

# Commerce is Destiny: Revival of Silk Road Civilization and Sino-American Relations

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Patrick Mendis

The beginning of pre-colonial glory of the Middle Kingdom has returned to China through the revival of the ancient Silk Road, which is now officially called the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI). To realize President Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream, the initially conceived “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) plan has a dual-strategy to “rejuvenate” the Chinese nation and its ancient culture:

The northern route is the Silk Road Economic Belt (the Belt) that links the western Asian region, Russia, and Europe. This belt revives the ancient Silk Road, which evolved through a grid of land networks and then gradually flourished from the ancient Chinese capital of Xi’an by connecting with other civilizations of the past.

The southern route is the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (the Road) that connects the Ming capital of Nanjing with Africa and the Middle East through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, i.e., the so-called “Western Sea.”

The common characteristic of the BRI is its westward orientation, which has a logical connection to previous economic policies. After President Deng Xiaoping’s opening-up policy and economic liberalization, the maritime region of China became more prosperous due in large part to Beijing’s export-led development strategy that links by trade with the North American markets.

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The looking-east trade and investment strategies over the Pacific Ocean made the coastal region of China increasingly rich and wealthy—creating a new middle-income class that concentrated in the maritime provinces of Jiangsu, Fujian, Guangdong, Shandong, and Zhejiang. Thus, the income inequality by province has begun to illustrate a widening gap between these littoral regions and the hinterland of Gansu, Ningxia, Inner Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang.<sup>1</sup> With this disparity, the Beijing leadership recognizes that the westward direction must be revived through the BRI like that of the ancient Silk Road, which connected the seaside cities with the rest of continental inland.

The vast networks of the earliest Silk Road that linked Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and Central Asia are the navigational blueprint for the new initiative. As in the past, the BRI brings the ethnically, linguistically, and religiously different people together with the majority Han ethnicity through trade; the process has recently expedited with the modernization of connectivity through modern highways, high-speed railways, and airlines. Thus, commercial trade has historically proved as the most viable force for unity than other factors in human divisions.

With the renowned travels of the pioneering diplomat Zhang Qian under Emperor Wu (reigning from 141 to 87 BC) of the Han Dynasty, the imperial envoy opened China to the world of trade and commerce through the intercontinental Silk Road in Central Asia and far beyond. His legacy expanded with subsequent trade missions, imperial religious undertakings (e.g., Faxian and Xuanzang) and other explorations in succeeding dynasties. Reviving that celebrated heritage, President Xi seemed to have identified the two illustrious dynasties to model after his BRI initiative to unify the nation for harmonious progress.

## The Tang and Ming Dynasties

The westward movement of the ancient Silk Road evolved over many

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<sup>1</sup> The author has traveled to all but four provinces of China, including every special economic and administrative municipality as well as Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan.

centuries since the Han Dynasty (202 BC–220 AD). Afterward, it reached its pinnacle during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD) with the increased exchanges of goods and knowledge. The latter was gradually developed in search of both religious and spiritual knowledge by sending imperial missions and cultural exchanges between China and India, the Middle East, and Western Asia through the Silk Road. Not only spiritual-seeking monks in Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist traditions were enriched in their own traditions and religious knowledge with their mutual encounters among themselves, but traveling merchants also became benefactors of the temples of worship by sharing their wealth and then attaining merits and blessings from monks and divine forces. These mutually enriching exchanges had transformed China into a “cosmopolitan nation” in both the material wealth and spiritual realms. Thus, the vibrant Chinese civilization was further augmented by interacting with distant Babylonian, Egyptian, Indian, and Persian civilizations. Ensuing dynasties such as Song, Liao, Western Xia, Jin, and Yuan at various capitals of China continued the Silk Road heritage after the consequential Tang Dynasty.

With the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 AD), another great era of social stability and orderly government by Han rulers returned to China with the collapse of the Mongol-led Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368 AD). Under the Ming Emperor Yongle, his most trusted eunuch Admiral Zheng He undertook seven enormous voyages of exploration with the intention of installing China’s tributary system and establishing diplomatic goodwill. By exchanging goods and knowledge, the Muslim admiral sailed to over 30 countries through the South China Sea, Indian Ocean, and as far as the eastern coasts of Africa and the holiest Muslim city of Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula.

Unlike the European colonization of Asian and African countries, the purpose of Chinese missions was to propagate the ancient belief of centrality of the Middle Kingdom for universal governance and its emperor serving as the Son of Heaven. Illustrating this grandeur, the advancement of Ming maritime technology and scientific innovation was evident on the hundreds of

ships that sailed on the blue waters, which were considered a “floating city.”<sup>2</sup> This was unprecedented in human history compared to the well-known voyages of Christopher Columbus to the Americas on three small ships almost a hundred years later. An innovator and builder, the Ming emperor constructed the Forbidden City, restored the Grand Canal, instituted the imperial exams in official appointments, and then employed a circle of eunuch supporters as a counterweight to the Confucian scholar-bureaucrats.

These two dynasties represent the best of China’s thriving civilization, national identity, and Confucian culture. One of the important cultural interlocutors of these two illustrious dynasties was the scholarly Buddhist monk Xuanzang whose travels and writings in the Tang Dynasty were later turned into a classic novel, *Journey to the West*, in the Ming Dynasty. Its perpetual popularity and inspiration is widely shared by both high officials and common people. The amalgamation of two historical eras of Tang and Ming Dynasties—the Silk Road in the cosmopolitan China and the maritime advancement in the Middle Kingdom—is undoubtedly a fitting tribute to the evolving dual strategy of BRI. Thus, the singular denominator of BRI is trade, which has not only brought harmonious peace but also united diverse nationalities and religious groups.

## Chinese Inspiration for America

Like the monks and merchants in China, the Pilgrims and colonists in America presented a similar evolution in search of spiritual happiness and material wealth. With the US conception motto of “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness,”<sup>3</sup> Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, and other Founding Fathers established the new republic in 1776 with commercial trade in mind for its unity, survival, and prosperity. Inspired by the dual pursuits of the Pilgrims and colonists that destined

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2 Patrick Mendis, *Peaceful War: How the Chinese Dream and the American Destiny Create a Pacific New World Order*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2014, p.130.

3 “The Declaration of Independence,” <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document>.

them together, the US Constitution was designed to unite the diverse nation with its Commerce Clause. The clause gives Congress the power “to regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes.”<sup>4</sup>

Establishing a commercial relationship with China was an institutional vision of the republic as the founding generation detested the British and other colonial powers and their mercantilism. However, the Virginia charter of the colonists—which sought “a shortcut to China”<sup>5</sup> by giving instructions to navigate through the James River “toward the North-West”<sup>6</sup> Pacific Territory—remained an intriguing document, especially with its strategic objective to trade with China. Thomas Jefferson, as the third US president, dispatched the Lewis and Clark Expedition to search for the navigational “holy grail”<sup>7</sup> to China. The instructions for the Expedition clearly stated that finding a direct waterway to the Pacific coast in the newly acquired areas under the Louisiana Purchase and the Pacific Northwest Territory was for “the purpose of commerce.”<sup>8</sup>

The new nation was fascinated by China’s wealth and attracted to its ancient history and the way of life. In his influential book, *General History of China* (1741), the French Jesuit historian Jean-Baptiste Du Halde characterized China as “the largest and most beautiful Kingdom yet known... compared with our own civilized Nations”<sup>9</sup> among all countries.

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4 Akhil Reed Amar, *America’s Constitution: A Biography*, New York: Random House, 2005, p.170.

5 Bob Deans, *The River Where America Began: A Journey Along the James*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007, p.65.

6 Wesley F. Craven, *The Virginia Company of London: 1606-1624*, Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing, 2009, p.10.

7 *Ibid.*

8 U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 105th Congress Second Session*, Vol.144, Part 15, September 22, 1998—September 26, 1998, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1998, p.21534.

9 Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, *General History of China: Containing a Geographical, Historical, Chronological and Physical Description of the Empire of China*, London: J. Watts, 1741, p.2.

Both Jefferson and Franklin had personal copies of the book.

Not only the European Renaissance writers but also the American Founding Fathers were practically galvanized by China's legendary existence and its literary culture. The Middle Kingdom's influence was so powerful that American colonial life was saturated with Chinese tea, silk, porcelain, wallpaper, Chippendale furniture, and other products—an attempt to emulate Chinese affluence.<sup>10</sup> Dr. Benjamin Franklin, a tea drinker, estimated at the second half of the 18th century that “a Million of Americans drink Tea twice a Day.”<sup>11</sup> Like Franklin, George Washington, the first U.S. president, held a great affection for Chinese tea as well as porcelain, importing a number of collections of the latter.<sup>12</sup> To overcome commercial dependence on British imports, Dr. Benjamin Rush, another Founding Father and a medical doctor, attempted to set up “a china manufactory” for “the service of America” in Philadelphia.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, Washington—a farmer and surveyor in his pastime—was keeping detailed records of his efforts to grow flowers from “Chinese seeds” that were given to him at his Mount Vernon estate.<sup>14</sup> Jefferson also studied Chinese gardening and architectural design for use at his Monticello home.<sup>15</sup> He not only admired gardening “where objects are intended only to adorn”<sup>16</sup> but also the railings below the dome of his Monticello residence and surrounding walkways were a blend of Roman and Chinese design.<sup>17</sup> For worldly Jefferson, it was natural for him to combine the best of both occidental and oriental civilizations to help create a new

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10 *Peaceful War: How the Chinese Dream and the American Destiny Create a Pacific New World Order*, p.46.

11 Benjamin Franklin, “Preface to Declaration of the Boston Town Meeting,” in *The Votes and Proceedings of the Freeholders and Other Inhabitants of the Town of Boston*, London, 1773, pp.i-vi.

12 Susan Gray Detweiler, *George Washington's Chinaware*, New York: Harry N. Abrams Publishers, 1982.

13 Benjamin Rush's letter to Thomas Bradford on April 15, 1768,” in L. H. Butterfield, *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951, Vol.1, p.54.

14 John C. Fitzpatrick ed., *The Diaries of George Washington, 1748-1799*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company (published for the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union), 1925, Vol. 4, pp.392-393.

15 Douglass Lea, “Thomas Jefferson: Master Gardener,” *Mother Earth News*, February-March 1999, Issue 172, p.104.

16 Marie Kimball, *Jefferson: The Road to Glory, 1743 to 1776*, New York: Coward-McCann, 1943, p.164.

17 Dave Wang, “Thomas Jefferson's Incorporating Positive Elements from Chinese Civilization,” *Virginia Review of Asian Studies*, p.143.

culture for Americans.<sup>18</sup>

Acting more like a Confucian disciple, Dr. Benjamin Franklin promoted Chinese moral philosophy in his own weekly newspaper, *Pennsylvania Gazette*. In 1737, Franklin explained to readers “what Confucius proposed to the princes:” moral governance “according to this [Confucian] model” for a “happy and flourishing empire.”<sup>19</sup> He also commented that the “Chinese are regarded as an ancient and highly civilized nation” from which Americans might learn in the formation of their own civilization.<sup>20</sup> Thomas Paine, a man of powerful words and the author of *Common Sense*, informed colonial America that the Chinese were “a people of mild manners and of good morals.”<sup>21</sup>

Fascinated by the transformative power of ancient philosophy, Franklin further demonstrated the relevance of—and his admiration for—China through his American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. Its secretary Charles Thomson (later secretary of the Continental Congress) linked the two countries, noting that Philadelphia “lies in the 40th degree of north latitude of very same as Pekin [Beijing] in China,” and that the comparable “soil and climate” would help the city to “thrive in a degree equal to our warmest expectations.”<sup>22</sup> Thomson went on to say, “This country may be improved beyond” what “might have been expected” if we could be “so fortunate as to introduce the industry of the Chinese, their arts of living and improvements in husbandry, as well as their native plants. America might in time become as populous as China, which is allow to contain more inhabitants than any other country, of the same extent, in the world.”<sup>23</sup> At

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18 *Peaceful War: How the Chinese Dream and the American Destiny Create a Pacific New World Order*, p.48.

19 Benjamin Franklin, “The Morals of Confucius,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, February 28-March 7, 1737, p.56.

20 Owen Aldridge, *The Dragon and Eagle: The Presence of China in the American Enlightenment*, Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1993, p.67.

21 Thomas Paine, Philip S. Foner eds., *Completed Writings of Thomas Paine*, Vol. 2, New York: Garden City Press, 1945, p.737.

22 American Philosophical Society, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 1, Philadelphia, PA: Aitken and Son, 1789, p.xix.

23 *Ibid.*

that time, the Chinese population was approximately 300 million; the American colonies had only slightly more than two million.<sup>24</sup> Dr. Franklin concluded that China was a role model and hoped that “America would in time come to possess much likeness in the wealth of its industries to China.”<sup>25</sup>

## The “Other” Journey to the West

As the new nation progressed and grew in land size as it connected the Atlantic coast with the Pacific Rim, the popular US economic strategy in the middle of the 19th century was to “go West, young man, go West and grow up with the country.”<sup>26</sup> Much like China’s journey to the west, the American westward drive reached Alaska, Hawaii, and the Philippines in the South China Sea—idealizing Thomas Jefferson’s vision of an Empire of Liberty. The expansion of the US throughout the American continents and beyond was a national belief, which gained its missionary zeal with the Manifest Destiny doctrine of the mid-19th century as inevitable and justifiable.

The westward expansion was intended to create a commercial civilization with a construction of two railroad networks. First, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Pacific Railway Act of 1862 authorizing the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific companies to build the first transcontinental railroad, which largely employed Chinese workers (arriving during the Taiping Rebellion, 1850-64). The railroad also attracted a mass American migration from the Atlantic coastal region to the Great Plains and the wilderness of the West—developing new human settlements along

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24 *Peaceful War: How the Chinese Dream and the American Destiny Create a Pacific New World Order*, p.50.

25 Dr. Ellis Paxson Oberholzer, the second-longest served president after Benjamin Franklin at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, wrote in “Franklin’s Philosophical Society,” *The Popular Science Monthly*, Vol.60, March 1902, p.432.

26 Editor Horace Greely (1811-72) of the *New York Tribune* rephrased the variations of the phrase in his editorial on July 13, 1865. See James A. Crutchfield, Candy Moutlon, and Terry Del Bene eds., *The Settlement of America: An Encyclopedia of Westward Expansion from Jamestown to the Closing of the Frontier*, New York: Routledge, 2015, Vol.1-2, p.240.

both sides of the rail-tracks. Second, the Northern Pacific transcontinental railway, which was approved by Congress in 1864, began to operate across the northern states from Minnesota to the Pacific coast in Seattle. It linked the Great Lakes region with Puget Sound on the Pacific and turned the vast virgin lands into farming, lumbering, mining, and ranching communities. During the height of the Civil War, President Lincoln thought that the railroad scheme would unite the divided nation from sea to shining sea as one people.

Decades later, the railroad civilization in America would inspire Dr. Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), the father of modern China. Educated in Hawaii, Sun became a passionate advocate of the American system, especially in economic development planning, and devised a great national railroad strategy after the collapse of Qing Dynasty in 1911.<sup>27</sup> Admiring President Abraham Lincoln's railway plan (and his three principles of government of the people, by the people, and for the people), Sun's ambitious railroad network connected not only to the cardinal directions of China but also linked it to a Eurasian system to intersect with Central Asia, India, Europe, and Russia.

In his "The Current Map of China" in 1899, Sun proposed to link Shanghai and Chengdu in Sichuan province before extending it to Tibet.<sup>28</sup> He wrote in the plan that "conducting migration into three northeastern provinces, Mongolia, Xinjiang, Qinghai, and Tibet in a scientific and systematic way... When the number of migrants reaches a certain ratio in a region, it should be granted autonomous rights."<sup>29</sup> Like in the United States, the father of modern China envisioned a railroad civilization that would integrate Han, Hui, Mongolian, and Tibetan ethnic groups in the wastelands of western frontiers with his strategic blueprint. It later had a significant impact on developing the contemporary high-speed railroad grid to create a commercial civilization that connected one urban-city with

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27 Richard Louis Edmonds, "The Legacy of Sun Yat-sen's Railway Plans," *The China Quarterly*, No. 111, September 1987, pp.421-443.

28 "Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Blue Print for Tibet," Xinhua, May 18, 2009, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-05/18/content\\_11395609.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-05/18/content_11395609.htm).

29 *Ibid.*

another and rural areas.

## **Trade with All, Entangle with None**

The entwined experience illustrates that China and the US have a shared and common strategy to unite people: trade. In China, the commercial legacy of the ancient Silk Road will continue through the Belt and Road

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*In China, the commercial legacy of the ancient Silk Road will continue through the Belt and Road Initiative.*

Initiative. With the Commerce Clause, America inaugurated its mission for the nation to work as a commercial republic, trading with Native Indian tribes, states, and foreign nations. Thomas Jefferson articulated this lofty vision that the

US would seek “peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations; entangling alliances with none” to create a more peaceful world in realizing his Empire of Liberty.

Ironically, that forgotten American vision is seemingly carried out by the Chinese foreign policy in their commercial engagements with other countries. China’s independent foreign policy derives from the five principles enumerated in 1954: non-interference in other nation’s internal affairs, mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. However, just as the US encountered numerous challenges, conflicts, and tragedies in its westward journey (in Texas, Hawaii, and the Philippines) with the Manifest Destiny, the assertive China will certainly encounter protest, competition, and potentially conflict with other countries and ethnic groups.

In fact, China has already experienced several strategic challenges and operation risks in its implementation of the BRI. One of the primary dangers is security risk that ranges from political stability of some governments to highly corrupt and inefficient regimes where Chinese investment could be jeopardized. The change of government in Myanmar and Sri Lanka,

for example, provides good case studies. Often, the prevailing regulatory and legal frameworks in these countries are incompatible with the Chinese strategy and its legal background. Foreign trade and payments, industrial and tax policies, environmental and labor issues, and currency exchange regimes are also involved in operational risks as well.

Overall, credit risk is the primary driver in investment decisions of the BRI agenda. Countries like Israel and Singapore pride themselves as the most secure and least risky place to invest with the assurance of their political stability and legal framework. Other countries like Egypt, Libya and Sudan are the riskiest and least secure as China had already announced the billions of dollars for debt forgiveness to many African countries.

Other challenges come from unintended consequences of China's engagement with the world: human trafficking, endangered wildlife trade, refugees and illegal workers, illicit drugs, and terrorism become more commonplace than before. With a collection of projects under construction at the cost of over \$50 billion through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), for example, China needs to anticipate protests and conflicts with the regional stakeholder countries like Afghanistan, India, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan in addition to these unintended consequences listed as well as international criticism by labor, human rights, and environmental groups. Reported terrorist activities around the CPEC region have already indicated a more challenging future ahead that required security guarantees for workers to protect national interests of China and Pakistan.

## **Building Trust**

Despite all this, trade in goods, services, and knowledge has historically proven to put the necessary foundation for mutual trust and to address other concerns diplomatically without entangling with each other. To build trust, China and the participating Silk Road countries need to have better understanding of the places, people, policies, and problems (4Ps) of other

nations. The seven Ming voyages provided a classic example of Admiral Zheng's diplomatic and trade missions as they prepared meticulously with subject matter experts (including anthropologists, astronomers, diplomats, doctors, geographers, historians, and even nutritionists) aboard as well as military forces to protect their security and overall wellbeing. In advance,

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they had evidently studied the countries, their people, customs, political history, diplomatic relations, and prevailing problems with calculated risk of visiting them.

Among over 30 countries, the Ming admiral encountered only a few conflicts; it was rather an exception than a rule compared to the numerous bloody conflicts and brutal battles waged by

Christopher Columbus in his discovery of the Americas. The initial voyage of Columbus was accidentally taken to the West Indies (the Caribbean) by westerly winds over the Atlantic Ocean, leaving behind the original destination to India. The Ming voyages were antithesis to the economic motivation and colonial interest of Columbus. Propagating China's tributary system and respect for the emperor was more of a trust building exercise for mutual benefits and friendship.

With the revival of 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, the world would expect China to lead a similar Ming path in its foreign policy and contemporary maritime affairs in the South and East China Seas, the Indian Ocean, and beyond as history matters—and perhaps easier having relatively a legacy of peaceful relations—for the rejuvenation of Chinese culture. Thus, territorial and maritime issues related to the Xisha (Paracel) and Nansha (Spratly) archipelagoes with the Philippines and Vietnam, the sovereignty over the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands with Japan, and the cross-strait issues with Taiwan could better be approached consultatively with all stakeholders and bilaterally. Challenging neighboring countries and

their distant allies would be counterproductive as it does not represent the Confucian culture that is being advocated by the Beijing leadership at home and abroad.

In retrospect, these challenges must be viewed as windows into employing creative approaches to conflict resolution to promote China's benevolent vision for international affairs. A case for such a model derives from the Ming-Kotte War in 1410, which was an isolated military conflict between the expeditionary forces of the Ming empire and the Sinhalese Kotte kingdom in the present-day Sri Lanka.<sup>30</sup> The brief battle led to taking the king, the royal family, and other captives to the Ming Court in Nanjing on Admiral Zheng He's treasure fleet. In 1411, "the prisoners were presented at [the imperial] court. The Chinese ministers pressed for their execution, but the [Yongle] emperor, in pity for their ignorance [of the Mandate of Heaven], set them at liberty, but commanded them to select a virtuous man from the same family to occupy the throne" on the island.<sup>31</sup> The invasion of Sri Lanka's royal city was "an exceptional event" of otherwise "a basically peaceful narrative of exploration and diplomacy" of the Ming envoy.<sup>32</sup> This illustrative story could serve as a diplomatic model for China's cultural civility and high morality—a vision that the enlightened American Founding Fathers emulated in creating the new nation by admiring the Chinese history and its Confucian culture.

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30 *Peaceful War: How the Chinese Dream and the American Destiny Create a Pacific New World Order*, p.112-18.

31 James Emerson Tennent, *Ceylon: An Account of the Island Physical, Historical, and Topographical with Notices of Its Natural History, Antiquities and Productions*, London: Spottiswoode and Company, 1859, p.624.

32 Edward L. Dreyer, *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405-1433*, New York: Pearson and Longman, 2007, p.68.

## Return to “Peaceful Rise”

The American vision for commercial intercourse for a more peaceful world was signified by the sailing of the Empress of China from New York Harbor to Canton (Guangzhou) on George Washington’s birthday in 1784. It officially signaled the US departure from the European colonial powers and recognized China as the primary trading partner. The momentous event was significant in Sino-American relations as the longest surviving civilizational-state and the newest republic—created by visionary and purposeful leaders—at last had come together for a shared commercial destiny.

In this backdrop, the recent actions by the overreaching China have unnecessarily invited greater American military presence in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The perception of the US economic decline and its entanglements in the Middle East and elsewhere has given the Beijing leadership reasons to miscalculate America’s strength and its founding vision for a mutually-beneficial strong and prosperous China. Both countries have their own domestic challenges and it is counterproductive to misconstrue original commercial vision that is reset in motion with intrinsically interconnected trade and economic relations as well as ever-increasing people-to-people exchange.

In sum, a long lasting mutual trust can more easily find its way in Sino-American relations by simply returning to Deng Xiaoping’s “Peaceful Rise” strategy. In hindsight, the Deng plan would also yield “soft-power” for China to achieve greater success in the BRI strategy not only among participating countries but also from global China observers. Otherwise, commercially-driven China is unintentionally and unnecessarily entangling with others, just as the vision of “trade with all, entangle with none” that America once advocated since its founding but mistakenly abandoned occasionally. Yet both countries still pursue a shared commercial civilization for a more peaceful world but its continued progress depends largely on leaders who can look to the past to guide a better future. 🇺🇸