globalisation that allows the space for countries to develop their own paths [and] does not seek to impose a set of political, economic values onto other countries. A globalisation that respects national sovereignty, respects differences. A globalisation of diversity, of pluralism."¹⁰²

Whether figures such as Kissinger, Fukuyama, Wang, Rolland, Mattis, Pence or Li are antagonists or protagonists of Belt and Road, they are all participants within its grand theatre of discourse. That discourse states that Belt and Road is an instrument of China which is a country on a path to re-orient the current world system. As an archetype, *the implication* of Belt and Road is the same as the implication of China as a twenty-first century superpower, what ever that may be.

2.3 Escaping the Metastructure

Belt and Road is an extra dimension for China to express itself on the world stage and for others to interpret and analyse but also amplify this expression. It is where entirely new political, economic and cultural coordinates of China are unearthed and plotted. The intersection of knowledge, information and data in the thousands of articles, reports and forums reveal Belt and Road to be everything and nothing at the same time. The China National Knowledge Infrastructure database reveals that between 2014 and 2019, more than 100,000 journal and newspaper articles were published on Belt and Road in China alone. It is not impossible to imagine that there are at least that many sources outside of China in all other languages. The more that Belt and Road is talked about, the more enigmatic it becomes. Christine Lagarde of the International Monetary Fund remarked that “When I first heard about the Belt and Road Initiative, I thought about something simple and straightforward—like a fragrant cup of tea. For centuries, tea has brought cultures, communities, and people closer together. For centuries, tea has connected economies through trade and investment.”¹⁰³ In the same desperate attempt to convey a meaning, Xi Jinping remarked that “If we compare the Belt and Road to two wings for the Asian economy to take off, then connectivity is the blood vessels of the wings.”¹⁰⁴ These are of course empty words of platitude, but they do not reveal anything less than full reports and analyses. Belt and Road is not any less a metaphor than it is a “systematic project” that can be examined in great detail.

Very few perspectives on Belt and Road avoid becoming entangled in its metastructural construction of definitions, scopes and implications. There is a unique category of expressions that orbit just outside the event horizon, so to speak, of the metastructure without falling into its void. These are more self aware critical reflections that

are less ideological or instrumental in their tone and intention. Grzegorz Stec, a researcher on China-Europe relations, proposes that the only constant aspect of Belt and Road is its propensity to change and that it advances through an evolutionary process that began with infrastructure. In a 2018 paper, he proposes that Belt and Road is a *process* and that “attempts to pin down the exact meaning of BRI in the way foreign policies are understood in the West may be futile.”¹⁰⁵ He points out that Chinese international relations have historically relied on general trajectories rather than on blueprints or clearly defined objectives; he observes that the debate on whether Belt and Road is a “threat” or an “opportunity” depends on the standpoint of specific actors and their goals within international politics, and therefore interpretations of Belt and Road are a function of this standpoint.¹⁰⁶ Wade Shepard, who has produced extensive journalistic coverage of Belt and Road, warns of the danger of falling in an abyss of confusion and dissonance. In a 2017 article, he highlights the inherent ambiguity of Belt and Road:

“If you’re looking for an official, correct map of where China’s Belt and Road actually goes, good luck. If you’re looking for an official explanation of what it really is, a list of approved projects, the amount of actual funding, where this funding is really coming from, what entities have the authority to engage projects under its name (and what entities don’t), or even a run down of what countries are officially a part of it, you’ve just jumped down into a very deep hole of misinformation, no information, and all out propaganda.”¹⁰⁷

In an extraordinary act of self reflection and admission, he continues:

While many news sites have published articles and pretty graphics which state things like, ‘The Belt and Road is a \$900 million/ \$1 trillion/ \$5 trillion dollar initiative spanning 65 countries, 60% of the world’s population, 75% of energy resources, and 30% of GDP,’ this is little more than grasping at journalistic handholds. I have written these words myself, and I know that this is basically just a more authoritative sounding way to say ‘a lot of projects in a lot of places that will impact a lot of people which are being financed with a lot of money.’¹⁰⁸

Other expressions frame Belt and Road within the broader historical context of China as a modern nation-state with a long ancient history. In his 2018 essay “China’s Historical

Statecraft and the Return of History,” Maximillian Mayer states that “Chinese leaders are increasingly mobilizing historical narratives as part of a broader trend that challenges Fukuyama’s thesis of the end of history. China’s monumental civilizational history serves to buttress infrastructural projects from the ‘belt and road initiative’ to Beijing’s territorial claims in the South China Sea.”¹⁰⁹ Naturally, Belt and Road is also theorised through the specific frame of Silk Road and its potent currency for narrative construction. In his 2018 essay “‘Silk Road’ as Foreign Policy Discourse” Timur Dadabaev writes: “the notion of the Silk Road has changed from a static concept of a historical trade route into a product of social construction of a number of powerful states – strategies that are constantly shaped, imagined and re-interpreted. In this sense, the Silk Road is not a foreign policy doctrine but rather a discursive strategy of engagement that largely exists in the realm of narration.”¹¹⁰

Furthermore, Tim Winter has examined Silk Road revivalism and Belt and Road in his 2019 book *Geocultural Power: China’s Quest to Revive the Silk Roads for the Twenty First Century*. He argues that the past in general is deployed as a mechanism of “great power” diplomacy and Silk Road in particular is deployed by China to gain a “geocultural” advantage within current geopolitical space. For Winter, Belt and Road is a geopolitical undertaking centred on heritage. He states: “Given that processes of heritage are about ordering the past into particular spatialized narratives, we see how the ‘ancient’ Silk Roads have become the apparatus that orders people and places—potentially separated by vast distances—into modes of cooperation across multiple sectors.”¹¹¹ In Winter’s analysis, the general foreign policy practices of “heritage diplomacy” together with “corridor diplomacy” are expanded and given new significance under Belt and Road. Others, such as Dylan M. H. Loh express Belt and Road itself as a contemporary Chinese narrative. In his 2019 essay “The ‘Chinese Dream’ and the ‘Belt and Road Initiative’: Narratives, Practices, and Sub-State Actors,” Loh states

that Belt and Road (along with Chinese Dream) is a “grand narrative” that with its “polysemous and enigmatic qualities” affects the practices of China’s domestic actors; he specifically examines how it creates the conditions for economic and political competition between China’s provinces, engenders opportunistic scholarship and functions as a self-justifying mechanism of diplomacy. Loh concludes that: “Compared to Mao who used violence and upheaval and Deng who used economic growth to buy loyalty (both of which has its limits), Xi’s turn is to narratives and stories for social control, and this may prove to be the most ‘sustainable, influential and powerful’ modality yet.”¹¹²

The above readings offer insight on Belt and Road as a phenomenon conditioned on history and the narratives engendered by it. At the same time, amidst the intense focus on Belt and Road’s historicism, an aspect that has not received much attention is Belt and Road’s futurism. That its narrative parameters are oriented in the construction of a future as much as the construction of the past has not received much attention or enquiry. What are the broader temporal dynamics of Belt and Road and is it a teleological imaginary as much as one born of history? In the following and final section of this chapter, I explore how official Chinese expressions of Belt and Road have gradually shifted from being oriented in the glories of the past to ones oriented in the promises of the future. I specifically examine how the now well known Chinese tenets of “Common Destiny” and “Chinese Dream” constitute what I call the “taleopolitics” of Belt and Road. These tenets expands the scope of Belt and Belt from spatial connectivities to temporal ones. China’s taleopolitics can be described as the exploitation of the present to construct the future.

2.4 Towards the Taleopolitical: Common Destiny and Chinese Dream

In September 2018, the film *Common Destiny* was introduced (not screened) at the Venice International Film Festival as “The World’s First Documentary Film on the ‘Belt and Road’”(fig. 2.23).¹¹³ Produced by the Beijing Silk Road Media Corporation, it was promoted at the festival by New Zealand director Martin Campbell, famed for directing James Bond films *Golden Eye* and *Casino Royal*. As a matter of manipulative news cycles, the film’s tangential association to Venice and Campbell as a director of famous films was widely publicised by all major Chinese media prior to its nationwide premier in 2019. The State Council Information Office in-turn reproduced that publicity and a synopsis of the film on its official website under the section on Belt and Road.¹¹⁴ Although *Common Destiny* performed poorly in theatres, it is a significant contribution to Belt and Road’s discursive reproduction: its very existence and positive coverage on it by Chinese media and its international surrogates are defacto advertisements for China’s capacity to construct and will to connect the world. The film tells the separate stories of real individuals across five continents and how their lives have been transformed for the better by The Belt and Road Initiative. One of the stories is of a young girl named Grace from rural Kenya whose school does not have an art teacher. Grace sets out on a mission to travel to the capital Nairobi on a new Chinese-built high-speed train line in search of an art teacher. The teacher Grace finds is first hesitant but agrees to teach at the rural school once a week since she can now conveniently commute on the high-speed train. In a review of the film on the website *Panda Paw Dragon Claw*, Tom Baxter summarises the theme of the film as “Personal Dreams + Infrastructure = A positive future.”¹¹⁵ Although its undertone is propagandistic, the film reveals an important change in Belt and Road’s narrative evolution: a shift away from emphasis on a shared past symbolised

by Silk Road towards emphasis on a shared future promised by infrastructural connectivity. According to *China Daily*, “By showing that people all over the world share similar emotions, needs and concerns, the documentary shows that ‘we have a common destiny, and we must work for it together’.”¹¹⁶ In the broader narrative structure of Belt and Road, the “Silk Road spirit” has mutated into the hopes, dreams and desires of a humanity sharing a “common destiny.”

The film’s title *Common Destiny* is a reference to a concept first espoused by China’s former leader Hu Jintao. In his report to the Communist Party’s 18th National Congress at the end of his tenure in late 2012, Hu observes that the world is undergoing complex and profound changes and that China should “raise awareness about human beings sharing a community of common destiny” and for all countries to “boost the common interests of mankind.”¹¹⁷ Under Xi (who took over from Hu following the congress) Hu’s call for a common destiny for mankind was eventually reformulated and formalised as *community with a shared future for mankind*. Used interchangeably with *common destiny* and repeated often by Xi, other officials and state media, it has become a dominant tenet of China’s outlook on the world and its place in it as a constructive participant. At a United Nations speech in Geneva in early 2017, Xi asked “Where did we come from? Where are we now? And where are we going?” He states that humanity is living in an era of challenges and risks and major world problems can indeed be solved and that “China’s proposition is [to] build a community of shared future for mankind and achieve shared and win-win development.”¹¹⁸ Later that year at the party’s 19th National Congress (the first one Xi presided over), Xi lists the pursuit of the Belt and Road Initiative, founding the AIIB, establishing Silk Road Fund, and hosting the first Belt and Road forum as major achievements of the party. This list of achievements is directly followed up with the statement “China champions the development of a community

with a shared future for mankind, and has encouraged the evolution of the global governance system.”¹¹⁹ As empty or meaningless as it may sound to some observers, a Chinese-led future for mankind is taken quite seriously as a policy proposal and widely emphasised as a goal of Belt and Road by all Chinese media and in official communications and documents. In fact, the 19th National Congress that Xi spoke at, simultaneously inscribed “The Belt and Road” and “community with a shared future for mankind” into the party’s constitution in the same section on international relations. It reads:

“In international affairs, it shall uphold justice while pursuing shared interests, safeguard China’s independence and sovereignty, oppose hegemonism and power politics, defend world peace, promote human progress, work to build a community with a shared future for mankind, and advance the building of a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity. It shall develop relations between China and other countries on the basis of the five principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual nonaggression, mutual noninterference in internal affairs, equality and mutual, and peaceful coexistence. The Party shall constantly work to develop good neighborly relations between China and its surrounding countries and work to strengthen unity and cooperation between China and other developing countries. It shall follow the principle of achieving shared growth through discussion and collaboration, and pursue the Belt and Road Initiative.”¹²⁰

“The Belt and Road Initiative” is the only named foreign policy concept in the constitution, and together with “community with a shared future for mankind” creates an international outlook where development underwritten by Chinese infrastructure is at the center of human development itself. In his opening speech at the second Belt and Road Forum in 2019, Xi remarked that since the founding of the People’s Republic of China seventy years ago, the country “has reached a new historical starting point” and remains “committed to peaceful development and will endeavor to build a community with a shared future for mankind.”¹²¹ In contrast to his emphasis on the future, Silk Road as an inspirational historical model is not evoked even once in his address. The term “Silk Road” is indeed mentioned, but only as a reference to the derivative components of Belt and Road such as the Digital Silk Road and

Green Silk Road. On the other hand, Xi evoked Silk Road in a historical context over two dozen times in his opening remarks at the first Belt and Road forum two years earlier.¹²² Since its inception in 2013, Belt and Road has gradually diverged from the Eurasian cooperative space embodied by Silk Road to a global one embodied by itself; it is not an accident that the title of Xi's speech at the second forum is self-referential: "Work Together to Deliver a Brighter Future For Belt and Road Cooperation." With Xi taking the lead, Chinese officialdom in general has minimised enthusiasm for Silk Road to convey that it is actually the construction of a shared future that is the goal of Belt and Road. In an early 2019 speech given at a security conference in Munich, CPC politburo member Yang Jiechi remarked that "The Belt and Road Initiative is an important international public good that China contributes to global cooperation" and an "important pathway toward building a community with a shared future for mankind."¹²³ The marrying of Belt and Road with Common Destiny by high-level officials is repeated and supported by Chinese scholarship. An endless stream of articles expound on the relationship, giving the two terms rhetorical synergy and new theoretical reference points. For example, in her 2019 article "The Belt and Road Initiative: Modernity, Geopolitics and the Developing Global Order," Shirley Yu writes: "A 'community of common destiny' elevates the BRI to similar strategic significance as the Manifest Destiny, a founding principle of U.S. foreign policy."¹²⁴ For Yu, Common Destiny enhances the power of Belt and Road and not an end in-itself. For others such as Zhaohe Chen, Belt and Road is the "practical way" to "construct the community of common destinies for all mankind."¹²⁵ For Ding Jun & Cheng Hongjin, "shared future for mankind and the 'Belt and Road' initiative are both positive inputs in the current mainstream pursuit of peace and development."¹²⁶ The vagueness of both terms allows pandering Chinese scholarship (which is the overwhelming majority) to express what one means for the other in innovative new ways. In major forums

on Common Destiny such as “Dialogue of Civilizations: Building a Community of Shared Future for Mankind” held in Beijing in 2018, Belt and Road looms in the background as the basis of a fully connected future world. In a letter congratulating the forum, Xi writes that “Inter-civilization exchanges and mutual learning are an important driver for human progress and world peace and development. For millennia, humanity has been moving forward thanks to the interactions among different nations and cultures.”¹²⁷ Such language is nearly identical to that Xi, other Chinese officials and scholars have used emphatically to describe the Silk Road spirit. Many of the qualities attributed to Common Destiny, most notably universalism, cooperation and connectivity, happen to be the same qualities of Silk Road. However, unlike Silk Road whose existence has come to pass and can only function as a metaphor, symbol or analogy, Common Destiny is a vision that can be brought into existence. Framing Belt and Road as Common Destiny, Chinese arguments for it are able to retain the Silk Road spirit, while at the same time move away from the self-evident anachronism of a Silk Road revival. Being an on-going narrative and a contentious subject of geopolitics, Belt and Road is perpetually under an existential threat. Common Destiny is a convenient corrective for some of the shortfalls of Silk Road as a pretext. It justifies the expansion of Belt and Road from Eurasia to every part of the world where humans exist and positions Belt and Road within the philosophy of a China that is willing to accept responsibility for the world’s future.

Political science scholars Ding Jun and Cheng Hongjin write of Common Destiny: “As a Chinese proposition that reflects China’s wisdom, this concept is based on the long-standing cultural tradition and the advanced Chinese ideological system, representing a new perspective for international cooperation and international order and the new concepts of development, security and civilization.”¹²⁸ By forming a narrative alliance with Belt and Road, Common Destiny overrides Silk Road. The Chinese script writers of Belt and Road

must be aware that “The Silk Road” is a colonial construct describing an abstract historical time irrelevant to China’s collective memories of “national humiliation” and its self ascribed position as a wholly independent and unique civilisation, or the Middle Kingdom. Although still retained in the background, Silk Road has declined as the primary index of Belt and Road legitimacy. China’s discursive engagement with Silk Road (as pointed out by Timur Dadabaev and others) to justify Belt and Road is largely a passing phase. For China, if anything of discursive value is retained of Silk Road, it is not glories of the past (for which other Eurasian countries have also asserted claims to), but a theory of long term spatial cooperation that only China can prove into the twenty-first century. Along with Common Destiny, another Chinese tenet that frames Belt and Road on teleopolitical terms is Chinese Dream. Where Common Destiny is rooted in an universalist ethos of worldbuilding, Chinese Dream is rooted in Chinese civilisation and nation building. Its entanglement with Belt and Road conveys that what is good for China is good for the world.

Throughout the twentieth century, the Communist Party has consistently formulated specific narrative themes to justify and capture the essence of major political, social and economic undertakings. Long March (1934-1935), Hundred Flowers (1956), Great Leap Forward (1958- 1962), and Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) are paradigmatic cases in China’s modern history. Also, since Mao Zedong’s Mao Zedong Thought, every Chinese leader has pronounced personal concepts or theories to frame domestic policies and actions under a single umbrella. Deng Xiaoping put forth Deng Xiaoping Theory; Jiang Zemin put forth Theory of Three Represents; Hu Jintao put forth Scientific Outlook on Development; and Xi Jinping put forth Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. These are not specific laws or agendas, but written into the Constitution of the Communist Party—along with Marxism-Leninism—as a guide for party members to act upon

and citizens to embrace. Firmly rooted in leadership, they are open to interpretation and expanded by scholars, intellectuals and the media as a matter of context and circumstance. Themes and theories, from Long March to Xi's socialism with Chinese characteristics, construct historical eras in real-time and function as practical narratives of nation building. Born of this tradition, Chinese Dream was adopted and popularised by Xi immediately after he became party leader.

While the actual origins of the term is uncertain, Chinese Dream is referenced extensively by Chinese officials, intellectuals and media as a singular theme representative of individual aspirations, national development and global standing. Although it cannot be reduced to a singular meaning, the most officially pronounced aspect of Chinese Dream is national rejuvenation; this was inscribed unambiguously in the CCP's constitution in 2017 as "realize the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation."¹²⁹ Under Xi, national rejuvenation is a nation-wide call to return China to its status as a preeminent civilisation. It is rooted in the party's decades-old desire for the full redemption of China's *Century of Humiliation*, a reference to the period between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries when the nation was subjugated by foreign powers and riven by internal conflict (fig. 2.24). It begins in 1839 with the Opium War, when Great Britain used its technologically superior navy to force China's Qing dynasty rulers to open the country's ports and markets to the opium trade. It extends to Japan's eight-year long occupation of China during the second World War and eventual withdrawal in 1945. The period ends with the Communist Party's victory over the Kuomintang in the country's civil war and the eventual establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. It is 110 years that mark the destruction of China as a millennia-old civilisation and the immense pain of its birth as a modern nation. Sometimes referred to

as the “long century,” it is deeply embedded in China’s national memory, education, military ethos and historiography as “never forget our national humiliation.”¹³⁰

At the 2019 celebration of the 70th anniversary of the founding the Peoples Republic of China, Xi said that the Chinese people and nation “will surely compose new and more beautiful chapters of the times in their journey to reach the two centenary goals and realise the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation.”¹³¹ The centenary goals of the Chinese Dream that Xi speaks of are officially: “to finish building a moderately prosperous society in all respects by the time the Communist Party of China marks its centenary [2021] and to build China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious by the time the People’s Republic of China celebrates its centenary [2049].”¹³²

As an official agenda, Chinese Dream is emphatically a domestic one and not a “foreign affairs dream.”¹³³ At the same time, Chinese Dream is frequently entangled with Belt and Road in official and media expressions. Sometimes it is simply by association when pronouncing major goals in a single statement, such as when Xi remarked in 2017 that “We will promote China’s great opening up and development under the ‘Belt and Road’ framework, and further promote the realization of the ‘two centenary goals,’ and the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”¹³⁴ Often times it is through stating how other countries benefit from China pursuing its own dream. In 2018, China’s ambassador to Greece, Zou Xiaoli, stated that “The BRI closely connects the Chinese dream to the Greek dream.”¹³⁵ An early 2020 *Xinhua* commentary titled “Dream-chasing China a global anchor of stability” states that China has “advanced high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, stayed committed to multilateralism, and played a mediating role in various hotspot issues to effectively promote world peace and stability.”¹³⁶ It is a natural marriage where one benefits

from the narrative of the other: Chinese Dream is extended into the geopolitics of Belt and Road, and Belt and Road is extended into the teleopolitics of Chinese Dream. Belt and Road is absorbed into the teleology of China's rejuvenation.

Unlike the revival of Silk Road, the rejuvenation of China is not a pretext, but a genuine national aspiration. A 2013 editorial in the CCP's main political theory journal, *Qiushi Journal*, expresses the exigency of that aspiration: "We must make persistent efforts, persevere, press resolutely forward, hold fast until the end, struggle untiringly and struggle eternally for the realization of the Chinese dream."¹³⁷ Then in 2019, at a Lunar New Year celebration, Xi exclaimed the urgency of realising the Chinese Dream stating that "time and history wait for no one as they are both on the side of hard workers."¹³⁸ While the message of Chinese Dream is urgent, its actual realisation is an eternal struggle. After four-decades of extraordinary transformation since reform and opening up in the late 1970s, China still considers itself as entering yet another "new era" and "embracing the brilliant prospects of rejuvenation."¹³⁹ In fact, in 1894, during the first Sino-Japanese war, Sun Yet Sen—the father of modern China and still revered in the PRC—founded the Revive China Society as the revolutionary platform to overthrow the Qing dynasty and modernise China. Since Sun, and from Mao to Xi, China has been caught in Sisyphean cycles of renewal under various guises where a fully renewed China is forever on the horizon. In the political sentiments of modern China, final victories are always something to work towards and not achieve. The opening section of the constitution of the CCP provides a glimpse of this sentiment via the final stages of communism:

The highest ideal of communism pursued by Chinese Communists can be realized only when socialist society is fully developed and highly advanced. The development and improvement of the socialist system is a long historical process. By upholding the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism and following the path suited to China's specific

conditions as chosen by the Chinese people, China's socialist cause will ultimately be victorious.¹⁴⁰

It is through such *nostalgia for the future* that Belt and Road, via Chinese Dream, can be understood. Domestically, the Communist Party operates through a temporal politics where ethical and legal transgressions are considered necessary and justified. Mass censorship, incarceration and repression, as well as other violations of its populace are the means that justify the end; an end that is located in the distant future and can only be registered at the scale of civilisational time, not the everyday. In the same way that individual liberties are sacrificed for common development, the present is sacrificed for future achievements. In the race “against time to reach Chinese Dream,”¹⁴¹ the present is fast forwarded and all of its immediate concerns and conditionalities are blurred. This blurring of everyday reality allows China to carry out human rights violations and self riotously negate critiques of it. Such are the taleopolitics that I believe Belt and Road has become irrevocably a part of at a global scale.

Influenced by Chinese Dream and Common Destiny, Belt and Road's temporal range extends all the way from Silk Road to the fully rejuvenated China of 2049 to the actual end of history. Underwritten by its unparalleled ability to both promise and construct large-scale infrastructure, China has claimed the mantle to bond people and nations over long spans of space, over long spans of time. Although Belt and Road, Common Destiny and Chinese Dream may be distinguished through strenuous theoretical manoeuvres, they all make the same point: China can be trusted to help build a harmonious new world in the process of rejuvenating itself as a preeminent civilisation. Like the Qilin chimera, all three are of a singular Chinese mythology (fig. 2.25).

Figure 2.23. Movie poster for *Common Destiny*, as “The world’s first documentary film on the Belt and Road.”

Beijing Silk Road Media Corporation, *Common Destiny* [Poster], 2018.

Figure 2.24. One of twelve posters for a fictional project called “One Belt One Road One World.” Poster is a reference to the “Chinese Dream” of achieving national rejuvenation after a “century of humiliation.” Background image is a political cartoon showing caricatures of nineteenth-century Britain, Germany, Russia, France and Japan carving up China, with China protesting in the back (by Henri Meyer, published in *Le Petit Journal* in 1898).

Jegan Vincent de Paul, *One Belt, One Road, One World: A New Silk Road Project*, 2017.

Figure 2.25. Representation of Belt and Road, Chinese Dream and Common Destiny as the qilin chimera of Chinese mythology. Based on a depiction of the qilin from the *Sancai Tuhui* encyclopedia of 1609.

Jegan Vincent de Paul, untitled, 2020.

Chapter 2 Notes

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Chapter 3

IMPACT

Sri Lanka – The Emerging Wonder of Asia

PER CAPITA INCOME (US\$)

Chapter 3

Impact

“The massive power projects now under construction will ensure that by 2012 every home and family in our country will have electricity. Therefore, the land that was freed from terrorism will by 2012 be a land that is freed of darkness. You will soon hear the hum of industry that is powered by this energy.”

—Mahinda Rajapaksa

The current six bank notes of Sri Lanka each depict a species of butterflies and birds as well as a traditional form of Sri Lankan dance. Also featured prominently at the center on the face of five of the notes is an object of infrastructure: the port of Colombo, a new bridge in Manampitiya, a new coal power plant in Norochcholai, a new tunnel in Ramboda and a new reservoir dam in Weheragala (fig. 3.1). Superseding the symbolism of Sri Lanka’s famous historical monuments and UNESCO sites, these objects of infrastructure have become emblematic of Sri Lanka’s twenty-first century aspirations. Issued in February 2011 with the theme of *Development, Prosperity and Sri Lankan Dancers*¹ and two years after the end of the country’s civil war, the notes are indicative of Sri Lanka’s new development priorities where infrastructure is a source of national pride and the primary catalyst of economic development. As is the case with countries of the global South, the financing, expertise and material resources for the construction of large-scale modern infrastructure is outside the scope of Sri Lanka. The coal power plant in Norochcholai was financed through a US\$1.35 billion loan from China’s state owned Exim Bank and constructed by its China Machinery Engineering Corporation (fig. 3.2)². Started in 2006 and fully completed in 2014, the plant is now Sri Lanka’s largest power generator and marks China’s extensive

involvement in the country's economic and political affairs through cooperation on infrastructure.

Between 2006 and 2019, Chinese state-owned companies have financed and constructed infrastructure in Sri Lanka worth an estimated \$12 billion.³ Along with power generation and transmission projects, these include nation-wide road development, railway construction and the expansion of the country's international shipping port in the capital Colombo. Prominent amongst these is the new Magampura Mahinda Rajapaksa Port in the rural town of Hambantota on the southern coast of Sri Lanka (figs. 3.3 & 3.4). Named after then president Mahinda Rajapaksa who presided over its realisation and eventually renamed Hambantota International Port, the first phase (Phase I) was constructed between 2008 and 2010 by China's state-owned China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC) and Sinohydro Corporation. At a total cost of US\$505 million, US\$306 million was provided as a loan from Exim Bank, China's primary policy bank dedicated to international development projects.⁴ Phase I modified Hambantota town's natural inland harbour with the excavation of a basin to 17 metres deep (to allow the largest ships) and opening a 210-metre wide entrance channel to connect it to the Indian Ocean (fig. 3.5). Two breakwaters were constructed to protect the new harbour against ocean currents. Along with access roads and ancillary buildings, the phase saw the completion of a 600-metre long general purpose berth, a 105-metre long berth for container ships and a 300-metre long berth for liquid cargo (fig.3.6). Phase I was declared open on the last day of Rajapaksa's first term as president on November 18, 2010 with an extravagant ceremony attended by China's deputy prime minister Sang Guawei to whom Rajapaksa remarked: "Our nation was at a strategic location on the Silk Route which joined your country with Europe. Thus, we are very old friends in the naval and trade sectors. In future too, this will be the same."⁵ One year later the port still had not begun operations and it

would become international news that a huge rock on the seabed would prevent large vessels from actually entering the port.⁶ The chairman of Sri Lanka Ports Authority stated that the rock was identified before construction started and that “We need just below \$40 million to blast it. We have requested the amount from China.”⁷ The loan was granted and the rock was blasted by CHEC, but it was a controversial moment revealing mismanagement and a potent sign of the more serious problems the port would encounter.

Construction on the second phase (Phase II) began in November 2012 and expanded the port with additional berths, a bunkering facility (for refuelling ships), a tank farm (for storing liquids), and a 93-acre artificial island the purpose of which was never made clear (fig. 3.7). The phase was undertaken by CHEC and China Merchants Port Holdings Company (CM Port) and was again funded by Exim Bank with a US\$810 million loan.⁸ As of late 2020, the second phase was never formally declared complete by the Sri Lankan government and the port’s final status remains publicly undeclared and ambiguous. But this is not without reason. The phase has been under the purview of multiple Sri Lankan governments with differing national priorities and levels of engagement with China. Phase II overlaps with the end of Rajapaksa’s presidency and the beginning of Maithripala Sirisena’s in early 2015. Under Sirisena’s presidency—with Ranil Wickremesinghe as prime minister—the port was seen as a liability rather than an asset (as it was incurring losses into 2016) and in July 2017, the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government signed the Hambantota Port Concession Agreement with CM Port (fig. 3.8). The infamous agreement gave a majority (70%) stake of Hambantota port to CM Port for 99 years in exchange for US\$1.1 billion that Sri Lanka could—if it wanted to— use to repay its remaining loans to China’s Exim Bank.⁹ Contrary to much discourse and popular media narratives both domestic and foreign, the agreement was not a “debt-for-equity swap” as the original loans were not renegotiated and their terms remain

unchanged.¹⁰ After Rajapaksa's younger brother and former defense secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa defeated Sirisena for the country's presidency in 2019, officials of his new government made public statements that the agreement violated Sri Lanka's sovereignty and will renegotiate with China to return control of the port to Sri Lanka.¹¹ This position was foreshadowed in Gotabaya's election manifesto that "Hambantota port is a national asset and was defined as a strategic asset by us previously, and the intention was never to sell or lease the port for 99 years."¹² That conviction was short lived, only for him to state that the agreement will actually remain in place and reiterate that China will not have military use of the port without Sri Lanka's authorisation; the Concession Agreement was always a commercial agreement between the Government of Sri Lanka, SLPA and CM Port and never contained any provisions giving China military access in the first place.

Since CM Port gained the majority stake to "develop, operate and manage" Hambantota Port for 99 years, SLPA's masterplan for the port was no longer applicable and all milestones made irrelevant. Although SLPA states that Phase II is "in progress"¹³ even as of 2020, a summary of the Concession Agreement released by CM Port in 2017 states that "Construction works for Phase 2 has commenced since September 2012 and was completed in April 2015."¹⁴ Regardless of this claim by CM Port, in April 2016 Chinese premier Li Keqiang met with Sri Lankan prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in Beijing and both hoped to "accelerate the negotiation on the cooperation of the second-phase of the Hambantota Port project."¹⁵

The contradictions and contentions of Hambantota port have defined its progress and its value and meaning as national infrastructure. Regardless of, or perhaps because of, the disjunctures in its planning, funding and development, Hambantota port has been a thematic thread in Sri Lanka's domestic politics. As a major logistics project with Chinese interests,

Hambantota port is also viewed through the frame of Belt and Road as a geopolitical object. It was also undertaken parallel to the end of the country's civil war where conflict and infrastructure are intersecting concerns of the same national question. This chapter thus explores: 1. The domestic background of Hambantota port and its impact in local space as real infrastructure; 2. Hambantota port as a geopolitical abstraction since it became part of Belt and Road; 3. How China's support for infrastructure construction was in conjunction with its support for Sri Lanka's framing of the ethnic conflict into an anti-terror problem that can be solved without a political settlement. In this last section, I use a timeline of official agreements, documents, meetings, and speeches to show how the seminal context of Hambantota port's realisation were the war and corollary national problems that long precede Belt and Road.

Figure 3.1. Front face of Sri Lanka's current bank notes. The notes were issued on February 4, 2011 on the 60th anniversary of the bank and coincides with Sri Lanka's Independence Day. The denominations show: Colombo port (20 Rupee), Manampitiya bridge (50 Rupee), Norochcholai coal power plant (100 Rupee), Ramboda tunnel (1000 Rupee) and Weheragala reservoir dam (5000 Rupee).

Central Bank of Sri Lanka, *Development, Prosperity and Sri Lankan Dancers*, [Theme], 2011.

Figure 3.2. Aerial view of Norochcholai Coal Power Plant Project in Puttalam District, North Western Province, Sri Lanka. The project was completed in three phases between 2006 and 2014 by China Machinery Engineering Corporation with a US\$1.35 billion loan from Exim Bank. The plant can generate 900 megawatts of electricity and supplies more than 40 percent of Sri Lanka's electricity demand.

Figure 3.3. Hambantota port's location on the island of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean.

Jegan Vincent de Paul, modified Google Earth image of Indian Ocean region, 2020.

Figure 3.4. Hambantota port's location on the southern coast of Sri Lanka. It is situated in the town of Hambantota in Hambantota District within Southern Province.

Jegan Vincent de Paul, modified, inverted colour United Nations country map of Sri Lanka [Map], 2020.

Figure 3.5. Top: Satellite view of Hambantota town's inland harbour in 2005 prior to its transformation into a port. Bottom: Satellite view of Hambantota port in 2014 after the completion of Phase I and during the construction of Phase II. Phase I modified the inland harbour extensively with a 17-metre deep basin and by removing the natural isthmus to create a 210-metre wide entrance channel from the Indian Ocean.

Jegan Vincent de Paul, modified Google Earth satellite images of Hambantota Port area, 2020.

Figure 3.6. Top: Digital visualisation of Hambantota Port after the completion of all phases. Bottom: Aerial view of Hambantota port after the completion of Phase I. The image shows the entrance channel, two breakwaters, a general purpose berth and a liquid cargo berth. Phase I was completed between 2008 and 2010 by China Harbour Engineering Company and Sinohydro Corporation with a US\$306 million loan from Exim Bank at total cost of US\$505 million.

(Top) Sri Lanka Ports Authority, "Hambantota Port Development Project Master Plan," [Digital rendering], circa 2010.

Figure 3.7. Top: Aerial view of Hambantota port Tank Farm completed during Phase II in 2014. Bottom: Aerial view of container berths completed during Phase II in 2015. China Harbour Engineering Company and China Merchants Port Holdings Company began construction on Phase II in November 2012 with a US\$810 million loan from Exim Bank.

Figure 3.8. Top: Chairman of Sri Lanka Ports Authority Parakrama Dissanayake (L), secretary to the Ministry of Ports & Shipping L.P. Jayampathi (C) and executive director of China Merchants Port Holdings (R) sign Hambantota Port Concession Agreement in Colombo on July 29, 2017. Bottom: Sri Lanka's minister of Ports & Shipping Mahinda Samarasinghe (left) and executive vice president of China Merchants Port Holdings Hu Jianhua (right) exchange gifts during the signing.

3.1 Hambantota Port: Local Reality

The Hambantota region was first identified for port development in December 2002 in the government's *Regaining Sri Lanka: Vision and Strategy for Accelerated Development* policy framework. The policy paper's preface by then prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe states that the biggest factors of poverty in the country is "the war that has raged for two decades and a legacy of poor economic management."¹⁶ Amongst the projects to address these determinants, Hambantota port is put forth as an alternate container terminal to the existing Colombo port and as one that is closer to Indian Ocean shipping routes. It is proposed as a 23-meter deep, longterm multi-modal port that can cater to post-Panamax vessels. The project remained dormant until Rajapaksa, a native and parliamentary representative of Hambantota district, was elected president in 2005. His *Mahinda Chintana: Vision for a New Sri Lanka* development framework further emphasised the economic significance of realising the port. It proposes a greater Hambantota development area anchored by the port and specifically calls for the construction of a breakwater, two berths, approach channel and deepening the existing natural harbour at an estimated cost of US\$150 million. In conjunction with *Mahinda Chintana*, the Rajapaksa government launched the more specific *Randora National Infrastructure Development Programme*, where major road and power projects as well as the expansion of Colombo port and the construction of Hambantota port are proposed as a way to "transform Sri Lanka's landscape into a regional growth centre" (fig. 3.9).¹⁷

With the majority of financing secured from Exim Bank, Hambantota town in particular indeed underwent a major transformation with the construction of the port starting in 2008. Hambantota's transformation, however, did not mean success for Sri Lanka as a

nation and nor did the port bring the kind of regional attention the government was hoping for. In 2012—two years after opening—Hambantota port became well known for calling only 34 ships, compared with more than 3500 at Colombo port (and more than 130,000 at the port of Singapore). Of course undertakings at the scale of global trade take many years to fruition, but when I visited the port five years later in 2017, I encountered vast stretches of eerie land and a quiet harbour with a single docked ship (fig. 3.10). The only other human presence was other curious visitors as well as bands of police officers or security guards, one of whom questioned my presence and why I would want photographs of a port. Even at a viewing platform celebrating the port with a large billboard, I was notified that for security reasons I could not use any “big lenses” in the direction of the port. The overall sense of security and emptiness I encountered was in stark contrast to the hustle-and-bustle of official discourse on Hambantota as a “nucleus of development in Sri Lanka”¹⁸ and “an economic revolution sweeping across Hambantota.”¹⁹

Even if the port was and continues to be an economic failure for Sri Lanka, it does not mean it is an infrastructural failure. It achieved what infrastructure always achieves as an undertaking of state power: it served as a promise of a better future (and still continues to), permanently confiscated land, exacerbated the control and management of populations, enlarged a centralised planning regime, and allowed two states to form a political alliance. More specifically, it was used to legitimise the Rajapaksa government’s authoritarianism and corrosive nationalism and physically extended the Chinese state within Sri Lanka’s territory for the long term future. Sri Lanka’s prioritising of infrastructure has deprioritised non-physical aspects of its society, particularly rights. Seen as a pure object of infrastructure, Hambantota port is the result of the state fulfilling its duty to construct and thus a monumental success. But when states achieve national goals using infrastructure, it is a

spatial intervention that directly impacts people and places. Sri Lanka's Law & Society Trust, a legal organisation that examines the country's civil and political issues from a human rights perspective, produced the first report on the social impact of Hambantota port after the first phase was completed in 2010 (fig. 3.11). In its 2012 report *'In Whose Interest?': Mega-Development Projects in Hambantota*, the author Miyuru Gunasinghe writes:

“Mega developments across the globe have had questionable impacts on communities and the surrounding environment. ‘Mega’ scale projects are generally designed top-down with long term goals in view and do not take into account the immediate needs of the grassroots communities nor the immediate negative impacts of relocations and consequent loss of livelihoods. Hambantota appears to be no different to the neo-liberal policies promoted by international financial institutions and large corporations which profit a few and disadvantage the masses.”²⁰

Gunasinghe is expressing a basic but vital truth that large-scale infrastructures anywhere in the world tend to have similar agendas and outcomes, regardless of the type of governments, firms or economic systems involved in their realisation. They are made possible by both autocrats and democrats but are always the purview of a small elite sector of society who has access to the state's planning regime and decide what is important for everyone else. In my interview of Dostain Jamaldini, the chairman of Pakistan's Gwadar Port Authority (which oversees the similarly Chinese-backed mega port of Gwadar of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) he remarked with a matter of fact tone that when it comes to projects of such importance, planners have to implement “the three Ds.” When asked to clarify what he meant, he responded: “displace, destroy and develop.”²¹

As with Gwadar port, Hambantota port's three Ds are of course not openly pronounced, but nevertheless must be implemented simply as a function of its scale and the Sri Lankan government's push for large-scale infrastructure as a panacea for national problems. The LST's report, based on field missions to assess the relationship of development promises to actual local benefits, points out the extent of displacement and

alienation of Hambantota's rural communities. Since 2009, the loss of housing, forced and involuntary displacement, insufficient compensation for reallocation and the replacement of local labour with Chinese workers created a rapid deterioration of livelihoods and living standards. More than one hundred families had been displaced and SLPA's resettlement scheme relocated over 400 families, but more than half could not resettle in their allotted plots because of inaccessibility to commercial centres, basic services and cultivable lands.²²

The contentions of land appropriation and job loss reached a climax in January 2017. The Concession Agreement mentioned earlier was actually first negotiated under different terms in late 2016 and included Sri Lanka conceding an 80% stake of the port (not 70%) along with 15,000 acres of surrounding land to CM Port for 99 years to develop an industrial zone. There was, however, no transparency on exactly where this land would come from and under what compensation program—if any—for Hambantota's private and generational land holders. Amidst the uncertainty, SLPA claimed that land would not be appropriated from that reserved for bird and elephant sanctuaries, a housing project for government officials or that of the stone quarries in the area. It became apparent to Hambantota district locals that what remained were the adjacent villages of Arawanamulla, Ballagaswewa, Medilla, Galwewa, Kamathyayawewa and Mirijjawilla, which consisted of paddy fields and farmland, the main source of livelihood for its inhabitants. Days before the framework agreement was to be signed into policy and on the day of the industrial zone's ceremonial opening (attended by Wickremesinghe, China's ambassador to Sri Lanka and CM Port representatives) on January 7th, major protests erupted in Hambantota district (fig. 3.12). The protestors, including village locals supported by Buddhist monks and local politicians, contended that traditional lands would be taken away and China would permanently establish itself in Hambantota. Demonstrations were also held by the Ceylon Ports General Employees Union, whose

general secretary stated that “The government is attempting to hand over 15,000 hectares [sic] of land to Chinese companies which would virtually turn Hambantota into a Chinese colony. We will not allow these kinds of things to take place at any cost.”²³ The union members, who also work in Sri Lanka’s other ports of Colombo, Galle and Trincomalee, had worn black armbands while working to show their disapproval of the deal.

The sentiments behind the protests and workers’s resistance were expressed acutely a month earlier when nearly 500 of Hambantota port’s workers occupied the inside of the port and its administration building and held the Japanese vehicle carrier *Hyperion Highway* hostage, preventing it from leaving the port with 5000 cars on board. The workers had feared the lease of the port to a Chinese company would result in the loss of their jobs and the government’s response was not reassurance of employment but to send in the navy. Led by the commander of the navy, hundreds of heavily armed soldiers broke up the strike using violence, and the threat of violence, and escorted the Japanese vessel to international waters. The workers’s actions was declared a “terrorist act” and a violation of international maritime law and the navy’s spokesperson stated that “We were called in because the action of the dock workers amounted to piracy. We want to make sure that the foreign vessels could have free passage.”²⁴ The entire event and its context is a stunning example of the sacred value of infrastructure and the extent to which state power can be exercised to protect it against the well being of its own citizenry.

An investigative report by the *Sunday Leader*—an outspoken national newspaper—on the impending land grab and workers’s rights pointed out that projects such as Hambantota port were “carried out without even having a nick of consideration towards the socio-economic and environmental impacts they cause to the country.”²⁵ Calling the disregard for consequences the “Rajapaksa Method”, the report references an unrelated, but major, 1999

court decision that prohibited the Sri Lankan government from selling the country's phosphate mine to overseas corporations. The decision states that: "A government that is appointed for a limited period of time to govern the state does not have the right to sell the properties of citizens in an arbitrary manner for the rulers are not owners but the stewards of a state."²⁶ This is a poignant reference for Hambantota port as long-term infrastructure that was expediently (and likely illegally) implemented by a temporary government and then privatised. Planned to last decades, and likely centuries, Hambantota port will transcend the Rajapaksa government and consecutive governments in its longevity, power and impact. This is because infrastructure is more a domain of the permanent state than cycles of governments. Like the state, which assumes itself as eternal, infrastructures operate on a time scale beyond the everyday life of the people claimed to be served. At that scale, populations become temporary and thus can be deprioritised and even sacrificed in the planning and construction phases. While it is possible to explain the negative outcomes of Hambantota port as a matter of personal glory, corrupt government officials or bad planning, could it be a more universal state conviction to materialise longterm infrastructure regardless of the immediate consequences to the nation? Despite the negative impact on Sri Lanka's population and national economy, Hambantota port is a sublime manifestation of the state and its drive to construct infrastructure.

Because infrastructures embody the state, they must be permanent and stable, not something to be dismantled or moved in the future. During the protests in Hambantota, prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe justified the lease to China by evoking the port's absolute permanence, stating "The port can't be taken away" with a reminder that the British did not take away the ports of Trincomalee and Colombo at the end of colonisation.²⁷ Ports, roads and railways may be neglected or destroyed in war, but they are intended to span long periods

of time and are perpetually extended and hardly retracted. Half a century after the British Empire colonised the island in 1815, it began the construction of a nation-wide railway system (fig. 3.13). Starting from the initial line of just over 50 kilometres in the west coast in the early 1860s, the system was expanded across the island to nearly 1500 kilometres by the end of the 1920s (fig. 3.14). This formidable undertaking was of course not with the intention of serving the populations the colonial government subjugated, but with the assumption the empire would be present on the island indefinitely. Built to exploit the island's resources, the railways were equally a defacto declaration of the intended permanence of colonisation by "the empire on which the sun never sets." Almost a century and a half after the British initiated the railway system, China is now part of extending it (fig. 3.15). In 2018 and 2019, China National Machinery Import and Export Corporation with funding from Exim Bank completed the extension of the Southern line from Colombo to Matara started by the British in the 1890s. Part of Sri Lanka's Railway Development Strategy initiated in 2010, the line along the country's southwest coast was extended 32 kilometres from Matara to Beliatta and from there it is to be extended to Hambantota and further west to Kataragama. Infrastructures retain historical continuity across territories regardless of changing governments. After Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948, the British railway system, roads and all other infrastructures became the possession of the new Sri Lanka. They were, however, not seen as symbols subjugation or a liability, but an asset that can be proudly administered to build a new nation and the foundation of a new state.

Figure 3.9. Page from brochure for *Randora National Infrastructure Development Programme*. The programme is part of *Mahinda Chintana: Vision for a new Sri Lanka—A Ten-Year Horizon Development Framework 2006 - 2016*, a policy framework released in November 2006. Hambantota Harbour is listed as one of ten major projects.

Department of National Planning and Ministry of Finance and Planning, *Randora National Infrastructure Development Programme*, 2008.

Figure 3.10. Check-point at Southern Expressway towards Hambantota, guarded entry gate near tank farm, distant view of the port's only two gantry cranes, China Harbour Engineering Company sign for Hambantota Port Development Project Phase II, viewing platform, view of east side of port (See Chapter 4 for further photographs of Hambantota area) .

Jegan Vincent de Paul, field visit photographs of Hambantota port area, 2017.

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Figure 3.11. Cover of the Law & Society Trusts's report on Hambantota port's local impact.

Law & Society Trust, *In Whose Interest?': Mega-Development Projects in Hambantota* [Report cover], 2012.

Figure 3.12. Above: People protesting the impending agreement to lease Hambantota port for 99 years to CM Port and the appropriation of private land for an industrial zone confront government supporters in the village of Mirijjawilla in Hambantota district. Below: Government supporters held back by police from confronting the protestors.

Figure 3.13. Above: Construction of the Colombo-Kandy railway line in 1860. Below: The line in operation in 1910 after its completion in 1867. Constructed during British rule of Ceylon, it is the first railway on the island.

Figure 3.14. Map shows the railway system constructed on the island under British colonial rule as of 1910. The Southern Line, shown on the south-west coast, extends from Colombo to Matara.

Ceylon Government Railway, "Ceylon Government Railways," [Map], 1910.

Figure 3.15. Above: Tracks being laid on the Mataru-Kataragama railway line in southern Sri Lanka in 2018. Below: Promotional poster of the opening of the first phase of the line from Mataru to Beliatta. In 2018 and 2019, China National Machinery Import and Export Corporation extended the Southern Line 32 kilometres from Mataru to Beliatta with funding from Exim Bank. The line is to be extended to Hambantota and further west to Kataragama in a second phase.

3.2 Hambantota Port: Geopolitical Abstraction

Hambantota port was under construction nearly five years prior to any notions of Belt and Road and then eventually subsumed into it. It was first an ambiguous and relatively obscure commercial project and then a major source of both international celebration and contention when framed by Belt and Road. As I showed earlier, Belt and Road is an open-ended narrative (without limits or scope) where any Chinese-involved project or country anywhere in the world can be considered a part of it. When Hambantota port is considered to be a part of Belt and Road—as it often is—it is through discourse by politicians, media figures, analysts and others. It is not because of any special kind of Belt and Road funding or agreements that provide material advantages. Like dozens of other countries, Sri Lanka and China signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for “cooperation on the Belt and Road Initiative” in 2014, but it is only an understanding to be part of a shared story and not a legally binding agreement. The MOUs are ceremonial and serve as reminders of already existing bilateral relations, foreign policies and ongoing diplomacy. There is no executive president, chairman, officer or director of The Belt and Road Initiative responsible for signing agreements under its name.

If Sri Lanka is part of Belt and Road, it is because of a shared belief and the reproduction of that belief through discourse. When actual consequential agreements are signed, such as the Concession Agreement, they are devoid of any relationship to Belt and Road and wholly independent of it. If Belt and Road ceases to exist, such agreements would not be affected. This, however, does not mean that Belt and Road is not used to legitimise them. After the Concession Agreement was signed in July 2017, *Xinhua* published an article in December titled “Sri Lanka joins China's Belt and Road with operations of Hambantota

Port: PM” stating that “Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said on Saturday that Sri Lanka had joined China's Belt and Road Initiative with the launch of operations at the Hambantota Port through a joint venture between China and Sri Lanka” (fig. 3.16).²⁸ It is indeed odd that Sri Lanka joining Belt and Road is presented as exciting news in late 2017 considering that officials of both countries have been making prodigious claims over the previous three years on Sri Lanka’s unique significance to China’s new maritime Silk Road. When Xi Jinping visited Sri Lanka in September 2014 (as the first Chinese head of state to do so in 28 years), he remarked: “I hope this visit can carry forward the profound feelings between the two peoples and make the ship of China-Sri Lanka friendship ride the waves and wind and move forward on the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st Century.”²⁹ Did the two countries not “move forward” on Belt and Road until the Concession Agreement was signed and three years after Xi’s historic visit? Between the agreement and the visit, *Xinhua* published a map showing Sri Lanka as a stop on the Belt and Road; the MOU was signed; Sri Lanka “reiterated its active participation in the Belt and Road initiative during Wickremesinghe’s visit to Beijing in April 2016”³⁰; and China and Sri Lanka signed a series of agreements including the “Framework Agreement for the Promoting of Investment and Economic Cooperation” at the Belt and Road Forum in early 2017.³¹ Did these claims and agreements not solidify Sri Lanka as a “Belt and Road country”?

Hambantota port is associated to Belt and Road through shifty public relations campaigns, media articles and the word of pundits and politicians. There appears to be no standard—legal or commercial—to judge whether it (or any other port) is a part of Belt and Road. In fact, even without Belt and Road, Sri Lanka had declared itself as part of a new Silk Road in 2010 when Hambantota’s first phase was being completed. In a policy framework that year, titled *Sri Lanka: The Emerging Wonder of Asia*, Mahinda Rajapaksa remarks:

“The objective of our next massive leap forward is to transform Sri Lanka into a strategically important economic centre of the world. My determination therefore, is to transform Sri Lanka to be the Pearl of the Asian Silk Route once again, in modern terms.”³²

Rajapaksa is able to merely conjure “Silk Route” to position Sri Lanka within a new twenty-first century spatial paradigm. Even earlier than that, in 2005 Rajapaksa wrote in his election manifesto: “I am determined to make our country the centre of the Asian silk route once again taking advantage of its unique geographical location.”³³ Sri Lanka did not need Belt and Road to assert itself as part of a Silk Road or a new Indian Ocean hub, because it has a thriving port in Colombo and Hambantota port was under construction with the claim of becoming “the biggest port constructed on land in the 21s century.”³⁴ But new logistics infrastructure disassociated from alluring regional paradigms of cooperation is not that politically convenient. When Belt and Road did come along, it was an opportune moment for Sri Lanka to substantiate its unilateral proclamation of being a modern Silk Road country, especially considering Hambantota port was fully underwritten by China as a logistics superpower and forbearer of all Silk Roads.

Hambantota port is a construct of narrations, but it is also hard infrastructure made of concrete and steel and located on real land and sea. If the noise of narration can be ignored, Hambantota port can be better understood simply as pure infrastructure, which means it is inherently political with all the consequences and problems it inevitably entails. Much international analyses and political discourses on Hambantota port, however, have been focused on its association to Belt and Road and how China seeks to exploit it. This has transformed Hambantota port from being really-existing infrastructure to a geopolitical abstraction. This is foremost exemplified in the framing of Hambantota port’s geography into a “strategic location” as I explore here in some detail.

“Strategic location” is repeated in news media and by proponents and critics as a matter-of-fact quality of Hambantota port. Rajapaksa’s above statement in the 2010 policy framework continues: “Using our strategic geographical location effectively, I will develop our motherland as a Naval, Aviation, Commercial, Energy and Knowledge Hub, serving as a key link between the East and the West” (fig. 3.17).³⁵ Presumably, this claim of a “link between the East and the West” is based on the often repeated statistic that Sri Lanka, and particularly Hambantota port, is a dozen nautical miles from the “East-West shipping route” where 70,000-80,000 ships are said to pass a year. Of course it is natural for any country with a desire to be a part of global logistics networks to highlight its geographic advantages; but is Hambantota port any more “strategically located” than other shipping ports in Eurasia? If Hambantota port’s location is so strategic, it is indeed odd why it was a monumental failure and Sri Lanka was forced to hand it over to Chinese management in 2017. Did the location—as the dominant asset of the port—not compensate for any other shortfalls the port may have faced to become commercially successful?

Although often evoked to describe Hambantota port’s location, it is not clear exactly what the “East-West shipping route” refers to. It could be interpreted to extend from the south coasts of Japan and South Korea, along China’s east coast, towards South East Asia, through the Strait of Malacca, across the Indian Ocean, into the Gulf of Aden, passed the Red Sea, onto the Mediterranean, out the Strait of Gibraltar and ending in the North Sea (fig. 3.18). If ships on this route exit the Strait of Malacca and are directly headed towards the Gulf of Aden, then Hambantota port would indeed be a good location for transshipment, refuelling, supplies and other services, since Sri Lanka is the only country on this stretch of the route. Shipping routes in the Indian Ocean region, however, form a complex network that many ports interact with, including in South East Asia, India, Pakistan, the Persian Gulf and Africa

(fig. 3.19). Hambantota port may be at a “strategic location” but so are many other existing ports and potential new ones.

Amongst the many countries that graze the “East-West shipping route,” it would be difficult to identify one that denies its own strategic relevance or is not described as such. The ASEAN claims that “Thailand’s strategic location makes it an investors’ gateway to Asia.”³⁶ A 1965 article in *Foreign Affairs* claims that “Malaysia is not only a bridge between continental and island Asia but also the gateway between the China Sea and the Indian Ocean.”³⁷ Roland Berger, a global consulting firm, claims “Investors are attracted by Myanmar being one of the last frontier markets, with more than 50 million people, the government’s commitment to liberalization and strategic location.”³⁸ A World Economic Forum brief claims “Bangladesh is strategically situated between two of the rising powers of the 21st century, India and China, and serves as a gateway to the Bay of Bengal.”³⁹ These claims are the same for countries on the other side of the Indian Ocean. About Eritrea, a *Reuters* article states: “The small Horn of African nation is also planning another free zone in Assab port, near the Djibouti border, as it seeks to take advantage of its strategic location next to bustling shipping lanes to-and-from the Suez Canal.”⁴⁰ Of course the same “strategic location” prescription goes for all the ports on the Red Sea and the Mediterranean sea.

Going beyond the Eurasian littoral and island countries, “strategic location” is ascribed to port countries along the African coast. The World Bank claims that “With its strategic location, the Dar es Salaam Port is the gateway for 90 percent of Tanzania’s trade, clearing US\$15 billion of merchandise annually.”⁴¹ The US Department of Commerce claims that “Cape Town is South Africa’s second biggest seaport and its strategic location ideally positions it as a hub terminal for cargo to South America and the Far East.”⁴² All the examples above are not unique exploitations of “strategic location,” but the standard

language through which any port serving global trade is described. Furthermore, going beyond the maritime context, it is difficult to name even a land-locked country whose location is not claimed to be strategic for one reason or another. Kazakhstan is often claimed to be a “strategically located gateway” for commerce and communications between Europe and Asia.⁴³ Kazakhstan’s Khorgos Gateway, considered as the biggest dry port in the world (discussed earlier in Chapter 1) is located at the furthest location on land from any sea or ocean. Even though it is located at the infamous “pole of inaccessibility,” it too has a claim of being “strategically located on the Kazakhstan-Chinese border.”⁴⁴ Just as “Silk Road” can be applied to any Eurasian country to create a sense of historical relevance, so too can “strategic” for spatial relevance. There is no criteria for what constitutes a “strategic location” (other than a conviction), but the label can be applied to broad geographies and still evoke a sense of uniqueness and importance. Under the pretext of geographic observation, “strategic location” is a term of opportunistic discourse, regional narratives, and a property of aims, interests and imagined potentials.

That Hambantota port is a “strategic location” is nonetheless posited as a fact in geopolitical, security and, of course, in strategic analysis. Because of the Chinese connection, “strategic location” is used to create a narrative of Hambantota port on antagonistic terms. This was clear in Hambantota’s pre-Belt and Road framing by US and Indian analysts as a “strategic pearl” within the String of Pearls paradigm (see Chapter 2). In a 2012 interview on China’s construction of ports in the Indian Ocean, prominent geopolitical analyst Robert D. Kaplan remarks: “...the Indian Ocean is sort of the world’s energy interstate and China will have a maritime presence, perhaps even a naval presence in some distant morrow. So the opening of this port in south Sri Lanka is of real geopolitical significance.”⁴⁵ Well after such String of Pearls-inspired perspectives were largely superseded by Belt and Road’s trade-

oriented “geocultural” narrative on Chinese infrastructure, Hambantota port’s location continues to be defined on strategic terms. Governments to pundits reflexively use “strategic location” as the central quality of Hambantota port to create meaning out of its perplexing but still ordinary existence as a shipping port. A 2015 article in Indian *Defence Review*, a prominent defense and foreign policy publication, on Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean claims that “Hambantota is basically a container port for China but due to its proximity, strategic location, increasing influence of Chinese (sic) and visit of a nuclear submarine to Colombo port there is need for closely watching Sri Lankan attitude and actions.”⁴⁶ Here, it is first admitted that Hambantota is a commercial port, but then its “strategic location” is used to imagine it as a potential Chinese threat. Even though China’s naval visit was to Colombo, the assertion of threat is premised on Hambantota’s “strategic location.” It is an especially mystifying assertion considering that since 2010, Colombo has been host to more than 200 naval visits, including by India’s INS Vikramaditya aircraft carrier in January 2016, the US’s USS Nimitz aircraft carrier in October 2017 and Japan’s largest warship in October 2018. As of 2020, Hambantota port itself has never been visited by the Chinese navy, but US, Russian and Japanese navies have actually visited it (fig. 3.20). Outside of obviously biased military perspectives, prominent international research organisations also assert that Hambantota port is a strategic location for China as a pretext for non-geographic and non-spatial analyses of it.

After the framework agreement to lease Hambantota port to China in early 2017, “strategic location” intersects with “debt” to produce the often repeated idea of the port being a “debt-trap.” The idea suggests that China lures countries into accepting loans for infrastructure that they can not actually pay back. The argument goes that China can consequently demand these countries to concede strategically located infrastructure as a form

of repayment. It was introduced by Indian “geostrategist” Brahma Chellaney in his 2017 article “China’s Debt-Trap Diplomacy” where he states:

Through its \$1 trillion “one belt, one road” initiative, China is supporting infrastructure projects in strategically located developing countries, often by extending huge loans to their governments. As a result, countries are becoming ensnared in a debt trap that leaves them vulnerable to China’s influence.⁴⁷

As I explored in Chapter 2, the statement that Belt and Road is worth \$1 trillion is a total fiction, as it is not an actual program that can be accounted for. Also, China gives out loans for thousands of development projects with a focus on infrastructure in developing countries all over Eurasia, Africa and South America and of course they cannot all be strategically located (fig. 3.21). But in Chellaney’s argument a selective few simply are by virtue of Chinese involvement. Since it has already been super established in geopolitics that Hambantota port is a strategic location for China to secure its oil supplies, “encircle” India, and use in a hypothetical military conflict, Chellaney uses it as a convenient example—as “Exhibit A”—to make his argument for a Chinese take-over plot using debt. That argument, however, has been extensively debunked. Sri Lankan economists Dushni Weerakoon and Sisira Jayasuriya point out that the assertion China took control of the port because Sri Lanka could not pay back the loans for it “is a story based more on fiction than fact.”⁴⁸ They point out that Sri Lanka’s foreign debt repayment problems are much deeper and older than recent Chinese loans (which made up less than 10 per cent of the country’s total foreign debt in 2017) and Sri Lanka has been caught in a typical cycle of lower middle income countries borrowing ever increasingly to pay past debts and finance ongoing deficits; in this view, Hambantota port is a symptom of Sri Lanka’s debt problem and not a cause of it. American political scientist Deborah Brautigam—who has produced extensive analysis of decades of Chinese funded infrastructure in Africa and Asia—has dismissed the debt-trap as a figure of

“story telling.” In her 2020 paper titled *A Critical Look at Chinese ‘Debt-Trap Diplomacy’: The Rise of a Meme*, she suggests that it is the result of “fear” and “negativity bias” towards China and that there is no evidence to suggest that China has intentions of seizing assets using debt as a bait.⁴⁹ Others have argued that the Concession Agreement was solely a decision by Sri Lanka to convert a loss-making port into a long-term foreign direct investment that only China was willing to risk.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the years of debt-trap discourse that follow Chellaney’s theory omit the fact that the final Concession Agreement has a provision for Sri Lanka to buy back 20% stake in the port from CM Port after 10 years to give it 50% ownership. Of course China potentially having only a 50% share as early as 2027 goes against the narrative of a total Chinese takeover plot. Perhaps most significantly, as mentioned earlier, the Agreement did not change the conditions of the original loans for the port and Sri Lanka is still burdened with repaying them.⁵¹ Finally, Chellaney’s assertion that Hambantota port is a strategic location that China gained by deliberately extending unsustainable loans “through its \$1 trillion ‘one belt, one road’ initiative” is completely moot considering that the loans (for both the first and second phases) of Hambantota port were negotiated before Belt and Road even existed. China’s financial involvement with Hambantota port is a multidimensional affair that can be analysed from many critical perspectives, but “debt-trap” makes good story telling and depends on first declaring Hambantota port to be a “strategic location” that China is determined to seize at any cost. Far from having critical value, such stories are absorbed into Belt and Road’s metastructure where the ultimate effect is a negation of the actual political, social and economic conditions under which infrastructure is materialised.

Hambantota port is declared as strategic for Chinese interests, but so are all other locations in the world from the Arctic to Antarctica, Jamaica to Papua New Guinea, from the

South China Sea to Greenland, and from outer space to cyberspace. The US-based Arctic Institute for example claims that “In the case of Greenland, the island’s strategic location and abundant natural resources make it an attractive partner for China’s Arctic strategy.”⁵² An article published by the Australia-based Lowy Institute on the expansion of a commercial airport by CHEC in Papua New Guinea begins with the statement “Manus Island is a vital strategic location. Why is a Chinese company being paid to upgrade its airfield?”⁵³ Manus Island is described as a “strategic location” because China is interested in it, as the article makes it explicitly clear: “Within the scope of the sharpening competition between China and its liberal democratic strategic competitors in the Pacific, Manus Island occupies a key location.”⁵⁴ Similarly, when “strategic location” is used to describe Hambantota port in relation to China, it is ideology and discourse formation and not an explanation based on evidence of militarisation. It is used to extract a unique poignancy out of Hambantota port, although it exists in the world like all other commercial ports that can indeed be used for military purposes in the event of war.

When served by infrastructure, any location on earth can become strategic and this is most obvious with the global military infrastructures of satellites, bases and aircraft carriers that function like floating islands. It is also the implicit promise behind Belt and Road, where every country is invited to participate in infrastructure construction to make themselves spatially relevant. Hambantota port is not strategic because of its location, but because it is logistics infrastructure. As a maritime transshipment infrastructure, Hambantota port can conquer the spatial problem of Sri Lanka actually being an island in the vast Indian Ocean with no land connection to any other place. China and Sri Lanka’s own need to celebrate the port and argue for its necessity actually reveals that Sri Lanka’s location is in fact a disadvantage that the port can overcome. Sri Lanka of course enjoys an ideal location relative

to its specific interest in moving things by sea between Europe and China, and it would be accurate to frame the port as efficient or economical, but such qualities are difficult to *geopoliticise* and thus not good for telling stories about Chinese intent behind its construction. Hambantota port's existence is not politically meaningful because of its location, but because of the inherent power of infrastructure to territorialise space. Since all states desire this infrastructural power, its geopolitical value is neutral and does not convey a specific advantage to China. "Strategic location" does convey that advantage and thus can be used to create a narrative of Hambantota port as both an exceptional opportunity and an extraordinary threat. While the world is distracted with the geopolitical abstractions of "String of Pearls," "strategic location," "debt trap" and other dubious ideas, China marches on with the construction of real infrastructure with real impact.

Figure 3.16. Article from *Xinhua* on Sri Lanka joining Belt and Road after the signing of the Concession Agreement on July 29, 2017.

Xinhua, “Sri Lanka joins China’s Belt and Road with operations of Hambantota Port: PM” [Screen print] 2017.

SRI LANKA

A Dynamic Global Hub

The objective of our next massive leap forward is to transform Sri Lanka into a strategically important economic centre of the world. My determination therefore, is to transform Sri Lanka to be the Pearl of the Asian Silk Route once again, in modern terms. Using our strategic geographical location effectively, I will develop our motherland as a Naval, Aviation, Commercial, Energy and Knowledge Hub, serving as a key link between the East and the West.

Mahinda Chintana - Vision for the Future

Figure 3.17. Map in *Sri Lanka: Emerging Wonder of Asia* policy framework highlights Sri Lanka's location relative to hypothetical shipping routes in the Indian Ocean region. It does not indicate where exactly the "link between the East and the West" is.

Department of National Planning, Ministry of Finance and Planning, "Sri Lanka - A Dynamic Global Hub," [Map], 2010.

Figure 3.18. The “East-West shipping route” often associated to Hambantota port could be the “Suez Route” shown on this map, extending from the East China Sea to the English Channel.

Aldis Bulisa and Roberts Skapars, “Existing trade routes between Europe and China,” [Map], 2014.

Figure 3.19. Maps shows live traffic flow of cargo vessels (green) and tankers (red) in the waterways of the eastern hemisphere based on positions received by satellite on August 3rd, 2020.

Marine Traffic [Live map], 2020.

Figure 3.20. Top: US navy ship USNS Millinocket (shown) and USS Spruance visit Hambantota port in April 2019. Bottom: Russian navy ships 'Tribuc' (shown) and 'Vinogradov' visit Hambantota port in September 2020. Unlike US, Russian and Japanese navies, the Chinese navy has not visited Hambantota port as of 2020.

Figure 3.21. Map shows world-wide Chinese financing of development projects in 138 countries and territories as of September, 2018. The largest circles indicate projects in the multibillion-dollar range.

AidData, “Mapping China's Global Development Footprint,” [Interactive Map], 2018.

3.3 Sri Lanka: Infrastructure and Conflict

When China's Communist Party politburo member Yang Jiechi visited Sri Lanka a decade after the end of the country's civil war in October 2020, president Gotabaya Rajapaksa took the opportunity to state that "China extensively supported us to defeat terrorism."⁵⁵ In the same breath, he reiterated that Hambantota port and other major projects would not have been possible without China's contribution.⁵⁶ Six years prior to that in 2013, Sri Lanka's then foreign minister G.L. Peiris remarked in an interview with the *Global Times* that "China has contributed very significantly to our economic development by assisting us with infrastructure after the eradication of terrorism."⁵⁷ Three years prior to that in 2010, president Rajapaksa remarked in his reelection manifesto that he expects 10,000 ships to dock at Hambantota port a year and "On that basis, in a manner similar to the way in which we eradicated terrorism, I am certain we will be able to eradicate poverty in our country permanently, by developing the Port sector."⁵⁸ In Sri Lanka's own official acknowledgements and interpretations of domestic events that lead to the end of the war in 2009, the intersection of China, infrastructure and conflict are not circumstantial. They are materially intertwined and have determined the country's subsequent new identity, sense of progress and place in the world.

I present here a timeline of official agreements, documents, meetings and speeches that reveal how conflict and infrastructure are correlated national concerns. It begins with the signing of the historic Ceasefire Agreement between Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 2002 and ends with Xi Jinping inviting Sri Lanka to join his new Maritime Silk Road in 2014. It is in this period that China and Sri Lanka establish deep infrastructural ties, Hambantota port is proposed, planned, funded and executed, Sri Lanka positions itself as

the “centre of the Asian silk,” and the country’s 27-year old ethnic conflict is concluded. As all of this is precede Belt and Road—thus outside of its narrative frame—the substantive context of Hambantota port is real war and real questions of sovereignty, not imaginary wars between major powers and unsubstantiated assertions of a Chinese threat based on its “strategic location” that appear in the geopolitical discourse since Belt and Road. The timeline is followed with my interpretation of its events.

CONFLICT & INFRASTRUCTURE

Sri Lanka 2002-2014

FEBRUARY 2002

1

*Agreement on a Ceasefire between
the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*

“The overall objective of the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is to find a negotiated solution to the ongoing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The GOSL and the LTTE recognise the importance of bringing an end to the hostilities and improving the living conditions for all inhabitants affected by the conflict.”

Conflict & Terrorism	Intersection in Official Documents, Meetings, Agreements and Speeches	Infrastructure & Hambantota Port
<p>“Many people have noted during the last year that Sri Lanka is at a pivotal point in our history and this is undoubtedly true. The peace process has raised hopes throughout the island that a genuine, lasting peace may be within reach.” (a)</p> <p>“A three pronged strategy is being followed to solve the conflict. This includes negotiation of a political settlement, advancement of a political and constitutional framework that fulfils the aspirations of all, and expediting development in war-torn areas.” (b)</p>	<p>DECEMBER 2002</p> <p>Government of Sri Lanka releases policy framework:</p> <p><i>Sri Lanka: Vision and Strategy for Accelerated Development</i></p>	<p>“Although everybody wishes to enjoy rapid progress we cannot ignore the constraints created by the public debt crisis, the inherited weaknesses in power and infrastructure and the impact of an uncertain world economy.” (c)</p> <p>“To strengthen the regional ports, over the longer-term, Hambantota is to be developed as a major port and, when peace is secure, the Trincomalee port will be upgraded.” (d)</p> <p>“Development of Hambantota Port-Alternate container terminal harbor which is closer to the main Indian Ocean Sea route, protected from both major monsoons and is expected to open up the Southern Province for commercial and service sector activity in the medium term.” (e)</p>

2

<p>“On the situation in Sri Lanka and South Asia, Hu said that since last year, the peace process in Sri Lanka has scored constant progress, which we welcome. China appreciates and supports the Sri Lankan governments efforts to promote the peace process in Sri Lanka, and hope the process will continue.”</p> <p>“Wickremasinghe briefed Hu on the domestic peace process in Sri Lanka. He said that in past years, China has supported Sri Lanka in maintaining state sovereignty and territorial integrity, provided precious political support and economic assistance to Sri Lanka, and help Sri Lanka to tide over the most difficult times. The Sri Lankan people will never forget this”</p>	<p>AUGUST 2003</p> <p>Sri Lankan prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe meets Chinese president Hu Jintao in Beijing</p> <p>Account of visit published on the website of the Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China</p>	<p>“Sri Lanka is deepening economic reform, and it is very important for Sri Lanka’s economic and social development to develop all-round cooperation with China. We hope to constantly deepen bilateral all-round friendly cooperation in economic and trade fields.”</p>
<p>DECEMBER 2004</p> <p>Sri Lanka struck by Tsunami causing 31,000 deaths</p> <p>LTTE and government temporarily cease hostilities and cooperate on tsunami response. Most coastal areas are affected with severe loss of life and property. Hambantota town and area of future port on the south coast are heavily damaged.</p>		

<p>“She reiterated Sri Lanka firmly upholds the one-China policy and supports the adoption of the Anti-Secession Law by the National People's Congress of China and all the efforts made by the Chinese side to safeguard territorial integrity.”</p> <p>“China expressed confidence in the Government’s ongoing efforts to reach a peaceful negotiated settlement of all issues involved.”</p>	<p>APRIL 2005</p> <p>Chinese premier Wen Jiabao meets Sri Lankan president Chandrika Kumaratunga in Colombo</p> <p>Account of visit summarised on the website of the Foreign Ministry of the People’s Republic of China</p>	<p>“Following the talks, Wen and Kumaratunga attended the signing ceremony of 6 bilateral cooperative documents including the Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement between the Governments of China and Sri Lanka.”</p>	5
<p>“They resolved to relentlessly fight against the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism and to consult and coordinate on regional and international action being taken to prevent such [recent assassination of Sri Lankan foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar by the LTTE] terrorist acts.”</p> <p>“The President described the efforts being made to ensure stability in the country and efforts to achieve a durable peace essential for the welfare, safety and freedom of all communities in Sri Lanka, despite difficulties posed by the terrorist element.”</p>	<p>AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2005</p> <p>Sri Lankan president Chandrika Kumaratunga meets Chinese president Hu Jintao in Beijing</p> <p>Joint Communique published on the website of the Foreign Ministry of the People’s Republic of China</p>	<p>“The Sri Lankan side proposed its projects for priority development, which included the Hambantota Bunkering System and Tank Farm Project; the Puttalam Coal Power Project; the Express Rail Link between Katunayake and Ratmalana and construction of the Colombo-Katunayake Airport Expressway. The Sri Lankan side requested Chinese financing for the above-mentioned projects. The Chinese side stated that it would encourage and support its financial institutions to effectively examine the request.”</p> <p>“The two sides expressed their satisfaction at the increasing participation of Chinese companies under different forms of partnership in infrastructure improvement and the development process.”</p>	6

<p>“It is hereby agreed to protect, defend and preserve the unitary nature of the Sri Lankan State under any solutions to be presented, formed or formulated for the purpose of the resolution of Sri Lanka's national question.”</p> <p>“As it is axiomatic that Norway has shown unprecedented bias and partiality towards the LTTE in her role as a facilitator in the negotiation process between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE and in the monitoring mission of the Ceasefire Agreement and also as she has undoubtedly failed to act impartially in performing her obligations, it is agreed hereby to reconsider seriously whether the Norway should be allowed to engage in those activities further and the necessary actions shall be taken accordingly.”</p>	<p>SEPTEMBER 2005</p> <p>Prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa nominated for president by Sri Lanka Freedom Party</p> <p>Signs pre-election policy agreement with Sinhala nationalist party Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna</p>	<p>“The harbours, seaports, airports, State commercial banks, the Petroleum Corporation, Ceylon Electricity Board and all other government establishments and including water and mineral resources which are nerve centers of the national economy shall not be privatized and also shall agree to abolish any such actions whatsoever taken so far towards privatization of the aforesaid institutions, services and resources.”</p>	7
<p>“My primary aim would be to arrive at a peaceful political settlement where the power of each and every citizen is strengthened to the maximum, without being trapped within concepts such as traditional homelands and right to self determination.</p> <p>“In the course of the consultative process, I shall initiate direct talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.”</p> <p>“In addition, I shall seek and obtain an Asian cooperation with China, Russia and Pakistan, who have been extremely helpful to us. I shall also hold open and frank discussions with the Co-chairs of the peace talks, United States of America, European Commission, Japan and Norway.</p>	<p>OCTOBER 2005</p> <p>Rajapaksa releases election manifesto:</p> <p><i>Mahinda Chintana: Towards a New Sri Lanka Victory for Sri-Lanka</i></p>	<p>“I am determined to make our country the centre of the Asian silk route once again taking advantage of its unique geographical location. I intend to develop it into a navigation, aviation, trading and commercial center linking the East and the West.”</p> <p>“Hambantota will be developed as an intermediate harbour. An economic zone comprising the areas between Hambantota and Embilipitiya will be established for the supply of fuel, cooked food, drugs and medicine and other services to foreign ships.”</p>	8

<p>"My government will give the highest priority to launch a new peace process to usher in a lasting peace through a political solution to the country (sic) national question. Our method is discussion instead of war. We are aware that such discussion is not simple and easy. Yet it is the only way to peace. I wish to state here that my government is ready to have direct talks with the liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam."</p>	<p>NOVEMBER 2005</p> <p>Mahinda Rajapaksa wins presidential election and addresses parliament</p>	<p>"Creation of a government infrastructure that will safe guard Sri Lankas sovereignty, territorial integrity, unitary nature of the state and the peoples national identity with the participation of all sections of our society as positive shareholders in a pluralistic system for the maximum devolution of power within an undivided sovereign democratic republic.</p>	<p>9</p>
<p>"The conflict during the last 23 years has resulted in the loss of over 65,000 lives, injuries to persons, disappearances and displacement of persons and destruction of social and economic infrastructure. It has destroyed the fabric of civil society in the North-East. The conflict has displaced over 1,000,000 persons and large numbers (estimates unconfirmed) of people have fled to foreign countries as refugees. Of the 200,000 internally displaced families, around 30,000 are widows. Also 300,000 children have been affected by the war, of which 50,000 are in the welfare centres.</p>	<p>NOVEMBER 2006</p> <p>Rajapaksa government releases policy framework:</p> <p><i>Mahinda Chintana: Vision for a New Sri Lanka: A Ten Year Horizon Development Framework 2006 - 2016</i></p> <p>Framework includes:</p> <p><i>Randora: National Infrastructure Development Programme</i></p>	<p>"The proposed Hambantota seaport and international airport would be a driving force to attract larger industrial and commercial sector to the region. Therefore, development of urban infrastructure in Greater Hambantota will be given priority in the urban development plan focused on next ten years period."</p> <p>"The implementation of mega power projects such as the Norochcholai and Trincomalee Coal Fired Power Plants, mega Ports and Aviation development projects such as the expansion of the Colombo and Galle Ports, new Ports in Hambantota and Oluvil, the new International Airport in Weeravila and urban infrastructural development projects such as the development of Expressways, National Highways and Rail Networks will transform Sri Lanka's landscape into a regional growth centre."</p>	<p>10</p>

“The Sri Lankan side briefed the Chinese side on the domestic situation in Sri Lanka and action being taken in the interest of **peace and harmony, against terrorism**. The Chinese side reaffirmed that it would continue to support Sri Lanka in its efforts to safeguard the country's **sovereignty, national unity and territorial integrity against terrorist forces**. They welcomed the positive steps taken by the Government of Sri Lanka to reach a peaceful resolution of ethnic issues through negotiations.”

“The two sides **resolved to fight tirelessly against the three evil forces of terrorism, separatism and extremism** and will step up consultation and coordinating on regional and international counter-terrorism action.”

FEBRUARY 2007

Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapakse meets Chinese president Hu Jintao in Beijing on "China-Sri Lanka Friendship Year".

Joint Press Communique published on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China

“It was noted that discussions have proceeded on the **Hambantota Development Zone** which includes harbor development, a **bunkering system and tank farm**, and positive progress had been made between the **Chinese companies** concerned and the Sri Lankan authorities.”

”Understanding the **desire** and request of the Sri Lanka Government for **infrastructure** improvement and economic development, the Chinese side expressed readiness to give **positive** consideration to facilitating the **financing** of relevant projects. The Sri Lankan side expressed its deep **gratitude** for assistance given through **technical** support and financial facilities for major **infrastructure** projects in Sri Lanka including the Puttalam Coal Power Project on which work has commenced, and other **infrastructure** projects and supplies on which decisions have been already taken.

11

MARCH 2007

Sri Lanka Ports Authority and Chinese consortium led by China Harbour Engineering Company sign agreement on Phase 1 of Hambantota Port Development Project

12

<p>“The Government of Sri Lanka yesterday (3rd January 2008) formally notified the Royal Norwegian Government of its decision to terminate the Agreement on a ‘Ceasefire (CFA) between the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam’ concluded on 22nd February 2002.”</p> <p>“In the meantime, I wish to underline that the termination of the CFA does not in anyway hamper the process of moving towards a negotiated political settlement.”</p>	<p>JANUARY (3rd) 2008</p> <p>Sri Lanka abrogates 2002 Ceasefire Agreement</p> <p>Foreign minister of Sri Lanka Rohitha Bogollagama makes official announcement at press briefing</p>	<p>“It should be noted that it was only following the LTTE blocking of water supply to the East at the Mavilaru anicut, that the Government was compelled to undertake military operations against the LTTE in order to protect the civilian population and vital strategic assets including the Trincomalee Port.”</p>	13
<p>JANUARY (15TH) 2008</p> <p>Construction begins on Phase 1 of Hambantota port by China Harbour Engineering Company and Sinohydro Corporation</p>			14

MAY (19th) 2009

15

Mahinda Rajapaksa declares Sri Lanka has been liberated from terrorism
after the Sri Lankan military defeats LTTE

“**Condemning** all attacks that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam launched on the **civilian population** and its practice of using civilians as human shields,...”

“**Welcoming** the conclusion of hostilities and the **liberation** by the Government of Sri Lanka of tens of thousands of its citizens that were kept by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam against their will as hostages, as well as the efforts by the Government to ensure the **safety and security** of all Sri Lankans and to bring permanent peace to the country,...”

MAY (26-27th) 2009

U.N. Human Rights Council
passes resolution submitted by
Sri Lanka during Special Session:

*Assistance to Sri Lanka in the Promotion
and Protection of Human Rights*

Resolution passes by 29 votes in favour
(including China), 12 against and 6
abstentions after rejecting EU proposal
to investigate human rights violations
during the final phase of the war.

“Emphasizing that, after the
conclusion of hostilities, the
priority in terms of human rights
remains the provision of assistance
to ensure the relief and
rehabilitation of persons affected by
the conflict, including internally
displaced persons, as well as the
**reconstruction of the country’s
economy and infrastructure**,...”

16

"We **defeated terrorism** and **separatism**, which outcome at one time was thought to be impossible. We are now ready to lead our children and our **nation** to a brighter future as stakeholders of a truly free **motherland**."

I am also pleased that I was able to defeat the conspiracy to grant oil exploration rights to a Norwegian Company, TGS Nopec, through the operation of an **illegal ceasefire agreement** through which the Northern and Eastern sea coast of our country were to be handed over to the **brutal terrorist outfit**, LTTE. (p.16)

JANUARY 2010

Mahinda Rajapaksa releases election manifesto after calling early election:

*Mahinda Chintana: Vision for the Future
Towards a new Sri Lanka*

"In the midst of tremendous obstacles, we **commenced** the construction of the **Hambantota Port** by committing a substantial investment during the year 2008. I am therefore happy to note that we now expect the **first ship** to be anchored at this new Port by November 2012." (p.10)

"The new Hambantota Port is located within 10 nautical miles from the **world's biggest Silk Route shipping lane**. Around 70,000 – 80,000 vessels annually, or around 200 vessels daily, sail past Hambantota." (p.10)

17

JANUARY 2010

Mahinda Rajapaksa wins presidential reelection defeating Sarath Fonseka

18

<p>The Uthuru Wasanthaya (Vadakkim Wasantham), the Northern reawakening programme is the accelerated regional development initiative of the Government to rebuild the Northern part of Sri Lanka liberated from LTTE in May 2009. This Province together with adjoining districts in the North Central Province and Eastern Province, suffered severe setback and lost the entire infrastructure facilities and the economy during the 26 year long LTTE terrorism.</p>	<p>AUGUST 2010</p> <p>Government of Sri Lanka releases policy framework:</p> <p><i>Mahinda Chintana 2010: Vision for the Future Sri Lanka Emerging Wonder of Asia</i></p>	<p>19</p> <p>“My determination therefore, is to transform Sri Lanka to be the Pearl of the Asian silk route once again, in modern terms. “ (p.11)</p> <p>“By building the world’s largest inland sea port in Hambantota, Southern Province will create another unique landmark with the largest harbour in the country.”</p> <p>“All ships travelling to Europe, the Far East, Middle East, Africa, Australia and the Pacific Rim countries will be served by the Hambantota and Colombo ports while the capacity in these ports will be enhanced to accommodate modern container vessels.”</p>
<p>“On that November 19, when I took over this country, it was divided and the Sri Lankan nation was losing this country. Yet, we toiled day and night with patience and commitment, facing all hostile forces, unshaken in the midst of rising storms. Subsequently, on another memorable 19th - May 19 - we united this country, achieving a victory over terrorism that had its global echoes. Today, on this November 19, I take over this country again with the determination, strength and courage to raise my motherland to a position of greatness in the world.”</p>	<p>NOVEMBER (19th) 2010</p> <p>Rajapaksa sworn in as president for second term and gives speech:</p> <p><i>Let's Build a Great Nation</i></p>	<p>20</p> <p>“It is where people who follow four different faiths live in harmony and where today many communities live in brotherhood; and where the world’s largest harbour and five other ports are being built, and the strides of development are proceeding to build airports, expressways and massive power stations.”</p> <p>“All development processes carried out in the North and the East are a closure of the highways to terrorism. I strongly believe that this infrastructure to banish poverty is a major part of a political solution.”</p>
<p>I recall the pledge I gave my nation five years ago, when after casting my vote at the polling station at Medamulana, I promised the nation that I would bring an honoured peace to this country and also build a new Sri Lanka. I am glad to state that I was able to fulfill both these promises within five years, even before the end of my term.</p>	<p>NOVEMBER (18th) 2010</p> <p>Opening ceremony held for Phase 1 of Hambantota port</p> <p>Mahinda Rajapaksa gives speech with deputy prime minister of China in attendance.</p>	<p>21</p> <p>“Today, we have left our mark, not only on the Sri Lankan map but also the world map. Today the Port of Magampura saw the berthing of its first ship. In the maritime maps of the world this will be marked as an important port.”</p> <p>“Our nation was at a strategic location on the Silk Route which joined your country with Europe. Thus, we are very old friends in the naval and trade sectors. In future too, this will be the same.</p>

<p>“With high expectations of seeing an end to terrorist activities that was impeding development activities in the country, the Central Bank took on the challenge to drive towards prosperity. One of the steps the Bank took to inspire the nation to work diligently, with unity, to achieve development and prosperity was through a new series of currency notes. “</p>	<p>FEBRUARY 2011</p> <p>Central Bank of Sri Lanka issues new currency notes under the theme of:</p> <p>“Development, Prosperity and Sri Lankan Dancers”</p>	<p>22</p> <p>“At the center of the front of the note, is a drawing of the view of the Port of Colombo as seen now and in history.”</p> <p>“The newly constructed bridge in Manampitiya appears on the center of the note. “</p> <p>The Norochcholai Coal Power Plant Project is at the center of the note, above which is the Laxapana waterfall with the cables that transmit the hydro-power generated by the waterfall.</p> <p>On the front center of the note, a drawing of the newly constructed Ramboda tunnel can be seen.</p> <p>At the center of the note, drawings of two dams appear. The one on the left is the Weheragala dam. The faint image on the right is the Canyon dam.</p>
<p>“The Panel’s determination of credible allegations reveals a very different version of the final stages of the war than that maintained to this day by the Government of Sri Lanka. The Government says it pursued a “humanitarian rescue operation” with a policy of “zero civilian casualties.” In stark contrast, the Panel found credible allegations, which if proven, indicate that a wide range of serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law was committed both by the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, some of which would amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Indeed, the conduct of the war represented a grave assault on the entire regime of international law designed to protect individual dignity during both war and peace.”</p> <p>“Most civilian casualties in the final phases of the war were caused by Government shelling.” (p.ii)</p>	<p>MARCH 2011</p> <p>UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon releases report on alleged violations of international humanitarian and human rights law during the final stages of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka</p> <p><i>Report of the Secretary General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka</i></p>	<p>23</p> <p>“It says the victims of the conflict will benefit from overall development of the conflict-affected areas and that the overall reconstruction of the North (and East) will contribute to the restoration of peace. The Sri Lankan Government points out that, in the performance of its functions, it is ‘showing contrition’ by touching the ‘hearts and minds’ of its people. It is spending and investing in the North and East for infrastructure, facilities and housing programmes, among other measures, ‘to some extent at the expense of the rest of the country.’” (p.79)</p>

<p>“China is also engaged in considerable work on infrastructure development in many parts of the country, that contribute to the rapid economic development that we seek to achieve after the successful defeat of terrorism.”</p>	<p>AUGUST 2011</p> <p>President Mahinda Rajapaksa meets Chinese premier Wen Jiabao in Beijing</p> <p>Account of visit published on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka</p>	<p>“Prime Minister Wen Jiabao praised the government’s ability to complete the first phase of the Hambantota port and said his government is willing to provide financial assistance for the construction of the second phase of the port.”</p> <p>“Expressing his gratitude for the Chinese assistance for the number of ongoing projects in Sri Lanka, President Rajapaksa apprised the Chinese Prime Minister about the post-conflict developments in the country and the government’s commitment to carry out major infrastructure development to ensure balanced economic progress in all regions.”</p>	24
<p>“In evaluating the Sri Lanka experience in the context of allegations of violations of IHL [International Humanitarian Law], the Commission is satisfied that the military strategy that was adopted to secure the LTTE held areas was one that was carefully conceived, in which the protection of the civilian population was given the highest priority.”</p> <p>“The Commission, strongly recommends that a separate event be set apart on the National Day to express solidarity and empathy with all victims of the tragic conflict and pledge our collective commitment to ensure that there should never be such blood-letting in the country again.”</p>	<p>NOVEMBER 2011</p> <p>Government of Sri Lanka releases:</p> <p><i>Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation</i></p>	<p>“As far as the North and the East were concerned, it was further pointed out that the foreign aid that was allocated to these areas, did not go into the projects that directly touched the people i.e. micro projects, small and medium industries. They had been very much focused towards large infrastructure projects. Accordingly it was stressed that what was expected in the form of an economic dividend in the North and the East did not materialize either. Thus, according to this view, an essential pre-requisite for the success of a peace process was lacking.”</p> <p>““My personal view is that the Government is more concerned on massive projects like electrification or major development activities, whereas the basic amenities for the people, the basic infrastructure for the people in the areas are not being attended to and individual needs of the people are not being attended to’.”</p>	25

NOVEMBER 2012

26

Construction begins on Phase 2 of Hambantota port by China Harbour Engineering Company

“First, to maintain high-level exchanges, to keep closer political contacts, and to support each other in **safeguarding independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity** and choosing a development path in accordance with their own national conditions. To strengthen exchange of experience on state governance.”

“Third, to consolidate cooperation in the fields of law enforcement, **security** and defence. To work together to crack down on the **"three evil forces" of terrorism, separatism and extremism**, as well as transnational crimes and drug trafficking.”

MAY 2013

President Rajapaksa meets Chinese president Xi Jinping in Beijing

Account of visit published on the website of the Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China

“Second, to expand the scale of bilateral trade and investment, to accelerate trade facilitation as well as investment and financing cooperation, to broaden cooperation in the fields of agriculture and the application of space technology. Sri Lanka welcomes Chinese businesses participating in **transportation infrastructure construction** in Sri Lanka.”

27

OCTOBER 2013

28

Chinese president Xi Jinping announces “a maritime Silk Road” in address to Indonesian parliament

Chinese president Xi Jinping visits Sri Lanka as first Chinese head of state in 28 years

"Meets president Rajapaksa and welcomes Sri Lanka to join 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road."

Sri Lanka's civil war in the country's north was a long way from Hambantota port's quiet town located on the island's southern shore. At the domestic level, the intersection of war in the north and infrastructure in the south is not a direct spatial overlap, but a timely one. It is a remarkable fact that Hambantota port was proposed in 2002, the very same year the CFA was signed; and construction on it began in January 2008, the very same month the CFA was abrogated by the Sri Lankan government. The first phase of Hambantota port overlaps with the last phase of the war, where Sri Lanka's victory over the LTTE in 2009 falls in between the groundbreaking of Hambantota port in 2008 and its opening in 2010. I believe the timing of these events are not tenuous or coincidental but indicative of how the outcome of one was determined by the other.

Contrary to contemporary beliefs, Sri Lanka's request to China to help fund Hambantota port was made not by Mahinda Rajapaksa, but Chandrika Kumaratunga who served as president between 1994 to 2005. In her last year as president, she met Chinese president Hu Jintao in Beijing and, according to the Joint Communiqué on the meeting, "The Sri Lankan side proposed its projects for priority development, which included the Hambantota Bunkering System and Tank Farm Project."⁵⁹ The communiqué continues "The Chinese side stated that it would encourage and support its financial institutions to effectively examine the request."⁶⁰ In the same meeting, "They resolved to relentlessly fight against the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism and to consult and coordinate on regional and international action being taken to prevent such terrorist acts."⁶¹ That terrorist act was the recent assassination of Sri Lanka's foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar by the LTTE. It was an opportune moment for Sri Lanka to gain the support of China to substantiate its claim of the LTTE as an international terrorist organisation, a claim that was easy to gain support for after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States and the War on Terror that

followed. Following 9/11, China had already established the precedent by deploying “the three evils” as a reactionary policy slogan to reframe ethnic conflict in Xinjiang into a counter-terrorism struggle of good and evil. The slogan also became a central tenet of counter-terrorism cooperation by the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, in which Sri Lanka would become a “dialogue partner” in June 2009, a month after defeating the LTTE.

The high level coordination between China and Sri Lanka to materialise large-scale infrastructure strengthened the existing bond between the two countries. When Sri Lanka faced the dual crises of a rice shortage and a decline in demand for its rubber in the early 1950s, it established a partnership with China to create the Rubber-Rice Pact. Through the pact, China received much needed rubber and Sri Lanka in turn received rice and avoided a national food shortage. This mutual exchange came at the cost of the United States cutting off aid to Sri Lanka as punishment for providing “strategic materials” to communist China. But it was a cost Sri Lanka was willing to pay to establish long-term friendly relations with China as a country of 500 million people, regardless of the competing ideologies between the world’s major powers. The successful pact continued for 30 years until 1982 and in 1957 Sri Lanka was one of the first countries to recognise the PRC over Taiwan as the legitimate government of all China.

As rice and rubber then, infrastructure builds solidarity today. Especially in its early phase, Hambantota port functioned as a concrete object of trust and political transaction between Sri Lanka and China that, I believe, transcend matters of finance, including problems of debt. For Sri Lanka, transcendence was victory in war and global acceptance of its absolute sovereignty over the island, and China was the only country willing and capable of helping achieve it. After Kumaratunga established the relation with China on a platform of anti-terrorism and infrastructure cooperation, it was strengthened in 2007 by Rajapaksa as Sri

Lanka's next president. On that year—which marked the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two countries and called the “China-Sri Lanka Year of Friendship”—Rajapaksa also met with Hu in Beijing and both also resolved to fight against “the three evils.”⁶² The joint communique of the meeting states that discussions have begun on Hambantota port and progress is being made between the relevant Chinese companies and Sri Lankan authorities.⁶³ Rajapaksa reiterated Sri Lanka's support for the “One-China policy” and Hu maintained that China will always support Sri Lanka to “safeguard state sovereignty, national unity and territorial integrity.”⁶⁴ The meeting resulted in Sri Lanka purchasing advanced Chinese military hardware⁶⁵ and receiving tacit support to conclude the war through military means. Rajapaksa's (and Kumaratunga's) meeting with Hu were markedly different to the time Chinese premier Wen Jiabao met Kumaratunga in Colombo in early 2005 where a joint communique stated that “China expressed confidence in the Government's ongoing efforts to reach a peaceful negotiated settlement of all issues involved.”⁶⁶ Similarly when prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe visited Wen Jiabao in Beijing two years before that 2003, he believed “that the peace process in Sri Lanka has made important progress, which created conditions and business opportunities for economic cooperation between enterprises of both countries.”⁶⁷

Naturally, both conflict and development have long been seen by Sri Lanka's polity as the same national problem. For Rajapaksa, the solution to this binary problem was large scale, nation-wide infrastructure that China can deliver on. His determination to use logistics infrastructure and place Sri Lanka at “the centre of the Asian silk route once again” was not possible if the country is engaged in war and it could not win the war if it is engaged in a peace process that had come to an impasse. After six years of failed negotiations and continued military hostilities since the CFA, in January 2008 the Rajapaksa government

unilaterally abrogated the agreement.⁶⁸ Fighting intensified throughout 2008, and in November the Sri Lankan military attacked Kilinochchi, the defacto capital and strong-hold of the LTTE in the country's north. Between November 2008 and May 2009, the Sri Lankan military carried out a relentless assault that resulted in the death of an UN-estimated 40,000 civilians, the internal displacement of more than 290,000 civilians, an unaccountable number of missing persons, and the complete evisceration of the LTTE as a fighting force. The LTTE's leader Velupillai Prabhakaran was killed and on May 19 Rajapaksa officially declared victory over terrorism at a televised speech in parliament.

The number of deaths in just the last months of the war is nearly half of the 80,000-100,000 total deaths over its entire 26-year period that began in 1983. During these final months of unprecedented violence, the Sri Lankan military unflinchingly maintained it was liberating the Tamil people from the LTTE and following a "zero civilian casualty policy"⁶⁹ although its own shelling of civilian areas, including hospitals, caused the majority of deaths.⁷⁰ International calls for Sri Lanka to negotiate a ceasefire and allow humanitarian access was not only unheeded but fiercely denounced as an attempt to give the LTTE time to regroup. There is little doubt that Sri Lanka's commitment to the military solution ignoring international humanitarian law was enabled by the ideological support, diplomatic protection and military aid it received from China. With the Sri Lankan army advancing deeper into the north in the final months leaving behind a trail of death and destruction, pain and suffering, multiple EU-led calls at the UN Security Council to address the situation were consistently rejected by China.⁷¹ Human Rights Watch observed at the time that "Instead of acting, council members have spent a great deal of time wrangling over whether to hold private briefings on Sri Lanka in the UN's basement – which would make the meeting unofficial – or in regular council rooms."⁷² China maintained that the conflict is an "internal matter," not a

threat to international peace and security and any action from foreign powers would be a violation of Sri Lanka's sovereignty. China's foreign policy of non-interference means that in the context of armed conflict such as Sri Lanka's, it engages only with the state, not non-state actors. Unlike Japanese and Norwegian officials who met with both the LTTE and the government of Sri Lanka in their attempts to negotiate peace earlier in the war, Chinese officials have never done so. As non-interference actually means support for the state as the only legitimate entity, beginning in 2005 China increased its military aid and weapons sales to Sri Lanka⁷³ and donated military equipment (including six fighter jets in 2008), all of which played a critical role in the final stages of the war and determined its non-negotiated outcome. While blocking the commemoration of the victims of war, Sri Lanka prominently and proudly displayed Chinese military equipment during its victory parade over the LTTE in June 2009. With China as the indispensable and willing partner, Sri Lanka was able to end the war using pure force, claim it defeated terrorism and completely close the possibility for the Tamil nation to exercise the right of self-determination or gain any form autonomy in the foreseeable future. Just over a year after claiming victory and one day after opening Hambantota port, Rajapaksa draws the historical trajectory of Sri Lanka from ancient civilisations to fighting terrorism to new infrastructures at his swearing in ceremony for second term as president in November 2010:

This is a land with a great history of many centuries, where the Kalawewa, Ruwanwelisaya, Sigiriya, Yoda Ela and Lovamahapaya stand; where the Buddha trod thrice. A land that won our freedom from the world's most powerful imperialism from struggles that lasted nearly four centuries; has defeated the most ruthless and savage terrorists of the world. It is where people who follow four different faiths live in harmony and where today many communities live in brotherhood; and where the world's largest harbour and five other ports are being built, and the strides of development are proceeding to build airports, expressways and massive power stations.⁷⁴

While infrastructure is a technology and used in economies, its function is more than material. In Sri Lanka's case, infrastructure is a vindication of state violence and a path to redemption.

5. IDP shelter destroyed by shelling in second No Fire Zone, April 2009

Source: submission to the Panel by the photographer

101. At the time, the Defence Secretary stated: "We are taking casualties to prevent civilians getting hurt. This is a factor we are very concerned about. Otherwise we could have used so much artillery and just moved on."⁵⁵ The Government announced on 25 February, and again on 27 April, that the SLA was no longer using heavy weapons in the second and third No Fire Zones.⁵⁶ But what was happening on the ground indicated the opposite. Intensive artillery fire had been a core tactic in the SLA's military campaign from the outset. As victory neared, this tactic was not abandoned, but rather its use was intensified, even though the LTTE was now immobilized and surrounded in an area of high civilian density. The intensive shelling also caused many civilians to attempt to flee the area, meeting another of the Government's objectives, to put pressure on civilians to get out of the way. Despite Government pronouncements, satellite images in Annex 3 show that SLA artillery batteries were constantly adjusted to increasingly target the NFZs. The LTTE had fewer heavy weapons left and less space to fire them from.

102. The coastal strip became increasingly crowded, and livable spaces were in short supply. Much of the land where IDPs set up shelters was beach territory, with sandy, waterlogged land unsuitable for human habitation, and it was difficult for IDPs to construct makeshift bunkers to protect themselves. Daily life for the IDPs at that time took place mostly inside the bunker, although some IDPs hoisted white flags over their shelters in an attempt to protect themselves. Fresh water was scarce and food was in such short supply that

⁵⁵ Sri Lanka Government website, <http://www.priu.gov.lk/>, under "Archives", "Civilian safety is the top priority- Defense Secretary", 17 February 2009.

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¹² Gotabaya Rajapaksa, *Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna, 2019), 58.

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⁵³ Thomas Shugart, “A Chinese-built airport next door to a key Australia-US naval base?,” The Lowy Institute, August 7, 2020, www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/chinese-built-airport-next-door-australia-us-funded-navy-port.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ *Ceylon Today*, “China assures SL of continued assistance,” October 10, 2020, <https://ceylontoday.lk/news/china-assures-sl-of-continued-assistance>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Quoted in “Rajapaksa arrives in China on sixth visit,” *Business Standard*, May 27, 2013, www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/rajapaksa-arrives-in-china-on-sixth-visit-113052700782_1.html.

⁵⁸ Mahinda Rajapaksa, *Mahinda Chintana: Vision for the Future* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: United People's Freedom Alliance, 2010), 10.

⁵⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, “China-Sri Lanka Joint Communiqué,” September 4, 2005, www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zjzg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2782_663558/2783_663560/t210145.shtml.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Joint Press Communique of the People's Republic of China and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka," March 10, 2007, www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t303108.shtml

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Shortly after Rajapaksa's visit, *Jane's Defence Weekly* reported on a classified deal to sell US\$37.6 million worth of military equipment to Sri Lanka by Beijing-based Poly Technologies (one of China's biggest arms exporters) in April 2007. The deal is known include to include fighter jets, air surveillance radars, armoured personnel carriers, assault rifles, machines guns, rocket propelled grenade launchers and missiles.

⁶⁶ *People's Daily*, "China, Sri Lanka issue Joint Communique to specify cooperation in all areas," April 10, 2005, http://en.people.cn/200504/10/eng20050410_180290.html.

⁶⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Premier Wen Jiabao Holds Talks with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe of Sri Lanka," August 11, 2003, www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2782_663558/2784_663562/t24729.shtml.

⁶⁸ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Sri Lanka: Government abolishes the cease fire agreement from 16 January 2008," *ReliefWeb*, January 4, 2008, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sri-lanka/sri-lanka-government-abolishes-cess-fire-agreement-16-january-2008>.

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch, "Sri Lanka: Official Report Whitewashes Military Abuses," August 1, 2011, www.hrw.org/news/2011/08/01/sri-lanka-official-report-whitewashes-military-abuses.

⁷⁰ United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka*, 49.

The report's section on "Nature and Scope of Alleged Violations" states: The Sri Lanka Army (SLA) advanced its military campaign in the Vanni, using large-scale and widespread shelling, at times with heavy weapons, such as Multi-Barrel Rocket Launchers (MBRLs) and other large artillery, causing large numbers of civilian casualties. It shelled in three consecutive No Fire Zones, where it had encouraged the civilian population to concentrate, and after it had indicated that it would stop using heavy weapons. It shelled in spite of its knowledge of the impact, provided through SLA intelligence systems, including UAVs, and through notification by various external actors, including the United Nations and the ICRC. The majority of civilian casualties in the final phases of the war were caused by Government shelling. The Government sought to limit external pressure and observation by excluding international organizations from the conflict zone."

⁷¹ Matthew Russell Lee, “On Sri Lanka in UN Council, China Blocks March 26 Meeting, Vote May Be Called,” *Inner City Press*, March 19, 2009, www.innercitypress.com/unsri3lanka031909.html.

⁷² Human Rights Watch, “We cannot Ignore Sri Lanka,” April 27, 2009, www.hrw.org/news/2009/04/27/we-cannot-ignore-sri-lanka.

⁷³ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *Arms transfer database: Sri Lanka 1950–2010*, accessed August 5, 2020, www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers.

According to SIPRI, between 2005 and 2010 Sri Lanka was China’s eighth largest arms market and China was Sri Lanka’s largest supplier of arms by a wide margin.

⁷⁴ Mahinda Rajapaksa, “United in peace, lets build a great nation” (swearing-in speech, Colombo, Sri Lanka, November 9, 2010), Consulate General of Sri Lanka-Toronto, www.torontoslcg.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=140:united-in-peace-lets-build-a-great-nation-president&catid=43:cg&Itemid=120.

Concluding Remarks

It is astonishing that the simple phrase “an economic belt along the Silk Road” uttered by Xi Jinping at an obscure university in Kazakhstan has mutated into a global phenomena that has grabbed and maintained the attention of political leaders, international media, global organisations, academic institutions and individuals around the world. In a brief instance of historical time, Belt and Road has transformed from an initiative for “connectivity and cooperation” into a transnational network of not infrastructures, but narrative constructions. The substance of it is not ports and pipes or concrete and steel, but papers, studies, reports, articles, maps, declarations, speeches and forums. Belt and Road is not constructed by labour, planning and engineering with political accountability and economic oversight, but scholarship, politics, public relations, allegiances, opportunism, sycophancy and denunciations. The consideration of infrastructure as the basic systems and services needed for modern societies has all but disappeared from the calculus of Belt and Road. Instead, it straddles the discursive space in between String of Pearls and Common Destiny and embodies the belief that China is on course to determine the future of humankind.

In the case of Sri Lanka—and many other parts of the world with Chinese involvement—the imaginaries of Belt and Road distract from the impact of really-existing infrastructures on local space and conflict dynamics. Geopolitical utterances on debt, strategic location and routine untruths provoked by Belt and Road continue to negate the inherent powers of ordinary logistics infrastructure to conquer territory, extend state power, promise a better future and redeem domestic political elites. On China’s part, it has successfully used Belt and Road to shift

perceptions of its expanding commercial infrastructures as military and neocolonial threats to “challenges and opportunities“ for the rest of the world. Built on a theology of past glories, a century of humiliation and future salvation, Belt and Road has become the vehicle “to tell China's story well.” It is a bright light of optimism, the glare of which prevents the world from directly looking at China.

It is not possible to identify the financial values, spatial coordinates, temporal extent or any other specific parameters of Belt and Road. It has no limits as a subject or object of analysis and ultimately without a scope. What can indeed be interrogated is the very process of its realisation. My assessment that “The Belt and Road” is a fragmented but recognisable narrative is not a definition or a theory, but the finding of an art-based research process to account for contradictory pronouncements, interpretations and analyses of it. My initial reading of Belt and Road as a blueprint for infrastructure and then a counter-reading of it as a narrative to obfuscate actual infrastructure has been a long journey. One that has lead me on a path of questioning political claims, the nature of media communication and the traditional theories and methods used to study the world at large. I am optimistic the artworks and the written component of this dissertation are illuminating of this world and evident that they are the product of my creative autonomy and not of any disciplinary expertise in infrastructure, China or narratives. In undertaking this journey, my goal was to exemplify the values of artistic research methods and visual forms of knowledge to critique the problematic dimensions of the complex systems and networks that are emerging into the twenty-first century. I hope my goal was achieved.

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Fig. 2.23

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Fig. 2.24

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Fig. 2.25

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Chapter 3

Cover page

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Fig. 3.1

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Fig. 3.4

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Fig. 3.5

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Fig. 3.6

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Fig. 3.10

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Fig. 3.11

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Fig. 3.14

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Fig. 3.15

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Fig. 3.18

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Fig. 3.21

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Literature Review As Appendix

The following is the initial literature review I conducted for this thesis.

This literature review is an interpretation and synthesis of published works I have consulted to produce a transdisciplinary understanding and the argument of my topic and research questions. Corresponding to my qualitative methodology, these sources are qualitative and concern theory and practice, methods of analysis, perspectives, as well as official and unofficial accounts. The sources are of various types, which at the moment are largely books and journals, but also the English-language version of the official policy statement on the Belt and Road, a primary source. Existing literature is organised into four overarching and interrelated themes that my research falls under: Infrastructure, World Politics, Ethnic Conflict and Visual Representation. Literature on the Belt and Road is categorised separately of these research themes due to its centrality to the thesis and specific materials I have collected on it.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure as a subject can be studied from the perspective of a large number of disciplines and for a many number of reasons. The purpose of studying it for this thesis is to examine how it is used as a political tool of governments and its consequent effects on territories and peoples, particularly conflict zones. This itself is a large area of enquiry and sources from multiple social science fields are consulted, including anthropology, economics as well as critical and human geography.

In his essay “The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure”¹ anthropologist Brian Larkin defines *infrastructures* as ‘the material forms that allow for the possibility of exchange over space. They are the physical networks through which goods, ideas, waste, power, people, and finance are trafficked.’ Providing this definition of infrastructure (in its plural form), Larkin traces a range of anthropological literature that theorise infrastructure in relation to biopolitics, science and technology studies, and perhaps most interestingly the concept of technopolitics. He discusses the technopolitics of infrastructure as a matter of organising populations and territories, as well as allowing for the free flow of goods through large-scale technical systems. Large-scale technical systems that consolidate water, energy, telecommunication, people etc., while providing the base of modern economic and social systems are far removed from formal political institutions. Larkin, however, suggests that as large technological projects, infrastructures reveal forms of political rationality and become an “apparatus of governmentality”. While Larkin’s essay is a wealth of insight into the various aspects of infrastructure including its aesthetics, semiotics, as a container of desire and fantasy as well as its very ontology, infrastructure in relation to Michel Foucault’s concept ‘governmentality’ is not discussed beyond the initial suggestion.

¹ Brian Larkin, “Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, no.42 (2013): 328-329

Based on an initial survey, no specific study examining physical infrastructure as an organised practice of governments to manage populations and exert control exists. To address this gap and to produce the specific theoretical framework of the thesis, I will develop a concept of ‘infrastructuralism’ using governmentality as a general critical framework. Developed by Foucault in his lectures² at the Collège de France in the late 1970s, and since expanded on by numerous scholars, governmentality could be an appropriate framework to study the infrastructures of One Belt, One Road in their political rationality and as strategies and techniques of governance. Governmentality studies is a vast domain and emerging new literature seem promising in their scope and applicability to twenty-first century, non-Western and authoritarian contexts.

In his 2006 paper “Chinese Governmentalities: Government, Governance and the Socialist Market Economy”³, Gary Sigley outlines the shift in the nature of the government of China from being based on a concept of ‘government’ in the 1970s to one of ‘governance’ today. He argues that the governmentality of non-Western societies has been overlooked and that the “‘socialist arts of government’ or ‘Chinese governmentality’, which governs not through familiar tactics of ‘freedom and liberty’, but through a distinct planning and administrative rationality, and which is nonetheless a product of the same processes that Foucault partly outlines in the governmentality lecture.”⁴ Borrowing from such contemporary scholars such as Sigley, the thesis will furthermore look at the applicability of governmentality studies when multiple governments are involved in building coordinated infrastructure projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the Sino-Myanmar oil and gas pipelines and the ports of Colombo and Hambantota in Sri Lanka. Taking ‘infrastructure as an apparatus of governmentality’ as the key starting point to develop the concept of *infrastructuralism*, I also examine literature discussing more specific aspects of infrastructure such as logistics, security, labor and trade.

In her book *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade*, Deborah Cowen traces the roots of today’s system of global logistics to their histories and geographies in conflict and violence. Logistics for trade is a recent evolution of logistics in war developed over millennia. The emergence of corporate supply chains after the Second World War and the drive to protect them have invested logistical systems with biological imperatives of flow and resilience where it is not only human life that matters, but the life of the system itself. Within the global logistics paradigm, the object of security are no longer people and places but the unimpeded and unrestricted flow of goods. Cowen’s uses the idea of *logistics space* to challenge common conceptions of a straightforward movement of commodities from one place to another. In logistics space, things, data and people are in perpetual circulation with capital across transnational and transversal networks, through chokepoints, contested territories and areas of piracy. Cohen brings up China as a leader in corridor and gateway projects. Through a public bidding process, Chinese state-owned company COSCO acquired

² Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.). *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87-104.

³ Gary Sigley, “Chinese Governmentalities: Government, Governance and the Socialist Market Economy,” *Economy and Society*, 35:4 (2006), 487-508.

⁴ Ibid., 491.

the Greek port of Piraeus at a cost of \$5 billion and established it as a gateway into the markets of Europe. With the acquisition came Chinese labor practices and management methods into Greece where wages, training and working hours are undermined and unions are not recognised. Furthermore, although Chinese exports make up one quarter of the global total, Cowen states that China is more than a factory for the world and that “China may be better conceptualized as a logistics empire.”⁵

On infrastructure and trade, a much less critical but much more specific reference worth considering for my thesis is Thilini Kahandawaarachchi’s “Politics of Ports: China’s investments in Pakistan, Sri Lanka & Bangladesh.” Written as a master’s thesis at the University of Washington, the paper argues that the rationale for Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to seek Chinese funding to build maritime infrastructure is: the funding has no conditionalities attached, China provides a counterbalance to India’s regional hegemony and the funding for ports helps achieve local development agendas. Kahandawaarachchi points out that scholars and analysts have too often seen South Asian countries as “pawns in China’s great game,” rather than for their agency and national interests. She points out that for these countries China is a practical ‘friend’ who can help solve their domestic problems with the large-scale infrastructure of ports. In the case of Sri Lanka, to help develop after thirty years lost to civil war; in the case of Pakistan, to help resolve the Baloch separatist issue through economic development; in the case of Bangladesh, to help meet rising import and export demands. She argues that for all these countries, Chinese port construction help address internal problems while increasing regional connectivity. My own thesis questions such arguments, particularly on the question of domestic conflicts and whether port construction actually disrupts or resolves them. Nonetheless, there is value in Kahandawaarachchi’s study of the domestic perspectives of these countries and the wealth of source material she has collected and produced on it; these will be useful in my own analysis.

World Politics

Literature on the broad relations of states, firms and other actors are categorised in this theme of ‘World Relations’. My thesis has come to be foremost a study of the intersection of infrastructure and ethnic conflict and not ‘international relations’ which is taken here as a field of study rather than a subject. Furthermore, as a field international relations is dominated by state-centred approaches and while having value, it is arguably limited in scope to study the long history and systemic nature of our contemporary world. Since the 1960s, prominent thinkers such as Emmanuel Wallerstein and Giovanni Arrighi have challenged state centrism in analysis, proposing alternative methods focusing on larger units of analysis such as global movements, long historical periods, zones, blocks and regions. Although *One Belt, One Road* is initiated by the People’s Republic of China, it is a program of cooperation amongst dozens of countries across Eurasia concerning billions of people. Rather than being too China-focused with the research, the thesis proposes to study One Belt, One Road as a *configuration of states, territories and people*. To study this configuration, I start with four key sources as building blocks: *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* by Immanuel

⁵ Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 67.

Wallerstein, *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-first Century* by Giovanni Arrighi, *Critical Imaginations in International Relations* edited by Aoileann Ní Mhurchú and Reiko Shindo, and *The Social Construction of the Ocean* by Philip Steinberg.

Wallerstein's *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* is an overview of a method of analysis to understand the history and development of the modern world. The book provides the historical background and explains the primary aspects of world-systems analysis as pioneered by Emmanuel Wallerstein and others in the 1970s. This review focuses on the key principles of world-systems analysis and its contemporary relevance.

Coming fifteen years after his seminal three-volume work *The Modern World-System*⁶, Wallerstein's *Introduction* is an addition for readers wishing to familiarise themselves with a macro perspective that for over three decades has attempted to explain the contemporary capitalist world⁷ with its roots in European feudalism and Western colonisation thereafter. Wallerstein's method of analysis is a critical analysis and his primary contention is that the modern world is far too systemic to be understood through specific individuals, nations-states, or disciplines. As such his basic units of analysis - and his object of critique - are systems themselves which always form worlds or the larger world-system⁸ which can be studied in some detail. Attention is given to major political events: along with the transformation of feudal economies into capitalist ones in sixteenth-century Europe, he identifies the French Revolution, the Revolutions of 1848 and the world revolutions of 1968 as the events that have come to determine the world as it exists today. The consideration of specific historical events as related over a long period of time is a key principle, sometimes called the *longue durée*, of Wallerstein's analytic approach. This temporal principle along with the spatial concept of *core-periphery*⁹ and his approach to knowledge production called *unidisciplinarity* form the kernel of world-systems analysis.

The core-periphery concept is used to assess the division of labour¹⁰ amongst zones (generally countries) that are economically strong (core), weak (peripheral) and in-between (semi-peripheral). The concept, as generally used in development studies, is used to critique the flow of surplus value from the peripheral zones to the core zones, creating unequal exchange and long periods dominance by wealthy countries over poor countries. Although Wallerstein must see the obviousness in the suggestion to study the world across large spans of time and space he also knows that it is not always taken for granted in scholarly research. This he attributes to the historical separation of the social sciences into history, economics,

⁶ Between 1974 and 1989 Wallerstein wrote: *Volume I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, *Volume II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750*, and *Volume III: The Second Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730-1840's* (1989). In 2011, he concurrently published *Volume IV: Centrist Liberalism Triumphant, 1789-1914*.

⁷ Wallerstein describes the modern world as a *capitalist world-economy*, the current world-system.

⁸ The existing world-system is made up of interconnected firms, states, households, classes, and identity groups such as race, ethnicity, gender.

⁹ The concept was first developed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) in the 1950s.

¹⁰ Specialised labor relative to a country's economic strength: core countries have higher skill, capital intensive production and peripheral countries have lower skill, labor intensive production.

political science and sociology.¹¹ He contents that there is no “sufficient intellectual reason” for such a separation and that the world can be better understood by the single discipline of the *historical social sciences* or “unidisciplinarity.”

The conceptual framework of world-systems analysis has much depth, breadth and explanatory power. While it is certainly difficult to offer a serious critique of Wallerstein’s general approach, there are major world developments that have unfolded since the 1970s that deserve far more attention in a book published in 2004. Most obvious is Wallerstein’s omission of the economic and political significance of Asian economic zones in shifting the global “balance of power” in the twenty-first century¹². The rise of the People’s Republic of China since the country’s economic reforms of the late 1970s has led to significant multilateral trade relations across Asia and the rest of the world that are arguably in the process of forming a new world-system.¹³ While it is true that China is a nation-state and as an unit does not sit well within the framework of world-systems analysis, it is also empire-like in its nature and is beginning to exert levels of influence that can be compared to that of the European and American world of the twenty-first and earlier centuries. Could it be that Wallerstein’s silence on Chinese-related and Asian geopolitics mean that his formulation of world-systems analysis is limited to a critique of the West? Wallerstein does not once mention the formation of major non-Western blocks and trade zones such as BRICs, ASEAN and Mercosur¹⁴ and how they fit into an evolving world-system that is challenging Western dominance.

Nevertheless, Wallerstein’s assessment that major Western political events and colonisation determined the world of the past five centuries is certainly not incorrect. Wallerstein emphasises that a world-system is not a system *of the* world, but a system *that is* the world.¹⁵ If taken seriously, Wallerstein’s insistence to consider long-term systemic relations over short-term phenomena can lead to better understandings of the causes, consequences and future of our rapidly globalising and chaotic world. The late sociologist Giovanni Arrighi who collaborated with Wallerstein and popularised world-systems analysis ascribes greater economic significance to Asia, and China in particular, in the twenty-first century. In his recently published seminal book *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-first Century*, Giovanni Arrighi offers an in-depth analysis of China’s rise within the the world capitalist system, specifically in relation to the decline of the United States and in reference to Adam Smith’s theory of economic development. In his introduction Arrighi writes: “The overall thesis put forward in this book is that the failure of the Project for a New American Century and the success of Chinese economic development, taken jointly, have made the realization of Smith’s vision of a world-market society based on greater equality among the

¹¹ Wallerstein states that economics, political science and sociology are *nomothetic* - disciplines that are in search for scientific laws and are distinct from history as a social science, which he considers *idiographic*, based on the uniqueness of social phenomena.

¹² Referred to as the “Pivot to Asia” in contemporary geopolitical discourse.

¹³ The “Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road” is an extensive multinational development program initiated and promoted by the government of the People’s Republic of China in cooperation with nearly a quarter of the world’s countries. The program includes the formation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, a major international financial institution seen as an alternative to the Asian Development Bank, International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

¹⁴ BRIC is a formal association of the countries of Brazil, Russia, India and China; since 2010 it includes South Africa and referred to as BRICS. ASEAN is the Association of South East Asian Nations. Mercosur is a sub-regional trade block of the countries Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela.

¹⁵ Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 98.

world's civilizations more likely than it ever was in the almost two and a half centuries since the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*.” Arrighi argues that the non-capitalist world-market that Adam Smith spoke of is being realised in East Asia with China at the helm. As my thesis is not anti-Chinese, the possibility that China may be leading a “commonwealth of civilization” will certainly be taken into account in my critical analysis of the Belt and Road. Arrighi’s argument on the ascent of China is a significant reference and will be examined in detail through the progression of the thesis.

Another significant perspective on world-politics using world-system analysis in the lineage of Wallerstein and Arrighi is *The Social Construction of the Ocean* by Philip Steinberg. Steinberg has researched what he calls *ocean-space* for more than twenty years looking at issues of ocean governance, capital mobility, coastal and marine geography, ocean metaphors and visual representations of the ocean (see below Visual Representation section). More specific to the maritime context of my topic of port infrastructures, Steinberg traces the history of the *world-ocean*¹⁶, since around 1450 to the present through a “territorial political economy” lens. In the chapter “Territorial political economy and the construction of ocean-space” he notes economists have calculated that the ocean provides humanity with twenty-one trillion dollars of services versus twelve trillion dollars provided by land (1997). Responding to the traditional perspectives of the ocean as a resource provider, transport surface and a battleground, Steinberg offers a constructivist perspective where the ocean is not merely the natural background or context but is socially produced. This ocean-space is constructed through its use, regulations and representations, with each of these aspects having a continuous impact each other, in turn producing a what he calls a “second nature”. Using world-system theorists, articulation theorists and spatial dialectics theorists, Steinberg goes on to show how the reproduction of capitalist processes through the creation of hierarchical spaces extends to ocean-space. To what extent can theories of the hierarchical spaces of capitalism be applied to the ocean-space of the Twenty-First Century Maritime Silk Road, if others such as Arrighi argue that Asia’s development via Chia is market-oriented but not necessarily capitalist?

More recent work by various thinkers from Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America in *Critical Imaginations in International Relations*¹⁷ explicitly set out to question the limitations in state-centred approaches in the discipline of International Relations and focus on ‘key concepts’ to discuss world politics. Following the Introduction titled “Being Critical and Imaginative in International Relations”, the sixteen chapters are: Borders, Citizenship, Community, Creativity, Difference, Globalisation, Knowledge Practice, Law, Narrative, Power, Resistance, Sovereignty, Space, Subjectivity, Technology, Theory and Time. The chapters on *borders* by Nick Vaughan-Williams and *space* by Joan Agnew are particularly insightful to positioning key aspects of One Belt, One Road in its vast expanse of transnational space and possibly ways of critically forming an understanding of it. Nick Vaughan-Williams begins his chapter on borders with a critical assessment of the traditional conception of the border in international relations:

¹⁶ Steinberg used the term ocean-space “to emphasise parallels between the aquatic and the terrestrial realms; that is, between ocean-space and land-space. Like land-space, ocean-space is constructed by a variety of actors as they respond to and reproduce social processes, spatial patterns, and physical nature.

¹⁷ Aoileann Ní Mhurchú and Reiko Shindo (eds). *Critical Imaginations in International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

The concept of the border of the state has acted – and indeed continues to act – as a lodestar in the practice and theory of international relations. It structures the modern geopolitical imagination and dominant ways of dealing with questions relating to, *inter alia*, identity, security and belonging. A simplifying device for understanding the location of political authority, the concept of the border of the state organises the otherwise messy, overlapping and interconnecting nature of global politics into two supposedly distinct realms: the ‘inside’ of the state characterised by normality, friendship, security and progress; and the ‘outside’ of the international, associated with enmity, insecurity and anarchy.¹⁸

Vaughan-Williams traces a number of critical scholarship that question the nature of borders in relation to what they are and where they are supposed to be as accepted by the ‘modern geopolitical imagination’¹⁹. He suggests that as an alternative to ‘borders’ perhaps a better analytic tool might be the notion of ‘bordering practices’ which he defines as an ‘attempts to identify and control the mobility not only of people, but also of services and goods’. He lists practices such as outsourcing and off-shoring as well as the contingency and variations in regulating the movements ‘regular’ goods, services and people in relation to ‘irregular’ goods, services and people. Because of such practices, defining the border, or the metaphorical ‘line’ or ‘wall’ of a given state require alternative imaginations in international relations. While borders may define the legitimate territory of a state to protect against violations and violence (from the outside), territory itself can be ‘land occupied and bounded by violence.’²⁰ Referring to the etymology of territory as deriving from the Latin root *terrere*, meaning to frighten or terrorise, the point is made that a border doesn’t actually limit violence as conventionally understood and as taken for granted in traditional international relations. Referencing R.B.J. Walker – a prominent critic of the concept of the border of the state – Vaughan-Williams discusses the border as affirming ideas of justice and democracy *inside* a sovereign state in the background of chaos and barbarism *outside* in the international landscape; same with formations of ‘here’ and ‘there’ as well as ‘us’ and ‘them’. If such binary notions of inside/outside is considered together with the actual flows of goods and services and other exchanges in the international system, the border as constructed by political communities becomes paradoxical. Furthermore, if modern technologies of communication and transactions are considered – especially in relation to who is included and excluded – the actual location of the state border becomes increasingly unclear.

¹⁸ Nick Vaughan-Williams, “Borders” in *Critical Imaginations in International Relations*, edited by Aoileann Ní Mhurchú et al. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 11.

¹⁹ Referencing Joan Agnew from “Spaces” in *Critical Imaginations in International Relations*, edited by Aoileann Ní Mhurchú et al. (New York: Routledge, 2016).

²⁰ Quoting from William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralisation* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 163.

Belt and Road

Regarding the Belt & Road, there is a vast quantity of materials in the form of papers, studies and reports as well as forums, speeches and talks that have accumulated since the initiative was first announced by Xi Jinping in 2013. I have collected and organised a substantial number of this material into eight volumes (see Appendix). These materials are largely ‘conventional’ accounts of the commercial possibilities, economic feasibilities and strategic imperatives of the Belt & Road. The purpose of examining them for this thesis is to study how the Belt and Road is communicated, perceived, promoted, challenged or questioned by various official and unofficial actors; the aim, in short, is to produce a *discourse analysis*²¹ of the Belt & Road. In addition to these materials, two key sources on the Belt & Road are the official policy statement published by the National Development and Reform Commission of the People’s Republic of China and an officially sanctioned book by international relations scholar Wang Yiwei of Renmin University of China. A selection of these materials are discussed below.

The English version of the Belt & Road policy statement titled “Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road” was issued with State Council²² authorisation and released online in March 2015 by the National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce.²³ The statement outlines the following eight aspects of the Belt & Road: Background, Principles Framework, Cooperation Priorities, Cooperation Mechanisms, China’s Regions in Pursuing Opening-Up, China in Action, Embracing a Brighter Future Together. The Preface begins with a statement on the historic silk road:

More than two millennia ago the diligent and courageous people of Eurasia explored and opened up several routes of trade and cultural exchanges that linked the major civilizations of Asia, Europe and Africa, collectively called the Silk Road by later generations. 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. Symbolising 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.²⁴

Drawing on the long history and romantic notions of the ‘ancient Silk Road’, the preface outlines the necessity of instilling ‘vigor’ and ‘vitality’ into it to build a twenty-first century silk road to strengthen regional cooperation, create economic prosperity of countries, create

²¹ Discourse analysis, Michel Foucault’s Archeology of Knowledge

²² The State Council, also referred to as the Central People’s Government, is an executive branch of government and the chief administrative authority of the People’s Republic of China

²³ National Development and Reform Commission of the People’s Republic of China, “Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_669367.html (accessed September 1, 2015).

²⁴ Ibid.

mutual learning between civilisations and promote world peace and development. It is difficult to imagine any other open declaration in the history of the world with such scale, scope and ambitions of revival involving the cooperation of dozens of countries. How can we understand the enormity of the 'initiative' as declared, in the midst of its very contemporary unfolding? And more importantly, analyse it critically? To begin with, the term 'initiative' in the officially English name "Belt and Road Initiative" is a misleading one and can be argued to be a propagandistic term used as an understatement. A more appropriate label would be 'project' or 'program' to recognise its imperative as an "enterprise that is carefully planned and designed to achieve a particular aim"²⁵ or "a planned series of future events, items, or performances."²⁶ This is not to imply that elements of the Belt & Road are systemically engineered to be executed with precision, but the immensity of planning and political, financial and cultural resources collectively invested as well as the already existing complex history of a silk road, makes it go far beyond a mere initiative by a single state.

The Background section states that the purpose of the Belt & Road is for countries to together strengthen the global economy and embrace a multipolar world within the existing "global free trade regime and the open world economy." The Principles section outlines the Belt and Road's recognition of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence of the UN Charter.²⁷ The Framework section outlines the Belt and Road as a practical way to achieve 'win-win' cooperation amounts the countries of Asia, Europe and Africa. The Silk Road Economic Belt (the Belt) is to connect China, Central Asia, Russia and Europe through overland transport routes while The 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (the Road) is to connect the South China sea, the South Pacific, the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean through sea routes. The more substantial section Cooperation Priorities states that countries along the Belt and Road have mutually complementary economies and resource advantages. It outlines that they *should* strengthen 'cooperation priorities' in five key areas: Policy Coordination, Facilities Connectivity, Unimpeded Trade, Financial Integration and People-to-People Bonds. The Cooperation Mechanisms section outlines the necessity of increased bilateral and multilateral cooperation to achieve full regional integration through the Belt and Road. It states that full use should be made of the existing 'mechanisms'²⁸ to encourage the participation of more countries in the Belt and Road. The section China's Regions in Pursuing Opening-Up outlines that the eastern, western, southern, northern and central regions of China should all take advantage of their geographic position to other countries in the region to improve the openness of China. The section China in Action outlines active steps taken by China, including by its president Xi Jinping and premier Li Keqiang in promoting the Belt and Road and bringing countries and firms on board. The final section Embracing a Brighter Future Together outlines that although the Belt and Road is proposed by China, it is actually the

²⁵ Definition of 'project' on google.com search result derived from Oxford American College Dictionary.

²⁶ Definition of 'program' on google.com search result derived from Oxford American College Dictionary.

²⁷ : Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence of the UN Charter are: mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

²⁸ The mechanisms are listed as: the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), ASEAN Plus China (10+1), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF), China-Gulf Cooperation Council Strategic Dialogue, Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) Economic Cooperation, and Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC).

‘common aspiration’ of all countries involved and can promote mutual respect, trust, benefit and cooperation.

The thesis considers the blueprint of the Belt and Road outlined above in both its seriousness and grandiosity. A more specific declaration of the Belt and Road, that is equally serious and grandiose in its prose, is *The Belt and Road Initiative: What Will China Offer the World in its Rise* by international studies scholar Wang Yiwei of Renmin University. With no shortage of official approval, praise and promotion²⁹, the book although written by a single scholar, can be considered an official perspective for all intents and purposes. The first of its kind translated into English and published in 2016, the book offers an in-depth overview of the Belt and Road program. Stating in the preface that “the 21st Century begins with the Belt and Road” Wang describes the program in four parts titled: The Belt and Road Initiative Will Transcend History, Opportunities for the World Offered by the Belt and Road Initiative, Risks of the Belt and Road Initiative and Ways to Advance the Belt and Road Construction. Describing each of these parts would go beyond the scope of this review, but on my subject of Belt and Road ports Wang writes:

As for the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, it lays emphasis on ways to achieve port renovation, shipping line upgrading and shipping capacity improvements in the 21st-century. The value of the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road lies in the 21st century, which shows that China will neither follow the old path of Western powers which committed maritime expansion, confrontation and colonisation, nor pursue the mistaken path of confrontation against the U.S. for maritime dominance. Rather, China seeks to effectively avoid traditional risks of globalisation and usher in a new type of ocean civilisation featuring the integration of man and the ocean, harmonious co-existence of countries, and sustainable development.³⁰

The thesis will examine such claims as well as the the policy statement in relation to the actual events on the ground within the domestic spaces of Myanmar, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Ethnic Conflict

The ethnic conflicts of Myanmar, Pakistan and Sri Lanka since the end of the Second World War are long and complex. These post-colonial conflicts are framed in multiple paradigms of civil war, terrorism, insurgency, security, separatism, independence, religion, race, human rights and social movements by countless official and unofficial voices. Unlike the study of infrastructure as a subject, the thesis does not undertake a study of ethnic conflict as a subject. Rather the focus is on understanding the specific conflicts in the three countries and how they are complicated or addressed by programs of infrastructure development. The following English sources are starting points into the ethnic conflicts of Myanmar, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

²⁹It is recommended by the Bureau of Theory of the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party as well as the Cadre Education Bureau of the Organisation Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

³⁰ Wang Yiwei...2

Myanmar:

Martin Smith's book *State of Strife: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Burma* published in 2007 offers a rounded assessment of the history and contemporary state of Burma's conflicts. The chapters are organised into three main sections: A Land Trapped in Conflict, the Cycles of Conflict and the Contemporary Landscape. The first section examines the structures of Burma's conflicts which were already taking shape through armed struggles and dilemmas of unity during the colonial era; these struggles and dilemmas have found new expressions in every political era since independence in 1948. He states that the dynamics of the conflicts can be better understood as "emerging political complexes" rather than "complex political emergencies."³¹ The second section outlines the evolution of the ethnic struggles over six decades since independence where armed opposition movements have continually been dissatisfied with the central government. He states that the five main cycles of conflict are: "the outbreak of violence in the parliamentary era after the British departure; the militarization of government under Gen. Ne Win; the international escalation of conflict around Burma's borders from the late 1960s; the decline of Gen. Ne Win's "Burmese Way to Socialism" to final collapse in 1988; the present-day era of the military State Peace and Development Council."³² The final section on the contemporary landscape is closer to my thesis on framing the current socio-political situation of the conflicts. He states that while Western governments have generally imposed sanctions and provided humanitarian aid, China, Thailand, India have more actively engaged Burma politically and economically - including the construction of infrastructure on the borderlands - and thus much more influential.

Pakistan:

As with Myanmar, the long on-going ethnic conflict in Pakistan have naturally generated a great many analyses and perspectives; there, however, are not many books written in English presenting a comprehensive study of the development of Balochistan's conflict from its history to its contemporary situation. Sources such Malik Siraj Akbar *The Redefined Dimensions of Baloch Nationalist Movement* offer tremendous insights into the grievances and demands of the Baloch people. Akbar, who is the chief editor of *the Baloch Hal*³³, is a well known journalist covering human rights abuses, press freedom and sectarian killings amongst other issues in Balochistan. His book which is a collection of articles, contains details into the nature of nationalist movement against the government of Pakistan for better control of resources and autonomy for the Baloch people. Questions of what group exactly is fighting the government and how does the government respond to them are brought up and discussed by. The BLA, which stands for the Baloch Liberation Army, for example is considered one of the biggest nationalists insurgent groups targeting government sites, but its not exactly clear who they are and what their organisational structure is, if it exists at all. Significant contemporary events, such as the killing of three Chinese engineers in February

³¹ Quoting Mark Duffield's, x

³² Martin Smith, x

³³ The first English language newspaper of Pakistan's Balochistan Province.

2006 and the killing of Nawab Akbar Bugti³⁴ in August 2006 are given contexts and framed within the broader politics of Balochistan. He also discusses the extreme controversies of Gwadar port, including the perception of the Baloch people that it is a way to colonise their homeland and turn them into minorities. Malik Siraj Akbar take on the Balochistan's nationalist movement can be contrasted to the more geopolitically oriented analysis such as that of Jason R. Murtha who in his *Strategic Importance of Balochistan*, sees the Baloch as creating an unstable environment for the development of Gwadar port and states that the "strategic importance of Balochistan lies in its potential to either take the forefront in development in South Asia, or be the epicenter of the next large-scale multinational conflict"³⁵. Although the thesis is more tilted towards perspectives such as Akbar's, those such as Murtha's will also be considered in context.

Sri Lanka:

Unlike with Myanmar and Pakistan, the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is not an on-going one as it came to a formal end in 2009. A comprehensive account of the last phase of the civil war framed in both a historical and international context is the book *The Cage: The fight for Sri Lanka & the Last Days of the Tamil Tigers* by Gordon Weiss. As a veteran journalist Weiss covered conflicts worldwide and was a United Nations official for two decades, serving as the agency's spokesperson in Colombo during war. The 'cage' in the book's title refers to the small pocket of land in the northeast of the country where hundreds of thousands of civilians were trapped along with the Tamil Tigers in a siege by Sri Lanka's army in 2009. From the onset Weiss provides a useful timeline starting from Buddha's enlightenment in 589 BC to Sri Lanka's independence from British rule in 1948 to the founding of the Tamil Tigers in 1971 to the re-election of Mahinda Rajapaksa as president in 2010. Weiss traces both the historical and recent events leading to this final onslaught of violence and the aftermath of abject failures in the reconciliation and accountability processes. Noting that Sri Lanka's southern tip is six nautical miles from the world's busiest sea route, Weiss writes:

China has long had a significant presence on the island (Sri Lanka was among the first to recognise the 1949 communist takeover of China), but the commissioning of a billion-dollar deep-sea port in the once impoverished home town [Hambantota] of Sri Lanka's president Mahinda Rajapaksa has significantly boosted the permanent Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean. As a corollary of these interests, China effectively blocked international action that might have prevented or moderated the mass killing of civilians at the end of the war. The Sri Lanka story, therefore, is a modest but significant sign of the new balancing of power between the US and China, a contest that is arguably the single most important political story in the decades ahead.³⁶

Weiss's statement that mass civilians deaths is as a *corollary* of the commission and subsequent use of Hambantota port is a significant assertion and deserves to be investigated

³⁴ Head of the Bugti tribe of the Baloch people and served as the Minister of State for Interior and Governor of Balochistan Province prior to his death.

³⁵ Murtha, v

³⁶ Weiss, xxiii

in detail. Weiss book is a result of his interviews and conversations with, in his own words “hundreds of diplomats, journalists, officials, artists, civic and business leaders, Buddhist, Catholic and Hindu priests, activists, politicians, students, JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna or People’s Liberation Front) revolutionaries, defence attaches, analysts, academics and many ordinary folk.”³⁷ The book extremely informative and balanced and will be an important reference to the thesis.

Visual Representation

Finally on the theme of visual representation, two key references are outlined here. As these references are less pertinent to the theoretical and analytic basis of my thesis, they are only briefly discussed. They are more precedents and guides on the visual and documentation aspects of my practical component, especially on producing a film.

Mission Reports: Artistic Practice in the Field: Video Works, 1998-2008, is a comprehensive survey of a decade of video works by the artist Ursula Biemann. Project texts by the artist and a range of essays by cultural theorists offer an in-depth reflection on Biemann’s subjects of transnational movements, border conditions and contemporary forms of migrations. The artist’s texts grouped under the headings of “Conceptualizing Artistic Fieldwork” and scholarly reflections grouped under “The Video Essay and Real-World Politics” offer a window into the nature and complexities of aesthetic practice on the political geographies of contested spaces and marginalised communities. In the introduction Jan-Erik Lundstrom suggests that this book should be considered an “implicit inventory of the problematics of the contemporary video essay, proposing at least four key issues: the complex relationship between form and content, knowledge production and incompleteness, agency and the essayist’s subject position, and the question of representation linked to victimisation and spectacle.”³⁸ How will such issues be addressed in my own work?

Another significance source, not on video, but on documenting aspects of international relations is *Documenting World Politics: A Critical Companion to IR and Non-Fiction Film*. Proposed as critical companion “the authors of this volume argue that much can be gained if we do not just think of documentaries as a window on or intervention in reality, but as theories that involve particular postures, strategies and methodologies towards the world they shed light on.”³⁹ The book is a series of critical and analytic essays on how documentary films informs international relations studies, how they are forms of analyses themselves and the role they play in producing public understanding of IR. It is organised under four main themes of: *popular culture and world politics; the history and characteristics of documentary film; a heuristic framework for analysis; documentary film, politics and ideology; filming as theory and epistemology*. Although the visualisation I intend to produce using film as a medium is not a documentary as such, these essays offer tremendous theoretical insights into the very act of documenting geopolitical events and the critical necessity of doing so. In his

³⁷ Weiss, xxv

³⁸ Biemann, 9

³⁹ i

essay in the book “Non-linearity in the ocean documentary,” Philip Steinberg states that given the tremendous importance the ocean plays in forming our global political, economic and ecological systems, it is rarely represented through the documentary genre. In the cases that they are represented, he states that far too many documentaries have attempted to produce linear narratives of the non-linear construct of the ocean. He suggests antidotes to this problem and brings up Allan Sekula and Noel Burch’s film *The Forgotten Space* :

Sekula and Burch understand that a film about a specific object, or that tells a specific linear story about a phenomenon or place, is as likely to obscure as to reveal underlying structural forces, leading the viewer *away* from the processes that extend beyond that space to the networks of connectivity and power that are the essence of society.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Documenting, 78