IN SEARCH OF PEACE ON THE SILK ROAD: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

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Looking beyond the assumptions and arguments of commercial liberalism, which sees economic interdependence and cooperation as fostering peace, this paper demonstrates that peace as an ideal can be found in various theories of international politics. The author finds the commercial liberal perspective to peace to be too narrow to explain the opportunities and challenges posed along the Silk Road and proposes to look at the peace narrative on the Silk Road through the lens of other approaches to peace, including the more interdisciplinary field of peace studies, for a more comprehensive picture.

Keywords: Silk Road, Peace, Peace Studies, China, OBOR

INTRODUCTION

Since its coinage in the 19th century (Ball, 2016), the term "Silk Road" has referred to a network of trade routes that throughout history facilitated mainly economic trade, but also cultural exchanges along the East-West axis of the wide Eurasian landscape,

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from Beijing to Istanbul and even as far as Venice. The civilizations along this path naturally have been both in competition and cooperation with one another, yet the Silk Road was a term with positive connotations, which emphasized the cooperative side rather than the competitive, which hinted at peace rather than conflict.

It is so even today. When the Soviet Union collapsed and the Soviet republics in Central Asia gained their independence, clearing the way between China and the West from the blocking of the Soviet Union, several new studies focused on the region, and the concept of the "Silk Road" saw the light of day once again. The end of the 20th century and the first decade of the post-Cold War era brought an emphasis on potential cooperation, especially around the issue of natural resources in the region (mainly fossil fuels), especially in Central Asia. The new debates around the Silk Road as a potential energy transport route were also underway under the name Eurasian corridor. It included not only the countries of the region but those of the Western world as well. The existence of advanced industrialized states in the West and the emerging power of China in the East, with an economy stronger than ever before in the late 1990s-early 2000s, all demanding energy, made many realize how strategically important these natural resources were.

Nevertheless, in the first years of the new millennium, the world's focus shifted from the post-communist geography to the Middle East due to the war on terrorism. Interest in this part of the world was revived under the name "The New Silk Road," with China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project stemming from Chinese President Xi Jinping's call for a New Silk Road during a state visit to Kazakhstan in 2013. Once again, the New Silk Road was seen as a term to return to an ideal where the nations in this region lived in peace through cooperation. While it can be debated whether such an ideal is based on historical accuracy or is imagined as a (re)construction, the fact that the ideal is there and is presented in academic and policy circles cannot be denied.

This newly emerged focus on the Silk Road is mostly based on commercial liberal assumptions where economic interdependence and cooperation are seen as fostering peace. However, this view of peace is not the only game in town. Peace is an ideal, an end with many paths when one looks at several theories of international politics that tackle the issue. In this paper, the author will argue that this commercial liberal perspective to peace may be a theory to look at the region and even serve as a policy tool, but it is too narrow to explain the opportunities and challenges posed along the Silk Road in practice for a more peaceful geography. The paper argues that it is possible to look at the peace narrative on the Silk Road through the lens of several approaches to peace, and focuses especially on how the more interdisciplinary field of peace studies

would view peace in the region for a more comprehensive picture of the current opportunities and challenges along the Silk Road.

The article will first introduce a simple theoretical background behind the study of peace in international relations, distinguishing between different perspectives on peace. Then the article will take a look at how the Silk Road has been seen as a historical concept from the past and how it is regarded now as a contemporary issue to discover continuities and ruptures in how the world conceptualizes the region associated with the Silk Road. The article will finally evaluate the current picture of the New Silk Road by highlighting issues that fall under the theoretical distinctions stated earlier, to question what opportunities and challenges the New Silk Road narrative poses to peace and cooperation in the region within the context of the political picture along the Eurasian landmass.

PEACE IN THEORY

Peace is the central theme of many research projects, articles, and books in the social sciences in general and in international relations in particular. Peace or how to avoid war and achieve peace has also been theorized about to a considerable degree. In international relations, it is the major preoccupation of many theories. Some of these theories are pessimistic about the state of interstate relations in world politics and about how likely peace is, while others adopt more optimistic visions on the basis of arguments that are equally as sound as those that are pessimistic.

The Pessimists

Realists are the oldest and the most renowned among those who have a pessimistic view of the state of international relations. They are pessimistic because as Martin Wight rightfully points out, they focus on anarchy, power politics and warfare (Wight 1992, 15). While classical realists believe that peace is difficult to attain because of human nature, which is selfish and which thus makes human-made states selfish (meaning pursuing their national interest), neorealists think that peace is difficult due to the anarchic structure of the international system where there is no central authority to enforce the rules, pushing states to resort to self-help, locking them in a state of security dilemma and resultant arms races (Goldstein and Pevehouse 2014, 45-47;

Genest 2004). In this thinking, one way peace might be possible is through a balance of power where two states or blocks of states balance against each other or where a group of states balance a newly rising power. However, realists contend that this does not always guarantee peace; it is rather aimed at stability (Goldstein and Pevehouse 2014, 52). Moreover, balance of power politics can be unpeaceful, as it also often leads to wars for the sake of balance.

Those who adhere to class system theories, which include Marxism, Imperialism, Dependency Theory and World System Theory (Genest 2004, 191-192), also think that peace is difficult to achieve because of the nature of class struggle. While Marx was the one to lay out the foundations of class struggle in politics, his ideas were not much concerned with international politics, and it was Lenin and Hobson who applied Marx's concepts to international relations (Smith 2010, 19-20; Genest 2004, 194-195). Lenin argued that imperialism was the highest stage of capitalism, and in a world of imperial powers, war was inevitable as the pursuit of colonies for easy access to cheap labor, raw materials and markets was a major driver of conflict (Lenin [1916] 2010). Dependency Theories and the World System Analysis of Immanuel Wallerstein (Wallerstein 2004) reiterated the existence of different categories of states which were locked in cycles of exploitation (Genest 2004, 195-196; Clemens Jr. 1998, 15). As long as this exploitation continued, peace would not be possible. Linklater shares a neoreal-ist critique of Marxism by Kenneth Waltz that only a worldwide transition to socialist governments could bring peace (Linklater 2013, 113). It should be noted, however, that since Marxism sees the collapse of capitalism and the consequent rise of social-ism as inevitable, one who adheres to this worldview may not find the prognosis for peace too pessimistic.

Feminist theories of international relations can also be categorized on the pes-simistic side as they focus on the power and predominance of males in world history as rulers, soldiers and historians who make history and write the official versions of their state's history as well as that of the world. Feminist scholars of international relations scrutinize this gender gap. To put it simply, even at the risk of oversimpli-fication, in such an environment, as long as women are not included in national and international political decision-making positions and women's already existing contri-butions to their societies are neglected and understudied, peace is unlikely to arrive. There are of course several different forms of feminism (Goldstein & Pevehouse 2014, 112; Smith 2010, 31) or different forms of feminist scholarship (True 2013, 242). Yet, many among the feminist scholars would argue that women are seen as more "peace-loving and inherently cooperative" than men, who are regarded as "war-

like, militaristic and competitive" (Kaufman 2013, 68). They are "more pacifistic than men, less likely to support defense spending or to support aggressive policies abroad" and "more interested in the so-called soft issues including the environment and social welfare" (Jaquette [1997] 2001, 222). Therefore, peace could come more easily when women are more included in positions of power. One can even talk about a "feminine peace" (Smith 2010, 31). The author chooses to place the feminists on the pessimist side since bridging the gender gap even in the most advanced democracies has proven to be a challenge.

The Optimists

While the above mentioned three theories exemplify how certain theories of international relations see peace as unlikely or highly difficult in the absence of radical changes, there are others which are more hopeful about the ability of human beings and of the institutions they build to bring peace to the world.

Liberalism is one such theory that first comes to mind. Liberalism as a theory of international relations claims that human nature is good; that states can cooperate through international institutions and international law, contrary to realist thinking which focuses on the conflictual aspects of interstate relations; and that there are not just states but several actors such as international organizations, transnational non-governmental organizations, and multinational corporations and even individuals on the world stage actively participating and thus influencing international relations. All of these assumptions of liberalism about the world paint a rosier picture and place a lot of focus on peace and cooperation. According to liberals, peace is achievable in different ways.

To exemplify, let's take a look at the ideas of Immanuel Kant. As an early liberal thinker, in his book *Perpetual Peace* ([1795], 2005), Kant made 3 central claims: that existence of a world government would facilitate peace, that republics were more peaceful than autocracies, meaning that peace and the domestic political system of a state were linked, and that more trade meant more peace (Kant [1795], 2005; see also Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2013, 87; Levy 2013, 586). It can be said that these three ideas of Kant ended up shaping the major tenets of liberalism in international relations.

The first idea that the existence of a world government would facilitate peace became the basis of the liberal argument that the realist assumption of anarchy (the lack of a world government), which the liberals share, can be mitigated via international

organizations and international law, thus establishing the strand of liberal institution-alism. That was the very reason why organizations such as the League of Nations and then the United Nations were established (Bennett & Oliver 2002) to serve as the first step towards a future world federation that Kant and others (among them US President Woodrow Wilson) dreamt of. The increasing number of international orga-nizations in world politics in the aftermath of WWII can be regarded as an important continuation of liberal thinking despite the predominance of realist thinking during the Cold War. Institutions are important for liberals, and they see institutions as inde-pendent actors in influencing world politics (Viotti & Kauppi 2013, 33).

The second idea, that the domestic political system of a state determined whether the state would be more or less likely to wage war on other states, served as the basis of what we call democratic peace theory today. While the original idea of Kant was that republics were more peaceful than autocracies, over time, this postulate evolved into democratic peace theory, which suggests that democracies do not fight against one another, but against non-democratic states. While the reasons for such abstinence from war among democratic states has been discussed at length (Doyle [1983] 2003, 100-101; Breuning 2007, 133-134), Levy (1989, 88) stated that "this absence of war between democracies comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in in-ternational relations." Democratic peace theory as such, constituted a motivation and a policy argument for spreading democracy. Exactly this motivation and argument are now associated with attempts at liberal peace, top-down peacebuilding efforts by Western powers in non-democratic countries, even to the point of legitimizing certain military interventions for "bringing democracy" to non-democratic regimes by force, Iraq and Libya being the latest examples. These attempts, labeled "liberal peace," have been extensively criticized (see, for example, Richmond 2006; Richmond & Mac Ginty, 2015; Selby 2013; Campbell, Chandler & Sabaratnam 2011).

Finally, the last idea, that more trade meant more peace, reinforced the strand of economic liberalism and led to more globalization in the long run. Also known as the interdependence model or commercial liberalism, this strand emphasizes that eco-nomic interdependence makes states see cooperation in a different and more positive light and thus military force becomes less important in world politics (Genest 2004, 126). In the past, states would gain wealth by conquering territory; today they do this through trade. Economic liberalism as an IR(International Relations) theory suggests that in an interdependent economically globalized market, states think twice before going to war because of the prosperity they would lose because of the disruption of trade during wartime (Walt 1998, 32) when compared to the limited gains from war.

This view is also based on the assumption of an existing harmony between national and global spheres when it comes to economic interests (Gilpin 1975). One should not forget that the IMF, IBRD and WTO were founded as a result of a post-WWII thinking that wanted to take measures against a revival of the mercantilist and protectionist policies that had led to WWII (Axtmann & Grant 2002, 36-37) and sail the world towards more economic interdependence.

The first and the third ideas of Kant were reflected in the policy decisions of several statesmen: US President Woodrow Wilson, who was also the Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 1919, included the first and the last of these 3 ideas in his 14 points in Art. 14 and Art. 2 & 3 respectively (Wilson [1918] 2001, 4). Wilson ([1918] 1992, 268) also believed that democracy should prevail both in individual states and in international society. Again, it is possible to see parallels between Kant's thinking on a perpetual peace and the European Union (Salikov 2013). Even if it is not a world government, the European Union at least partially fulfills Kant's ideals by being a supranational regional organization, the first of its kind in world politics. The member states of the EU have been able to surrender some parts of their sovereignty to a higher authority through being a community of democratic states, by making being a democratic state a prerequisite for becoming a member through the application of the Copenhagen criteria, and finally by being a community of free trade. The English School theory of international relations, also known as the Rationalist or Grotian school, often said to be standing between realism and liberalism, claims that through the establishment of an international society with its own norms and rules, order and peace can be achieved, as was done in the case of the European Union (Linklater 2013; Dunne 2016).

Many IR theories take into account non-state actors as well as state actors, with the exception of classical and neorealist theories which claim that the only actors worth analyzing in international relations are states. However, even those theories that acknowledge the existence of other actors still think states are the most important actors in international relations, especially when it comes to pursuing peace. Almost all of them place peace as a target to be achieved by states for the sake of the states, by international organizations set up by states, or by individuals (leaders) who act in the name of states. For example, even though liberal theory includes several non-state actors, peace is not a goal for any of them per se in international relations. Peace studies fills this gap by focusing research on promoting ways of positive peace where the major actors are seen as individuals and individuals working as groups with the final goal of promoting peace (Genest 2004, 547). Therefore, it is a bottom up approach to

international relations and widens the scope of our thinking about peace.

There are several issues that peace studies sees differently than mainstream international relations. The first distinction would be on the concept of peace. Peace studies theory makes a distinction between negative peace and positive peace. Galtung (2012), the renowned Norwegian scholar who came up with this distinction, refers to them as negative peace, "the absence of the violences," and positive peace, "the presence of the peaces." The concept of negative peace is based on absence of war where a direct fight has ended but the reasons for war may still linger. This is the meaning of the term in mainstream international relations. When we refer to peace, we oftentimes refer to the end of armed hostilities in a conflict. Yet, it is widely acknowledged today that many seeds of a next war are sown within the peace treaties that supposedly end wars, but which in fact only postpone them until new conditions arise where the parties to the peace return to armed conflict. Moreover, a world filled with problems that could serve as the next reason or excuse for war is not necessarily a peaceful place. It is in this sense that peace studies prefers to focus on the concept of positive peace, which certainly means the absence of war but which goes beyond that and urges addressing and solving the underlying problems that may lead to war (Genest 2004, 549; Wallensteen 2011, 15). One cannot have positive peace without first having negative peace, so negative peace is a precondition for positive peace, but having negative peace is not sufficient for establishing positive peace (Barash 2014, 2). The preoccupation of peace research is to take peace in its positive sense and try to find ways of fostering peace through the elimination of causes and conditions that lead to war and violence.

The last sentence brings up another important distinction in peace studies: war and violence. Given the distinction between positive and negative peace and the focus being on positive peace, the opposite of peace is not war but violence, which is a broader term as seen through the lens of peace studies (Galtung 1969). In addition, humans and their societies may face violence of different kinds such as direct violence (war, domestic violence, gang violence, assault), cultural violence (colonialism, repression of minorities) and structural violence (starvation, poverty) (Galtung 1969; Wallensteen 2011, 15-16).

Peace studies is also a highly prescriptive theory which is focused on policies to promote peace and which encourages peace activism. One often sees peace activists from all walks of life contributing to the field with their hands-on field experience. World famous physicist Albert Einstein's contribution to the Russell-Einstein Manifesto calling for nuclear non-proliferation, peace activism by world spiritual leaders

such as Desmond Tutu or the Dalai Lama, and the work of an NGO such as International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) all prove the diversity, dynamism, activism and policy relevance of this approach. The above-mentioned Einstein, Desmond Tutu, 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, and IPPNW all became Nobel Peace Prize recipients thanks to their peace activism.

As Barash (2014, 3) puts it, another distinguishing aspect of peace studies is that it is value-laden, meaning it allows "biases and preferences," an unacceptable practice in social sciences in general. In the words of Barash (2014, 3), "It does not simply encourage the study of peace, but is in favor of peace." He likens it to medical sciences which chooses "health over disease."

Peace studies is also the least Eurocentric of all theories that address the issue of peace. It takes note of ideas from various non-European cultures such as *ahimsa* (non-violence) from Gandhi's India, *ho'oponopono* (to set things right) from Hawaii, *dao* (the way) and *jen* (empathy) from Confucian China, and *ubuntu* (humanity towards others) from South Africa. In addition, historical examples of philosophers who preached peace (Mo Tzu) or rulers who, after a military life, turned to peaceful ways (Ashoka) are all studied, referred to and find their rightful place in peace studies (see Gandhi 1969; Barash & Webel 2014, 5; Schlichtmann 2016; Yao 2004; Murithi 2006). Even Western scholars in peace research often borrow non-Western concepts and incorporate them into their study of peace, such as Johan Galtung's (1996, 2012) use of the terms *dukkha* (suffering) and *sukka* (bliss) – "generic terms for negative and positive goals" as stated by the writer himself (Galtung 2012, 37).

Peace studies is a highly interdisciplinary field which incorporates people not only from international relations but from all walks of academia such as psychology, medicine, physics, and religious studies. The general field of peace studies includes several more specialized fields related to peace such as peace education, peace economics, and peace psychology, proving its interdisciplinarity. Peace economics stretches from the famous (though ironically entitled) contribution of John Maynard Keynes (1919) in his "The Economic Consequences of the Peace" or "The Economics of Peace" by Kenneth E. Boulding (1945) to the contemporary Australia-based Institute for Economics and Peace, which annually publishes the Global Peace Index among other works. A peace economics perspective outdoes the liberal thinking of linking trade and peace and scrutinizes not only the underestimated costs of war, conflict and violence containment but also particularly focuses on the opportunity costs of military spending (Leontief & Duchin 1983; Bilmes & Stiglitz 2008) and the cost-benefit analysis of alternative allocation of military spending for civilian purposes (e.g. con-

version). Peace economics also extends into further subfields of peace business (Barbara, Dubee and Galtung 2009) and peace tourism (Blanchard & Higgins-Desboilles 2017) to study the relations between peace and business and peace and tourism. The International Peace Research Association (IPRA) has long had a working group on peace tourism. While a discussion of this literature is beyond the scope of this article, it is worth noting here that the commercial liberal view of trade promoting peace is a useful but rather narrow view even when it comes to studying economics for the promotion of peace.

It is hard to say if peace studies is really an IR theory. On the one hand, it is an IR theory since it addresses issues of peace and conflict in the international system or within the units that make up that system. Yet, on the other hand, peace within and among states is only one part of the research agenda in peace studies. Peace studies goes beyond that and investigates issues of personal peace, domestic violence, intercommunal violence, and cultural and structural violence, and as such, it goes beyond traditional political science and international relations theories. The goals of peace studies can be defined as "the causes of war, conflict and violence, the nature of peaceful human systems and the means of their attainment and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, not necessarily their disappearance" (Dunn 2005, 37).

This review of the concept of peace in international relations theories helps us see the Silk Road as a space of cooperation and peace under a different light in the following pages.

SILK ROAD FROM PAST TO PRESENT AS A SPHERE OF PEACE

The Silk Road was first and foremost the name of a network of roads. There is no agreement on where it starts and ends, and different groups along this geographical continuum probably used its many different routes according to their own needs (Azad 2017, 82-83). The roads were along an east-west axis in general but not necessarily; some ran from north to south. Despite the fact that the roads that qualify as part of the Silk Road actually existed, the term itself is an abstract concept (Hiebert 1999, 41). As it was a 19th century conceptualization, those who used these roads between the 1st century BCE and the 14th century CE never referred to it as the Silk Road.

Unlike the more contemporary trade-based peace narrative of the Silk Road, the historical peace narrative of the Silk Road, while also covering commercial ties, car-

ried significant cultural overtones. It was a route for carrying commercial products such as silk, hence the name; yet, many other tangible items and intangible elements of culture were also carried along the Silk Road. Religion was one of them. For example, the Silk Road was the path taken in Buddhism's spread to China when the first Buddhist monks arrived in China in 120 BCE (Schlichtmann 2016, 80-81). Trade and merchants, as well as military conquests, were instrumental in the case of Islam's spread towards the east along the Silk Road (Baipakov n/a, 15). While religions such as Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Manicheism, Nestorianism and Islam were carried to China from the West, technology went the other way. It was through the Silk Road trade that Western civilizations got introduced to technological inventions from China such as paper making, printing, gunpowder and the compass, which had trickle down effects for the rest of the world (*Culture of Silk Road* n/a). The Silk Road served as a long-distance communication network (Williams 2014, 6). In the words of Waugh (2010, 9), "The history of the Silk Roads is a narrative about movement, resettlement, interactions across ill-defined borders but not necessarily over long distances. It is also the story of artistic exchange and the spread and mixing of religions, all set against the background of the rise and fall of the polities which encompassed a wide range of cultures and peoples, about whose identities we still know too little." Another source (Baipakov n/a, 11) states that "along with merchandise, cultural samples and samples of applied arts, architecture and wall painting, the Silk Road acted as the spreader of music and dance art, performances, a sort of medieval 'variety.'"

The Silk Road was not only historically important for the countries of the region but also for those in the West. The Silk Road trade first brought silk to Europe in the 1st century CE, and it was claimed by the Roman historian of the time, Pliny the Elder, that the treasure of the Roman Empire was at risk because of the influx of all the luxury goods coming to the West from the East (Liu 2010, 20). In the long term, contrary to Pliny the Elder's observations, the West benefited a lot from its trade with the East along the Silk Road. Thus, in general, the trade along the Silk Road brought win-win scenarios for those who used it. The cultures along the Silk Road enriched one another according to archeological findings (Baipakov n/a, 12).

Alfred A. Andrea (2014, 105) distinguishes two time periods of heightened interest and scholarly research on the Silk Road: the first in the 19th and early 20th centuries and the second after the 1980s. In both of these periods, we see that the concept of the Silk Road is referred to in positive terms. Certainly, wars occurred along this territory. In addition to wars, power struggles between major powers such as the Great Game of the 19th century also took place in this region (Wen & Jinjing 2016, 95).

When the competition over access to the natural resource reserves of the Central Asian republics was under way during the last decade of the 20th century, this too was dubbed as the New Great Game, despite talk of cooperation in the region at the same time. Nevertheless, we hear more about the corridors of trade and dialogue than about wars along this path. As a modern-day concept, which appeared during the first period mentioned above, whenever the Silk Road is mentioned, looking back retrospectively to 1500 years of history, it is mentioned as a space of dialogue, cooperation and peace. This perspective is adopted today by those who claim a heritage of the Silk Road or who promote projects on the Silk Road.

One such example is a project initiated by UNESCO in 1988 right before the end of the Cold War entitled "Integral Study of the Silk Road: Roads of Dialogue" to look into cultural interactions in the region. The project was envisioned as part of the World Decade for Cultural Development and lasted for 10 years, during which scientific and cultural activities were planned in order to "renew intercultural dialogue and become more aware of their mutual ties, with a view to promoting a culture of peace and tolerance" (*The Silk Roads Project* 2008, 4). A similar attempt was made by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) starting in 1993, where the goal was to facilitate touristic travel in the region for those from outside as well as from within the region. The UNWTO organized several meetings, travel forums, workshops for tour operators, and seminars on the topic of the Silk Road. As recently as 2010, the Fifth Silk Road Mayors Forum, which was held in Iran, gathered together mayors from 48 cities in 26 countries associated with the Silk Road. One of the goals was "the promotion of peace, unity and cooperation" (*Summary of Silk Road Activities 1993-2011*). Peace as a word appears 6 times in the 2-page Shiraz declaration which was adopted at the end of that meeting (Shiraz Declaration 2010).

Some of the other plans developed under the name of the Silk Road were America's New Silk Road plan in 2011 with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the Silk Wind Plan proposed by Kazakhstan in 2012, and the Modern Silk Road program announced by Turkey and Azerbaijan in 2013 (Wen & Jinjing 2016, 104-108), emphasizing the cooperative aspects of their initiatives.

ONE BELT, ONE ROAD: THE NEW SILK ROAD

The latest and the most comprehensive project planned around the concept of the Silk Road is China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project. The project includes the Silk

Road Economic Belt (SREB) project, covering land routes, which was announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping during a state visit to Kazakhstan's capital on September 7, 2013, and the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) Project, covering sea routes, announced by the President one month later, this time during a visit to Indonesia (Minghao 2015, 2). The SREB would connect China to the Baltic, the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean mainly by a network of railroads passing through several countries and regions on the way. The MSR would have the two destinations of Europe and the South Pacific (Chin et al. 2015, 3), mostly through upgrading the infrastructure of ports via Chinese investment. One such example is the Chinese investment in the Greek port of Piraeus as a gateway to Europe (Bessler n/a).

The ancient Silk Road and the New Silk Road project, embodied in the OBOR initiative, are both similar and different, hinting at both (mostly) continuities and (some) novelties in the concept of Silk Road. The historical Silk Road was amorphous and not clearly defined. It did not remain constant over the course of the centuries. It served the states and peoples in the region and it changed due to political (wars) and natural conditions (climate change) (Erdem 2016, 55). OBOR also is an umbrella concept that can extend itself according to the political and economic needs of the parties involved, even to the extent of including projects that started before the launch of OBOR in 2013 under the banner of OBOR (van der Putten et al. 2016, 5; Fallon 2015, 140). However, unlike the old Silk Road which did not seem to have a dominant actor claiming the right to orchestrate trade, today China is up for such a role. Although China only initiated OBOR and does not necessarily intend to build and own it (Minghao 2015, 3), OBOR is first and foremost a Chinese policy.

The goals of the new Silk Road are summarized under the label "Five links" which address "policies, infrastructure, trade, finance and people" (Chin et al. 2015, 6). Put in more concrete terms, OBOR is based on 5 major elements: "enhancing development policy coordination, forging an infrastructure network, expanding investment and trade cooperation, improving financial integration and deepening peope-to-people bonds" (Minghao 2015, 5).

There are several reasons why China has launched this project. On the economic front, China is a country with domestic overcapacity and can export its infrastructure building capacity in material goods and technology along with its skills in engineering and construction to put this domestic overcapacity to good use (Van der Leer & Yao 2016, 4). Moreover, since most of the projects associated with OBOR are projects of transport (mainly railroads and ports), upgrades and new infrastructure in this area would allow China to export its goods faster and more efficiently to world markets.

As for imports, not only was China the biggest consumer market in the world in 2013 (Wen & Jinjing 2016, 99), the Chinese economy is also in need of energy resources (Brugier 2014, 3). In fact, in 2013, China surpassed the US as the leading oil importer nation ("China Overtakes…" 2013). Central Asian oil resources to the west of China are very strategically located for China to push OBOR into this region and would diversify its energy resources. Finally, in the long run, through these projects, China could build a "Eurasian Economic Corridor" (Rolland 2015, 1). This economic integration controlled by China could create a soft power base for China in the Eurasian landscape. However, that this initiative is coordinated and led by China does not mean that China alone will be able to finance all these projects linked to OBOR. China will have to cooperate with other governmental and non-governmental/business actors in sharing the costs (Van der Leer & Yao 2016, 6). The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is a new institution with 52 current and 18 prospective members which was established in 2015 to this end.

On the security front, Chinese will to establish stability in the troubled regions of western China serves as a main goal. China's western provinces such as Xinjiang are poorer when compared to the rich eastern coastal areas and have seen uprisings during the last decade. China hopes that an improvement in the economic situation of the western regions will bring stability to these regions (Rolland 2015, 2; "Heritage Diplomacy…" 2016, 10). These are also the very regions where most of the Muslim populations of China live. China has prioritized fighting against the three evils of religious extremism, separatism and terrorism and hopes that regional economic development will serve well in this fight both in its own western regions and elsewhere in Central Asia (Brugier 2014, 1; Wen & Jinjing, 2016, 99). Finally, China also sees OBOR as a way of securing its neighboring regions through cooperation and dialogue. In this sense, OBOR is also referred to as "infrastructure diplomacy" (Rolland 2015, 3)

For the moment, China seems to be positioning itself as a bridge between developed and developing countries (Minghao 2015, 4). However, taking the economic and security fronts discussed above together, OBOR could also help China to contend for a global power position. Chinese dreams of internationalizing its own currency, the Renminbi, and its hopes that OBOR will help realize this dream is one manifestation of this quest for a global position (Van der Leer & Yao 2016, 3; Minghao 2015, 5).

A similar question is why other states are eager to join China's OBOR project. Many of these states are developing states that are in dire need of infrastructure. Chinese plans for OBOR match their goals of development. OBOR has even come to

be dubbed the "Chinese Marshall Plan" (Van der Leer & Yao 2016, 5). Given the fact that almost all Western countries' foreign aid is conditional on democracy and human rights and that most of the countries in the region have troubled records in those areas, it is easier and more desirable for the countries in the region to seek Chinese development aid which does not base its aid programs on such political conditionality (Gu 2015, 3).

PEACE ALONG THE SILK ROAD: THEORY AND PRACTICE

In a recent article, Karluk and Karaman (2014, 730) state that "the railways, transport facilities, transnational gates, energy corridors, and natural gas pipelines that constitute the Silk Road will transform the region with improving its economy and bringing peace and economic prosperity." Another such article qualifies the Maritime Silk Road Project as "a road of peace" and claims that the Maritime Silk Road will "deliver peace and prosperity afar" wherever it goes (Lan 2014, 11). These two examples are symbolic of how academia and policymakers see this. One can come up with hundreds of publications and statements that play the same tune, that the Silk Road will bring trade and economic prosperity and together they will lead to peace.

This is very clearly an interpretation and expectation of peace along the lines of commercial liberalism. The predominant talk around the cooperation, trade and peace aspects of the Silk Road is about bringing interdependence to the region through economic cooperation. While it will be the subject of future empirical research to show whether the project will deliver what it promises, it is noteworthy that states throughout the region and beyond have responded enthusiastically to the OBOR proposals. Kant's idea that trade promotes peace surely has a lot of adherents/supporters along the Silk Road.

When it comes to liberal institutionalism, it is also underway throughout the region with several international organizations already in place to facilitate regional cooperation. These organizations may not carry the name "Silk Road," but oftentimes the cooperation ideal and even references to the Silk Road ideal are present within the documents or the statements issued by the existing regional organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In addition, the Silk Road ideal is the reason behind the founding of new international organizations such as the AIIB. The Silk Road is also referred

to in strengthening diplomatic ties, exemplified in President Nursultan Nazarbayev receiving the first Silk Road Peace Prize from his Chinese counterpart in 2014 ("Nazarbayev Receives" 2014).

However, even if one assumes that the economic interdependence/commercial liberalism envisioned through the Silk Road may truly increase the likelihood of peace, and that the prospect of cooperation and peace resonates in the workings of the regional international organizations and diplomatic circles, what kind of a peace would this be? Even from a liberal perspective, one surely cannot talk about a democratic peace along the Silk Road given the lack of democracy and civil liberties in many of the countries along the Silk Road – not in China, not in Russia, not in Central Asia, with the possible exceptions of India, South Korea and Mongolia. While the region is not suffering from too many hot conflicts, with the exception of Afghanistan and the terrorism that hits its neighbor Pakistan, the frozen conflict between the two nuclear powers of Pakistan and India, the regional rivalry between India and China, and the rivalry between the Russian Federation and China, again all nuclear powers, might be worries for the future in the absence of democracy accompanying prospective economic interdependence.

Playing the devil's advocate, one could also argue that expectation of a more peaceful region is perhaps not impossible but unlikely when we are talking about the Eurasian landmass. It can be questioned whether states would like to join in the Silk Road projects because they buy the argument that OBOR will bring prosperity to be followed by peace or whether they pursue their national interest in realist terms. One look at the political landscape of Eurasia (for example, China's aspirations to stabilize Xinjiang or fight against religious fundamentalism and terrorism) is enough to grasp that states in the region may often use the concepts of peace and stability interchangeably or, better put, prioritize stability over peace, especially positive peace.

In a similar vein, the primary role of China along the new Silk Road is also especially important, given the fact that in its new guise, the Silk Road project is seen first and foremost as a Chinese policy. What would the predominance of China as the country behind the project do to the prospective success of the project as a whole? Would it create interdependency and lead to peace, or would it create dependency and lead to dominance? Furthermore, would a communist China with a capitalist economy not trigger concerns about Chinese exploitation of its periphery in the sense of Imperialist/Dependency theories? Is this a pursuit of access to cheap labor, raw materials and markets for China?

Looking through the lens of peace studies forces us to delve deeper into ques-

tioning the validity of the argument of peace coming through mere trade. When commercial liberalism talks about peace, it is negative peace in the vocabulary of peace studies. However, peace studies would seek traces of several aspects of positive peace in the region such as justice, equality, human rights, human security, transparency, accountability, rule of law, civil society, etc. It would not be wrong to argue that the concept of positive peace as introduced by peace studies theory is not commonly addressed in the academic or political rhetoric of the region yet.

One of the goals of OBOR is stated as "deepening people-to-people bonds," which hints at an understanding of peace in the sense of peace studies where peace is to be built from the bottom up. The historical legacies of war and cultural animosities in the region surely make this a much-needed item on the goals list. When the Silk Road is spoken of and perceived as a shared heritage that goes beyond borders, across the continent through trade and people-to-people contacts, the chances of building respect and trust will increase and so will overcoming historical legacies and cultural animosities ("Heritage Diplomacy" 2016, 9). The history of the region proves that bonds throughout the Silk Road were often reinforced by cultural ties. Yet, today, the region is also distraught with historical legacies of wars fought and modern day examples of cultural and structural violence such as gender discrimination, human rights issues, poverty, inequality and political repression. A peace studies perspective would want to see projects carried out in peace education, peace economics, peace tourism, and peace business to reach the goals of positive peace in the region and would not see mere increased trade as a sufficient condition for peace.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that the peace narrative along the Silk Road has been always present, although in the past the narrative included both commercial and cultural factors, whereas today in the second decade of the 21st century after China's initiation of the OBOR project, it is mostly based on commercial liberalism, which suggests that trade and economic independence promotes peace. The author has argued that this is too narrow a perspective and takes into account only one aspect of liberal international theory. By reviewing how several international theories see the path to peace, the author has suggested incorporating several of these theories, especially the peace studies perspective, into our analysis of the Silk Road region. She has claimed that going beyond a limited understanding of liberal theory would give us a more com-

prehensive picture of what to expect from the potential of this region. She has posed important questions about peace in this region, applying the views of peace as seen from several theories of peace and argued that when the scope of peace is broadened from the trade-induced peace of commercial liberalism to the positive peace of peace studies, the region's prospects demonstrate more challenges along the way to peace.

As the most recent project on the Silk Road was initiated by China, much will depend on the future of China and its policies and world vision. Though there are surely further roads to be traveled for peace in the region, peace is a current ideal that is kept alive and that the states in the region aspire to. The Silk Road is a brand today, and nations benefit from this brand by allying themselves with its heritage (Azad 2017, 83). China has certainly risen to the occasion and is wisely using the brand to increase its economic and political might in the region and globally. Whether the Silk Road brings peace to the region is to be seen; however, it is highly likely to bring more power to China. What China will choose to do with this power and how the other powers such as the US, Russia or India will respond to that is key for the future of the entire region.

Apart from the liberal and peace studies theories of peace discussed in this paper, the author would like to mention one last strand of IR theory before concluding: the long cycle theories of global politics, especially as discussed by George Modelski (1987), who sees issues of war and peace as cycles. According to Modelski, world politics is characterized by long cycles that are marked by the rise and fall of world powers. Since the 16th century, the major powers of the world, Portugal, the Netherlands, Great Britain and the USA respectively, have all risen to power after a major war. In contemporary international relations, the rise of China is a popular and hot topic where many see China as the next potential superpower. The interest around the new Silk Road project is mostly because of what it also means for China's future position in the world system.

If China becomes a major superpower without a major war, this would be the first time in world history that a superpower transition has taken place in peaceful terms. If China achieves this difficult task, will China be successful through embracing an understanding of peace through economic and institutional liberalism or will it enlarge its vision to democratic peace and even positive peace? The world will be watching for the answer, especially by looking at how China will ride and sail along the New Silk Road.

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