

Historical Examination and Practical Lessons of the Silk Road: A Production-of-Space Perspective

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Abstract: The rise of the ancient Silk Road is a model of cross-nation production of space in early human history. During the Western Han Dynasty, after a passage way to the Western regions was "hollowed out" and secured, commerce and trade along the route boomed, people started to form clusters, and towns and cities were established. Since the late Tang Dynasty, under the combined effects of natural disasters and man-made misfortunes, regions along the Silk Road in Northwest China were severely depopulated, the towns and cities declined, the ecological environment became fragile, and the social space in West China shrank dramatically. The West Development Strategy later launched by the People's Republic of China had its focus on optimization and reconstruction of domestic social space, whereas the Belt and Road Initiative (referring respectively to "the Silk Road Economic Belt", hereinafter "the Belt", and "the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road", "the Road") is rooted in the planning of space for long-term development and production. In building the Belt and Road, we should take the initiative and necessary steps to manage sound top-level designs; further break down the space alienation emanating from the domestic administrative divisions, and stick to the policy of all around opening up; base the endeavor on the new types of urbanization and strengthen social construction to optimize spatial structures; pay attention to the leading role of space consumption by vigorously developing Silk Road tourism; enhance the transportation and communication infrastructure in the node cities to achieve seamless docking and deep-level integration of both social space and natural space along the Belt and Road.

Keywords: production of space; the Silk Road; historical examination; practical lessons

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In recent years, the theory of production of space has received extensive attention from social sciences. The concept was initiated by Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey, Edward Soja, and Manuel Castells all elaborated on it. Its theoretical basis is the sociality of space, that space is not a static objective existence with just geometric and geographic significance, but a social existence as well." Space is not a conventional geometric or geographic category, but a process of reorganizing social relationships and practically constructing reality."^[1] Space is both the condition of people's behavior and the results of the behavior, a process of humanization. Production of space is an activity that creates space products that suit people's practical needs through re-configuring the means of production. The theory's biggest contribution is the introduction of the social interpretation of space, thus breaking away from the society-time (history) dichotomy analysis. This allows historicity, sociality and spatiality to integrate organically and form a "triad analysis method,"^[2] thereby becoming a unique theoretical system and research paradigm that can be profoundly enlightening and interpretative for studies in many other fields. The widely discussed "The Belt and

Road Initiative" can gain new revelations from this theory. The sociality and historical construction of production of space in particular provide a new perspective in explaining relevant issues of the Silk Road.

The Silk Road is both a trade route that extends across the Eurasian continent and a friendship corridor that connects the oriental and occidental cultures. From the ancient Silk Road to the contemporary "The Belt and Road Initiative" (respectively "the Silk Road Economic Belt" and "the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road"), more than 2,000 years have passed. Spatially the Road has evolved from a few several thousand-kilometer long trade routes to an economic belt involving more than 90 cities in over 50 countries.^[3] This change from "line" to "plane" is not just spatial expansion in a geographical sense, but also a production and reconstruction of social space. Be it the ancient Silk Road or the B&R today both are in essence an expansion of social space. The initiative and constructive power of people has played a decisive role in the evolution of the Silk Road. Both Zhang Qian's "hollowing out" the Western regions in the Western Han Dynasty and the *Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and*



"the Silk Road Economic Belt" and "the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road"

the 21st Century Maritime Economic Road released by the Chinese government in March, 2015, are a construction endeavor with prominent subjectivity. The force behind them originates mainly from the government's policy of pushing from top to bottom. During the production of space, new space is constructed, new models of social relationships are created, new space structures are formed, and during the historical evolution, social space is being constantly reconstructed. While examining the Silk Road from a production-of-space perspective and a historical viewpoint, we must see the complex interplay between production of space and social construction, and gain inspiration for the creation of space construction along the Belt and Road currently underway.

1. Ancient Silk Road: Formation and Depression of the Western Social Space

1.1 The Western Regions Were "Hollowed Out", Leading to the Rise of the Silk Road in the Northwest.

Prior to the Han Dynasty, the border inhabitants in the Northwest had already established trade ties with many countries. Nonetheless, the Silk Road in the proper sense of connecting Asia and Europe was opened in the early Han Dynasty, the result of the famous event of Zhang Qian exploring connections with the Western regions. Zhang Qian was twice sent as an emissary to the Western regions, resulting in the strengthened ties between China and the countries in those regions and steadily increasing foreign trade. After that, the Han government introduced policies of reclaiming arable land, frontier garrisoning and emigration, which caused rapid growth in population and productivity along the Silk Road. (In the early Western Han Dynasty, the

northwest had a population of about 2.5 million, which topped 6.2 million by the late years of the dynasty.)^[4] In particular, the Western Han court set up the Protectorate of the Western Regions with its station in Wulei City, east of present-day Luntan County, Xinjiang. Wulei was both the governing center of the 36 counties in the Western regions and the transfer point to India in the south, and Middle and Western Asia in the west. This arrangement greatly promoted local political stability, economic development, and guaranteed the safe and smooth running of the Road. Upon the road extending from Chang'an to ancient Rome," emissaries coming in both directions, passed by one another."^[5] The opening of the Silk Road was originally a politically motivated attempt to defend against the Huns, but its significance transcended the political scope; the Silk Road trade and commerce linked ancient China with ancient civilized countries such as Kushan, Parthia and Rome, and countries along the Road enjoyed better communications with one another, and their trade ties, cultural exchanges and religions strengthened and spread.

Towards the end of the Western Han empire, the Silk Road was blocked due to political unrest until Ban Chao of the Eastern Han managed to re-connect with the Western regions, thereby reopening the Silk Road. Although the country was not unified during the period of the Southern and Northern Dynasties, the Road still played its role, as proven by the historical records of emissaries and monks traveling to and from China along the Road during this period.^[6]

During the Sui and Tang dynasties, the Silk Road entered a period of unprecedented prosperity. Not only did the Road's starting point city Chang'an become the then world's most populous and international metropolis with the best developed commerce, but carrier stations



Chang'an became the then world's most populous and international metropolis when the Silk Road entered a period of unprecedented prosperity in Sui and Tang dynasties.

were also densely distributed along the Road and load-carrying camels and horses came in a ceaseless stream, caravans came one after another, and trade prospered. The post roads reached all the way through the Western regions to Central Asia, linking together cities such as Dunhuang, Yiwu, Gaochang, Shanshan and Suyab along the Silk Road. They became the transit places for foreign merchants and formed a beaded cluster of towns. These Road areas had extremely vigorous handicraft industries and commerce. The needs of business activities also led foreigners to build commercial bases like Xinghupo, Zhinu City, Shicheng Town, Putao City and Sapi City. With commerce prospering, "all-family" and "all-clan" population emigration into the Road areas became more frequent.^[7] The population concentrated along the post roads, and the concentrated areas developed into towns and cities based on the carrier stations, gradually turning into hinterland clusters of cities and towns. The four Anxi Towns and the Northern Frontier Protectorate set up by the Tang government effectively safeguarded the stability of the regions along the Road and promoted economic development. Historical

records from various sources clearly indicate the prosperity of the Western regions," At that time (the twentieth year of Tianbao), Tang Dynasty was strong and prosperous. Along the road that stretched over 12 thousand *li* from Anyuan Gate to the Western regions beyond Tang's border, there were rows upon rows of commoners' residential quarters, and mulberry, hemp and the like abounded. No place or region under the heaven was equal to Longyou (regions to the east of Long Mountain, today's Liupan Mountain) in terms of prosperity and wealth."^[8] "In the high Tang period, among the thirty prefectures in Hexi and Longyou regions, Liangzhou Prefecture ranked first in area and its soils were fertile, products abundant, and people wealthy and in happiness."^[9] The verse line "Seven miles into Liangzhou, hundred thousand homes are passed" also illustrates the booming prosperity of this city, then the town of greatest strategic importance in Hexi. Cities along the Silk Road could not have developed and prospered without the supply of the Road trade and commerce, and they, on their part, provided safeguards for the continuing development of the Road.

Seen from the production-of-space perspective, the rise of the ancient Silk Road is not merely the blazing of a route or the expanding of territories, but a process of social space production as well. Sima Qian, the historian and author of *Historical Records*, said in the book of the endeavor by Zhang Qian to connect with the Western regions as "凿空 (zao kong in pinyin, meaning hollowing out in English)."^[10] "凿" (hollowing) is a verb and a concrete yet vivid kind of "production;" hence the "hollowing out" of the Western regions is undoubtedly an act of "producing space." The more important significance of such territorial expansion is manifested in the formation of social space, the large number of cities and towns that came into

existence. The envoys and trade caravans traveling or trading along the Silk Road required stable access to supplies, which facilitated the trade and commercial activities of the courier stations and towns. Some cities and towns that were originally established as political and military centers also developed rapidly as commodity distribution centers. It should be noted that the Silk Road trade and cultural exchanges must have been established on the basis of the carrying capacity of agriculture and animal husbandry. As the garrisoning, land reclaiming and population emigration continued on a huge scale, the carrying capacity of the cities along the Road increased continuously, their service capacities improved, and a legion of mature cities and towns emerged. For example, the relatively large cities that rose along the Shaanxi-Gansu section of the Road included Baoji, Tianshui, Jincheng (present-day Lanzhou), Wuwei, Zhangye, Jiuquan and Dunhuan. Those along the Xinjiang section were Loulan, Yanzhu, Ruoqiang, Jingjue, Guizi, Kucha, Khotan, and Kashgar. Of course, if a town could not meet the needs of supplying the caravans, the town was bound to decline and would even impede the smooth flow along the Road, causing new routes to be searched out and opened. For instance, the decline and fall of Loulan resulted in the gradual abandonment of the southern route of the Silk Road.

Surveying the history of the rise of the Silk Road, we find that the Road was blazed by the government for political and military purposes. The flow of commerce, population movements and the concentration of people came later. As productivity developed and consumption increased, towns and cities were populated, society developed and communications between nations followed thus promoting cultural integration. This evolution can be encapsulated into six stages; political, trade and commerce,

population, cities and towns, society, and culture. During this process, an economic and cultural belt that connected Asia, Europe, and Africa and accommodated the three major regions and four civilizations of the world, came into existence and the city clusters beaded along the belt gradually formed relatively stable social space. It is no exaggeration to say that to an extent the forming of the Silk Road was in essence globalization in ancient times, opening new space for human civilizations to progress.

1.2 Disasters, both Man-made and Natural, Shrank the Northwest' s Social Space

The Tang Dynasty declined rapidly after the "An-Shi Rebellion," and as part of the nation, the northwest regions were severely affected. To put down the rebellion, the Tang government moved large numbers of border garrisons inland. Taking advantage of this situation, the Tubo army marched eastward to "capture all land in Hexi (west of the Yellow River) and Longyou (west of Long Mountain) regions,"^[11] cutting off communications between Anxi, Beijing and other Western regions including the central plain and blocking the Silk Road. Although most of the Western regions falling under Tubo' s control were later recaptured by the Tang during Emperor Xuan' s reign, the Tang Dynasty was already in full decline, and gone were the days when the trade and commerce along the Silk Road boomed. During the Song period, the Dynasty was surrounded by minority regimes. The Western regions were ruled by Xixia, Huihe, Huanghu, Khotan and other ethnic regimes and were torn apart by incessant wars between these groups. Coupled with the political and economic centers gradually moving to the south and the rise of the Maritime Silk Road, the northwest land route' s status decreased significantly. However, due to the Song government' s encouraging foreign

trade and the rise of grassroots mercantilism, the Silk Road trade flow and the sending and receiving of envoys was never completely severed. According to statistics, from the third year of Tianzan of Liao (924 A.D.) to the Kaixi years of Song (1207 A.D.), friendly exchanges between the Song and countries in the Western regions were officially recorded a total of 55 times.^[12] When the Mongolian regime of the Yuan Dynasty expanded its territories with forceful enthusiasm, both the land route and the Maritime Silk Road were strengthened and protected, and connected many parts of the world. Both were maintained in a safe and smooth running way as, "The road that spanned across the Eurasian continent was controlled by one and only one regime and travel thus became far securer."^[13] Commercial activities grew once again. For example in Xinjiang, *The Travels of Marco Polo* recorded that from Kashgar, "Many merchants set out to travel to other parts of the world for trade and commerce."^[14] Although a unified regime guaranteed the smooth flow of commerce along the Silk Road, many years of campaigning and the Yuan Dynasty's tyranny over the Han people, and its disregard of agriculture, caused significant losses to the population in the northwestern region. By the late Yuan Dynasty, the population of the northwestern territories had fallen to 4.65 million, accounting for only 4.37% of the national total, the lowest level in history.^[15] The substantial reduction of population affected the prosperity and development of the Silk Road, destabilizing the basis of the trade along the Road. After experiencing a short-lived revival during the Yuan Dynasty, the ancient Silk Road was even more depressed during the Ming with the increasing reliance on the Maritime Silk Road. Decline continued and accelerated under the Qing Dynasty's closed-door policy.

Combing through the development of the

Silk Road after the late Tang Dynasty, we find that although its development was interposed with several relatively short-lived trade booms, it trended towards irreversible decline. The indications included, among others, impeded communications, stagnant trade, the sharp decline in population, depression and even the disintegration of towns and cities. As described by Ma Duanlin, "Since the mid-Tang Dynasty, the land to the west of the Yellow River was reduced into a near alien place, a barren desert that was devoid of its once bustling prosperity and wealth."^[16] Reasons leading to the decline of the ancient Silk Road are multi-faceted, such as wars and unrests, climate and water-source changes (drought), the rise of the Maritime Silk Road, the southward movement of the political and economic centers as well as the decreased demand for silk products in foreign countries. Compared to natural factors, human factors played a more decisive role. Aside from the significant influence produced by the wars, separatist movements triggered by regime change and migration, the seemingly objective changes in the ecological environment also had direct and close association with human activities. Of the many factors affecting the development of the Silk Road, essential as the climate and water changes were, they also directly had something to do with the human activities such as irrational exploitation of land, over-exploitation of water resources, and vegetation over-exploitation.^[17] As the famous American scholar Donald Worster put it, "To some degree, drought is also a man-made phenomenon, or at least a problem greatly exacerbated due to human's unwise behavior. It makes the natural cycle deeply embedded in the deep tragedy of humanity."^[18]

From a social space viewpoint, the gathering or diaspora of people, the behavioral agent of spatial construction, directly determines the

formation and development of spatial structures, meaning that social space is in essence the space of people's concentration. In the process of social space formation, people's production practices play a decisive role. Natural space's socialization is completed through people's social production practices. Social space is the result of the constant interaction between social relations and productive forces. The social space thus formed by human efforts, in contrast, would see its sociality fade away gradually if it lost the continued support of the people, and would return to its natural state. Many of the ancient cities along the Silk Road, fell silent in the desert after," they were emptied with the inhabitants leaving for other places," becoming once again an absolute natural space.

Under the combined effects of man-made and natural disasters, the Western regions' social space declined rapidly after the late Tang. Areas along the Silk Road became sparsely populated, the ecological environment fragile and natural disasters frequent, creating a vicious cycle: wars and unrest, population shifts, ecological damage, then social space collapse. While the Silk Road on land declined with age, the Maritime Silk Road increased in activity and significance. This could be interpreted as the production of space along the Silk Road in the northwest declining as the west's social space shifted to the east.

2. The New Silk Road: Interactions Between and Reconstruction of the Social Space of East China and West China

2.1 Hu Line: The Unbalanced Social Space

The formation of the Silk Road social space was the process of constantly increasing industrial and commercial progress in a farming and animal



the Hu Line

husbandry society. The shrinking and shifting of the Silk Road's social space was the result of the continuing stagnation and regression of productivity resulting in the social space becoming increasingly unbalanced between Eastern and Western China since the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Mr. Hu Huanyong drew the famous "Hu Line (or Heihe-Tengchong Line)" on the map of China in 1935, saying "Let us draw a straight line, starting from Aihui, Heilongjiang and ending at Tengchong, Yunnan to the southwest, and hence divide the country into the southeastern and the northwestern parts. The southeastern part takes up an area of some four million square kilometers, accounting for about 36% of the national total while the northwestern part covers seven million square kilometers, accounting for about 64%. In terms of population, the former has a total of 440 million, 96% of the total population; while the latter has a population of only 18 million, about 4% of the total. The population divide is as huge as this."^[19] The land Silk Road, composed of the Northwest's Silk Road and the Southwest's Ancient Tea-horse Road, is located to the west of the "Hu Line." The population distribution

pattern disclosed by it also reflects that of China's economic sectors. In the early years of New China, there were only a small number of industrial bases. These were concentrated in the Northeast, along the Yangtze River, and the coastal areas in the Southeast. In the vast western regions, agriculture was the predominant form of economy. For example, the 1949 combined industrial and agricultural output of the five Northwest provinces, Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, and Xinjiang, was only 2.837 billion *yuan* (at 1980 constant prices), of which 2.289 billion came from agriculture.^[20]

Beginning with the "First Five-Year Plan" and from the 1950s to the late 1970s, the state gave preferential policies to hinterlands in the national economic development arrangement, and intentionally increased support for the western regions. At the beginning of the 1950s, the state established the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, and called on aspiring young people around the country to "support the Northwest". Meanwhile, a number of key institutions of research and higher learning were established or relocated in Xi'an, Chengdu, Chongqing, Lanzhou and other western cities. During the 1960s, based on the then international situation and the needs of combat readiness, a large-scale "three-line construction" was conducted. The "Three-line areas" included mainly Sichuan (including Chongqing), Guizhou, Yunnan, Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai. Between 1964 and 1980 the state invested a total of 205.268 billion *yuan* in infrastructure development for the central and western regions belonging to the Three-line areas. This was over 40% of the national total spending on infrastructure during this period. More than four million workers, cadres, intellectuals, PLA officers and soldiers, and tens of millions of migrant workers participated in

the "Three-line" construction programs, the results being the creation of over 1,100 medium to large sized industrial and mining enterprises, and other scientific research units^[21]. This laid the industrial base for the northwestern and southwestern parts of the country.

2.2 Western China Development: Social Space Optimization with a Domestic Focus

Along with the implementation of the reform and opening up policy, the national regional development strategy also underwent a directional shift, from tilting towards inland to coastal areas. Although the entire national economy developed at a rapid pace after the opening up, the development in East China had, for 20 years, outpaced that of Central and West China. In 1988 Deng Xiaoping proposed the strategic vision of "Two Overall Situations". The coastal areas should accelerate opening up to the outside world and lead the development at a quick pace, while the central and western parts of China should accommodate the needs of this situation. As a result, the uneven development between China's east and west has gradually become a major problem that has a bearing on the overall economic and social development.

In 1999, China's central government called on the whole nation to focus on "Western China Development" and laid out a comprehensive strategic plan. The Western China Development policy covers a total of "12 + 2" provinces, municipalities or districts: Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, Xinjiang, Sichuan, Chongqing, Yunnan, Guizhou, Tibet and Inner Mongolia, Guangxi, plus Xiangxi of Hunan and Enshi Autonomous Prefecture of Hubei. Relying on a series of major infrastructure projects, including the Qinghai-Tibet Railway, returning cultivated areas to forestry and grass, the West-

East Power Transmission, the West-East Natural Gas Transmission, and the South-North Water Diversion, infrastructure development in the western regions has made substantial progress, and the environmental protection and construction has been significantly strengthened. Resulting from economic development, ecological restoration, and traffic improvement, several city clusters have gradually come into existence, such as the Guanzhong cluster, Mt. Tianshan' s North Slope cluster, the Lanzhou-Bai-Xi' an cluster, the Yinchuan Plains cluster and the Jiuquan-Jiayu-Yuquan cluster where the ancient city clusters were once beaded together and later disappeared along the route of the ancient Silk Road. When the Western China Development strategy was in its second ten years, around 2009, the three national-level economic zone plans in West China, namely, the Guanzhong-Tianshui Economic Zone, the Chengdu-Chongqing Economic Zone and the Beibu Gulf Economic Zone, were reviewed and approved by the State Council. The development mode of forming large economic zones and city groups has further deepened the development of West China.

2.3 The Belt and Road: Globally Planned Social Space Reconstruction

On September 7, 2013, during his visit to Kazakhstan, President Xi Jinping proposed in his Nazarbayev University speech that China and Central Asia cooperate to build the "Silk Road Economic Belt" where the key points (or cities) can drive the development of their surrounding areas and then connect different regions to encompass whole pieces of regions, thereby facilitating regional macro-cooperation. On October 3, 2013, while addressing the Indonesian Congress, President Xi put forward the initiative to make preparations for establishing an Asian

Infrastructure Investment Bank and to jointly build "the 21st-Century Marine Silk Road." In November 2013, Decisions on Several Major Issues Relating to Comprehensively Deepening Reform by the CPC Central Committee pointed out that, "Efforts should be put into promoting the building of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road, thus creating a new pattern for all-round opening up." On March 28, 2015, authorized by the State Council, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Commerce jointly issued the Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, drawing out the blueprint for the future development of the Belt and Road.

Arguably, the Western China Development strategy was carried out with a view to balancing the development of East and West China. But it is apparent that the Belt and Road Initiative has a greater scope, which is planning a spatial layout from a global standpoint. The Silk Road Economic Belt focuses on bringing together China, Central Asia, Russia and Europe (the Baltic) and linking China with the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea through Central Asia and the Indian Ocean. The 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road is designed to go from China' s coast to Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean in one route, and from China' s coast through the South China Sea to the South Pacific in the other. The land arm of the initiative' s transport routes relies on the existing major international passageways, supported by cities of central importance in regions along the routes, and takes the major economic and trade industrial parks as the cooperation platforms, with the overriding purpose to jointly creating international economic cooperation corridors such as the new Eurasian Continental Bridge, the China-Mongolia-Russia corridor, the

China-Central Asia-West Asia corridor, and the China-Indo-China corridor. The modern Maritime Silk Road focuses on weaving together key coastal ports and building a huge unobstructed passage that is safe and efficient.^[22] The Belt and Road runs through Asia, Europe and Africa, connecting the vigorous East Asian economic circle with the advanced European economic circle. It is beyond doubt that the production of space of the new Silk Road will reshape the global economic and political landscapes.

From the "First Five-Year Plan" to the "Thirteenth Five-Year Plan", every five-year plan is about laying out the production of social space. From the founding of New China to the "Three-Line Program", the industrial and urban layout initially was scattered production of space. Since the Western China Development strategy, the booms of building "economic zones", "economic circles" and "city clusters" have taken on a "plate-like" spatial production pattern. The implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative has signified that China's regional economic development and social space production tend towards the mode combining "plate and shafts". The production of space is increasing in scale. The spatial structures of eastern, central and western Chinese societies are gradually becoming optimized during this interaction and remodeling.

3. Community of Common Destiny: the B&R Social Space of Mutually Beneficial Cooperation

3.1 Take the Initiative and the Opportunities to Deliver Sound Top-level Design

It was with the intention of building military alliances that Zhang Qian set off on his journey to the Western Regions, but the actual result was a road of peace facilitating the flow of commerce

and cultural exchanges. The "hollowing out" produced a "community of common interests" among different ethnic groups along the Silk Road, through which they could exchange needed goods. President Xi, by contrast, advocated "the Belt and Road Initiative" with the clear objective of building a "community of common destiny" that benefits and rewards all participating parties. The ancient "production of space" did not have a clear design scheme but now the government's top-to-bottom regulation and its leading role in the modern production of space show that top-level design is more and more important and effective. This is manifested in the evolution from the China Western Development strategy to "the Belt and Road Initiative", where the planning and design have become more specific. From the ancient Silk Road to the new Silk Road, the production of space has evolved from being "spontaneous" to being "conscious".

Production of space is an integral part of human social practice, where people are the agents. Because of human social practice, the original pure natural space has changed into a product of space with social implications. In the modern "conscious" production of space, people's subjective initiative should be given full play to secure forward-looking, sustainable top-level designs. In the early days following the introduction of the reform and opening up, China's social space was in a low-level equilibrium. With the rapid economic development after the policy was implemented, the wealth gap between eastern, central and western regions widened with each passing day, and the social space imbalance among them was significant. There has always been a voice in the circle of theorists, advocating *laissez faire* in economic management in the belief that "the nature of the market is to govern by non-interference^[23]" and the "invisible hand"

will automatically adjust the space balance to its optimal state. In fact, however, market mechanism has a significant "Matthew Effect". The developed eastern regions attract the labor force, talents and energy resources from the central and western regions in a ceaseless stream, and regional development becomes increasingly unbalanced. Practice has proven that market mechanisms, combined with the macro-control under the auspices of the government, is a development road that accords with China's realities. During the B&R production of space, we must guard against every variant of "market fundamentalism" preaching zero government intervention.

It must be noted that although production of space is the production of space by human practice, it is not and cannot be subjective construction in the pure sense. Any social space inevitably relies on, and fits in with the natural geographic space. The ancient Silk Road was also known as the "Silk Road of Desert Oases", which means that the basic condition for producing the Road was to find desert oases with a water source, vegetation, and supply conditions suitable for the survival of people and animals. In the modern B&R production of space, the government should not only guarantee sound top-level designs and a rational plan, but also adapt to the local natural, geographic, and demographic factors and actively define every region's strengths and weaknesses to maximize the effectiveness of the plan.

3.2 Further Break the Spatial Alienation Resulting from Domestic Administrative Divisions and Persist in an All-round Opening Up

Space is a process of reorganizing social relations and realistically constructing social order. Production of space is thus in essence the production of social relations. From the ancient Silk Road to the contemporary "The Belt and

Road Initiative", the core essence has always been to build compatible and mutually beneficial social relations, break spatial alienation and achieve win-win cooperation. The ancient Silk Road achieved "hollowing out", or breakthrough of the natural, closed geographic space to build the social space connecting China to the West. The Silk Road became the important channel for trade and business exchanges between East and West in ancient times. With the exchange of commodities and the dissemination of relevant technologies followed, exchanges of agricultural technology, handicraft technologies, ceramic firing and metal smelting, and biological species all took place. Amidst the exchange of trade and commerce, technologies and culture, the Oriental and Occidental cultures discovered each other along the Silk Road and spread knowledge of each other, which had an important positive impact on historical cultural evolution. The Silk Road had," So large a scale that it is no exaggeration to say it is relevant to the entire human history."^[24]

That the ancient Silk Road made such important achievements is closely associated with the active participation and promoting efforts by the countries along the Road. The ancient Roman and Persian Empires, for instance, played a critical role.^[25] Similarly, contemporary China is the sponsor and advocate of "the Belt and Road Initiative", but cannot single-handedly promote it and accomplish the goals. For the vision to be realized, it calls for the deep-level and mutually beneficial cooperation, multilateral exchange, interconnectivity and interests sharing among the countries along the Road. However, it can also be discerned that while the B&R brings us a more comprehensive opening up, the open cooperation between domestic regions is far from adequate, as the phenomena of enclosing space through administrative division abound. Some countries

contend for projects or policy preferences and scramble to turn their respective administrative regions into "policy wash", which leads to the homogenization of competition, further resulting in duplicate construction. Others pursue local protectionism, mounting regional administrative barriers which hinder the factors of production from flowing rationally. Cooperation featuring openness and mutual benefit should not only be oriented towards the international community, but also apply to the various regions in China. First and foremost is to break the restricting social space alienation resulting from administrative divisions of the country, implement a more proactive strategy of opening up, give full play to their comparative advantages, and strengthen the interactions and cooperation between the central and western provinces to raise the overall level of openness.

3.3 Rely on the New Type of Urbanization to Strengthen Social Construction and Optimize Spatial Structure

Production of social space is largely a process of demographic changes and urbanization. Historically, changes in population structure along the ancient Silk Road mirror the rise and decline of the city clusters beaded along the Road. Under the current "The Belt and Road Initiative", the building of cities as individual points, as belts and as groups^[26] shall remain the essential vehicle or support. With this type of urbanization, focus should be on people, and an approach to the new type of urbanization should be people-oriented.

Lefebvre explicitly criticized the capitalization in production of space, arguing that production of space has been permeated by capital relations and has become the carrier for capital proliferation. Capitalists obtain gains by producing space, and with the production of space all other resources

have become a tool to gain surplus value." Space, as a whole, enters the modern capitalist mode of production. It is used to produce surplus value. Land, underground, air, and even light are all included in productivity and products."^[27] An examination of China's realities leads to the finding that unrestricted sprawling prevails in China's urban expansion efforts. On the one hand, the government is keen to "make business of cities", which is reflected in the real estate developers' seeking to appreciate the land value so as to maximize their gains; on the other hand, the accompanying "urban diseases" like traffic congestion, air pollution, and safety risks have produced many plights in social management. Therefore, during the building of the Belt and Road, we must not blindly pursue the exchange of value under the capitalistic system, which is to take development and urban development as the tool for local governments to gain short-term profits, but instead keep to the values that put people's interest first and maintain fairness and justice, lay out long-term plans, optimize population structures, industrial distribution and other factors of production, focus on the development of cities' quality of culture, ecology and life, so as to enhance the level of urbanization.

From the perspective of history of urban development, the construction of cities can be decomposed to two levels, technical construction and social construction. Zhuang Yougang holds that the main emphasis in contemporary China's urbanization efforts has been laid on the technical construction, while the social construction has been somewhat overlooked, even evaded, giving rise to and intensifying a host of social problems and social conflicts.^[28] This remark makes sense. In contemporary China, rapid urbanization focusing on technical construction, represented by a single building or group of buildings, has

been given full attention to, while the social construction attached thereto remains a weak link. For instance, if a school is included as part of a land development, does it affect the accessibility to, and fairness in, basic education? Does it really count as a social intergraion process if farmers originally living in "urban villages" are relocated in high-rising buildings? A wealth of facts prove that the technology-centered, application-focused development approach is one-sided, because technology is not an end in itself, but only a means to an end. During the urban technical planning, equal importance should be attached to social constructions such as the transformation of people's production methods, construction of social life relationships, and conversion of social identities, which is, put another way, to achieve the organic integration of natural space and social space.

The future carrying forward of the B&R should be based on the new type of urbanization to strengthen social construction, optimizing the structure of space. The production of social space is "man-driven" and, more importantly, carried out for the benefit of people, so the new type of urbanization should be, in essence, the urbanization of people. During their development, the individual cities, city belts and city groups along the B&R should draw on the experience and lessons learned from previous planning and coordinate the development of cities and towns to help the economy, society, culture and ecology for the benefit of the people. We must focus on the value of social spatial products which will strengthen the construction of harmonious social relations.

3.4 Pay Due Attention to the Leading Effect of Space Consumption by Vigorously Developing Silk Road Tourism

Production of space and consumption of

space are a dialectical unity. As production in space changes to production of space,^[29] so does the consumption in space change to consumption of space. As held by Lefebvre, "Just like any other commodity, space can be produced as well as consumed, and thus becomes a consumption object. Like the machinery, raw materials and labor in a factory or workshop, space as a whole is consumed during its production. When we climb a mountain or reach the seashore, we consume the space. When industrial Europe's inhabitants moved southwards to the Mediterranean regions, now their leisure space, they were precisely shifting from space of production to consumption of space."^[30] In the contemporary consumer society, space consumption is increasingly becoming a symbol of consumer culture, any natural landscape or architectural space with positive aesthetic characteristics is likely to be transformed into an object of consumption and profoundly influence people's production and life. Consumption of space has become an important channel^[31] to expand consumption in cities.

In the past, people were more concerned about the practicality of building and space, whereas the city's overall image and spatial characteristics now increasingly become objects of space consumption, with tourism being one of the major forms of space consumption. Leisure tours, cultural history tours, exercise and fitness tours, S&T and ecology tours, folklore and genealogy tours, shopping and gourmet tours, and many other forms of tourism consumption have produced and facilitated a long industrial chain, and also constructed new space products. The British scholar David Chaney opined that "tourists' visits are also a type of production. The prerequisite for tourism is that cultural differences can be occupied as resources for the tourism culture. Tourists are primarily concerned with the symbols and signs that constitute the

uniqueness of ' a place.' "[32] The regions along the Silk Road happen to be home to rich yet unique tourism resources of which the exotic northwest ethnic customs, the natural scenery of deserts and grasslands, and the Yellow River culture with its long history are but a few. This legendary Chinese history and cultural corridor is one of a kind in the world.[33] The implementation of "The Belt and Road Initiative" will offer the tourism industry a god-given opportunity for development along the Road. The local governments concerned should actively seize the opportunity and boost consumption by playing the tourism card, thereby driving the overall economic development. The development of tourism related products and traveling routes call for enhanced communications and cooperation among the regions along the Belt and Road. The regions should rationally develop the tourism resources based on a full understanding of the historical and cultural value of these resources. Hence, they should highlight their own regional flavor and give play to the overall B&R space, thus realising the comprehensive development of West China.

Of course, while the consumption of space is mainly advanced through tourism development, considerations should not only be given to the economic benefits, but also the cultural significance attached to it. The Belt and Road represent economic and trade space, but more importantly the social and cultural space of "community of common destiny". Of the "five inter-communications" in the development of the B&R, popular local feelings is the critical basis and cross-border tourism is the most common and most effective way to boost popular culture exchange and thus achieve this inter-communication. Consequently, as an important link in developing the B&R, vigorous development of Silk Road tourism should be of great importance

to local governments.

4. Strengthen Development of Transportation and Communication Infrastructure in the Node Cities, and Seamlessly Connect and Deeply Integrate Social Space and Natural Space

Whether it be the ancient Silk Road or the contemporary B&R, the prerequisite for development is smooth transportation conditions. Due to the difference in productivity, the roads themselves and the conditions of transportation have also undergone huge changes, leaping from the camel and horse in ancient times to the maritime-land-sea multi-tier transportation of today. This is consistent with the law of production of space. Production of space is historic; any society, any mode of production will produce its own unique space." If space is produced, if there is a production process, then our examination is historic, but we can be sure of the power of production (nature, labor and labor organizations, technology and knowledge) as well as, naturally, the important role played by relations of production in the production process of space. We should be aware that it is of high theoretical importance to us for one mode of production to transition into another mode."^[34]

Different production modes give rise to distinctive space and outlooks on space. Relatively speaking, the geographical space and the social space were united in ancient times. People's production and living space was the spatial extent which people could perceive and their bodies could utilize. As modern technologies improve, people's limbs and senses are significantly extended; efficient transport networks turn the entire planet into a "global village" , and time

is now an effective unit with which to measure space, with "X-hour economic circle" becoming a hot term. The progress of our times overturns the former equivalent relationship between people's perception of space; mental space, social relations space, and natural space. Such a change adapts to the development level of productive forces of our times. When we refer to a specific social space, it can be seen as a type of regional space that has almost the same level of productive forces and similar structure of production relations. Let us assume that in ancient times where traveling on foot, pulling by horses, and load-carrying by camels represented transportation. This was "Space 1.0." Present day space includes ships, cars, trains, airplanes and other machine carriers. This is "Space 2.0." The "economic circles" space resulting from the increased speeds in land transportation, from roads to expressways, freight trains to high-speed rail is "Space 3.0." Then we can say that the space we are currently in is "Space 4.0" where the Internet, the Internet of Things, and the Information Highway have seamlessly docked with our sea, air and land transportation. However,

despite this being the beginning of the 21st century, infrastructure in regions along the B&R is mostly underdeveloped, which creates obstacles to achieving the needed interconnectivity. Thus one of the pivotal objectives of China's "The Belt and Road Initiative" is to achieve interconnectivity among the Asian, European and African continents and the surrounding seas.

Along the ancient Silk Road in "Space 1.0", China was the starting point in the Oriental world. In the current era of three-dimensional transport and the Internet, there is no such thing as a "starting point" nor is there an "ending point". Today there are only "nodes". Every "node" should be an endpoint that extends in all directions. In the production of space, transport lays the groundwork. In carrying out the Initiative, due/great attention should be given to building a three-dimensional transportation network in node cities as well as ports, including harbours, airports and land ports, and great efforts should be made to build "Space 4.0" with a view to achieving the seamless docking and in-depth integration of social space and natural space.

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