

**Nostalgia in the Context of “the Belt and Road Initiative”:
An Analysis of a Chinese Documentary: Maritime Silk Road**

Zhun Gu¹

Produced by Chinese local television stations, Maritime Silk Road is a documentary which adopts ancient Maritime Silk Road as a historical nostalgia to interpret “the Belt and Road Initiative”, a contemporary Chinese economic, political, and cultural strategy put forward by Chinese government mainly aiming at the countries of Southeast Asia. The main body of this article has three parts and the first part analyses how the documentary adopts computer-generated imagery (CGI) to create a historical nostalgia about ancient Maritime Silk Road in the period of Imperial China. At the same time, this part also presents a sense of diasporic nostalgia of the overseas Chinese. This historical and diasporic nostalgia is related to Chinese President Xi Jinping’s political discourse: “Chinese dream” that propagandises to build a strong China put forward by Xi in 2013. The second part analyses how this historical and diasporic nostalgia legitimates Xi’s “Chinese dream” and how it responds to recent territorial dispute when China continuously claims its territorial sovereignty in the South China Sea. In this light, the documentary repeatedly mentions two political rhetoric: “coexistence” (gongcun) and “mutual benefit” (huli gongying) as a practical strategy to deal with the dispute between China and some countries of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In the third section, the concept of “community of common destiny” (mingyun gongtongti) is adopted by the documentary to depict a convenient and effective organization of China and ASEAN, which is framed as an ultimate goal that Chinese government is depicted as the potential leader of this nostalgic community. At the same time, by providing different and even opposite viewpoints, this article discusses three controversial political rhetoric to present how historical and diasporic nostalgia is politicalized and served for Chinese diplomacy and national interest. Overall, this article argues that the documentary creates a glorious ancient Maritime Silk Road, as a sense of nostalgia, to expand China’s economic and political influence, to respond to the controversial issues, and to reassert China’s leadership as the centre of Asia.

Keywords: Maritime Silk Road, nostalgia, Chinese dream, coexistence, mutual benefit, community of common destiny

¹ The University of Nottingham, UK

Political and Economic Policy: The Belt and Road Initiative

Maritime Silk Road (2016) was produced by Chinese local television stations: Shanghai TV (SHTV), Guangzhou TV (GZTV), and Quanzhou TV (QZTV). This article examines the presentations of nostalgia in this documentary to investigate what the documentary expresses in the context of “the Belt and Road Initiative” proposed by the Chinese government in 2013.

The documentary tells audiences that the history of Maritime Silk Road dates back to 2,000 years ago. Guangzhou was the starting-point of the route, which extended across the Indian Ocean and then passed through various countries around the Persian Gulf. The goods for trade around the route were consisted mainly of silk, china and tea from Imperial China, while the imported merchandise included a variety of spices, flowers and grasses from the Middle East and South Asia. The route emerged in the Qin and Han Dynasties (BC 221-AD 220) and became popular from the Sui Dynasty (581–618) and the Tang Dynasty (618–907). Guangzhou became the first great harbour in China around the time of the Tang and Song Dynasties, though it was later substituted by Quanzhou in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). Zheng He’s navigation in the early time of the Ming Dynasty to the West further promoted the development of the Maritime Silk Road. However, the government of Qing Dynasty issued bans on maritime trade, which brought about a negative influence on massive maritime trade. After the opium wars (1840), Chinese government gradually lost its important status in maritime trade.

Chinese President Xi Jinping first raised the initiative of rebuilding contemporary “Silk Road Economic Belt” with European and Asian countries when he visited Kazakhstan on September 7th, 2013 (Xi, 2013a); following that, he raised the initiative of building the “21st-Century Maritime Silk Road” with ASEAN when he visited Indonesia on October 3rd, 2013 (Xi, 2013b). The two initiatives together have been referred to as The Silk Road Economic Belt and The 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road focusing on the cooperation with the countries around the Maritime Silk Road. On March 28th, 2015, the Chinese government officially published the Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (or known as “the Belt and Road”) (Chinese government, 2015). “The Belt and Road” has linked China’s seaports and the seaports in the South China Sea, the South Pacific Ocean, Indian Ocean and Europe. It plans to build the longest economic corridor that includes 65 countries, specifically targeting at the ASEAN. In the past, the silk, ivory, gold, silver, tea, fruits, nuts, paintings, sculptures, and manuscripts were the main products on the ancient Maritime Silk Road. Under “the Belt and Road”, China-ASEAN will focus on the construction of infrastructure and industry cooperation (Shen, 2015, P. 2), through which the Initiative attempts to construct a China-ASEAN Maritime Silk Road economic belt.

“The Belt and Road” is put forward partly in the context of Chinese political power transfer. Since coming to the highest power in 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping has made a large adjustment in China’s domestic affairs and foreign policy. Firstly, he put forward a nationalist slogan of “Chinese dream” (Wikipedia, Chinese Dream), to emphasise the great national rejuvenation of China. Further, he handled major international relations with proactive approaches

to build new relationships with neighbouring countries. Rather than being limited to the countries in China's periphery, the relationships have been extended to the Eurasian continent, Africa, and Oceania to further boost China's economic and political influence. At the China-hosted Belt and Road Forum (BRF), Xi (2017) identified "the Belt and Road" as part of a regionally-based approach to redefine Asia's geopolitics, and referenced the initiative with regard to China's growing interconnectivity in Central Asia. In this light, "the Belt and Road" can be interpreted as a specific strategy in order to fulfil Chinese political ambition.

At the same time, after the global financial crisis of 2008, the development of Chinese economy is described as a "new normal", and the growth of GDP keeps around 6.7% (Wikipedia, New Normal). Wang Yong (2016) points out that China's "Belt and Road Initiative" is actually proposed when the Chinese new leadership faced the combined pressure such as the economic slowing down, the US pivoting to Asia, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP),² and deteriorative relations with neighbouring countries (Wang, 2016, P.4). In this context, "the Belt and Road" cooperates with Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) constructed mainly by Chinese government to deal with the growing internal and external issues and increase China's influence in international affairs.

The documentary emphasises that China and the countries around the ancient Maritime Silk Road have similar beliefs, faith, and lifestyles, which can be seen as a united community within a "sense of common destiny". To some extent, it is an expression of Chinese government's ambition in the aspect of international affairs. Xi attempts to promote Chinese economic development through intercontinental trade between Asia and Europe through Chinese government's actions in international relations, such as the sovereignty claim about the South China Sea led to some controversy. Therefore, the intention is potentially to weave neighbouring countries into a network of economic, political, cultural, and security relations, to form a new regional economic community, and to boost Chinese economic and political influence. As William A. Callahan (2016) argues, "'the Belt and Road' acts as a means of promoting China's global development through hardware (the construction of infrastructure) and software (cultural communication)"(P. 8). Therefore, Beijing's diplomacy in the "Belt and Road" to some extent is more than so-called "mutual benefit" with its neighbours; instead, Chinese government wants to be the biggest winner in this cooperation. The discourses of "mutual benefit", "coexistence", and "community of common destiny" can be considered as a kind of flexible political rhetoric that Chinese government adopts to peddle its economic and political ideals. One of the effects of this strategy is that China becomes the centre of this community like the past that constructed by the documentary. Therefore, "the Belt and Road Initiative" can be perceived as a further political strategy that cooperates with "Chinese dream" to fulfill the dream of national revitalization and recovery of China's status as a so-called great and glorious country in the world. Further, as Timur Dadabaev (2018) argues, this Initiative is also designed to strengthen the "soft power" potential of China in Central Asia by

² TPP was signed on 4 February 2016 in the presidency of Barack Obama but US government withdrew its signature when Donald Trump became president in 2017. The remaining nations negotiated a new trade agreement called Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, which incorporates most of the provisions of the TPP.

offering a non-coercive, non-military (non-security-focused) approach (P. 34). Similarly, this strategy represents an increasing effort to shape positive Chinese involvement in Southeast Asia.

The concept of ancient Maritime Silk Road is adopted and renewed as a 21st-century Maritime Silk Road, which is represented as a symbol of Chinese national rejuvenation and intention of market expansion. However, this article expresses some reservations about whether it is suitable to adopt the discourse of Maritime Silk Road, which is a symbol of Imperial China, to gain some countries' trust. Is it possibly be perceived as a neocolonialism that China invades the countries in Southeast Asia?

Maritime Silk Road was produced in the political and economic context discussed above. It is a cooperation work produced by three local television stations. Compared to China Central Television (CCTV), China's provincial, municipal and county television stations are important components of Chinese television broadcast system. One of the differences between CCTV and other local TV is that CCTV as the main broadcast system in China has a more comprehensive and competitive ability to broadcast national voice. Local television stations, as a kind of supplement to some extent, undertake a cooperating function with CCTV. Meanwhile, they sometimes are in a competitive relationship. For example, CCTV, SHTV, GZTV, QZTV and some other local television stations participated in the bidding of the documentary of Maritime Silk Road that was projected by State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT) (Zhang, 2016). At last, SHTV, GZTV, QZTV won the bidding.

Overall, Maritime Silk Road is produced in the context of the Chinese "Belt and Road Initiative". This project is supported by SAPPRFT and co-produced by local television stations of SHTV, GZTV, and QZTV in 2014 and would be released for the foreign audience as well as the domestic audience (Zhang, 2016). It presents local identities and China's image in a national and transnational perspective. Therefore, it is suitable as an example to investigate how Chinese local television stations broadcast Chinese authority's political discourse.

Maritime Silk Road (2016)

This section has three parts. The first part will discuss where nostalgia is in the documentary. The second and third parts will investigate how this specific nostalgia is adopted to propagandise contemporary Chinese government's strategy "the Belt and Road".

The documentary is a series of seven episodes and every episode expresses a different and related theme. Episode 1, Cross the Sea and Land speaks the technical development of navigation and the large-scale construction of harbours along the road, which boosts economic development of many countries. Further, this episode emphasises the importance of international cooperation and depicts this as "mutual benefit". Episode 2, Good Products from the Earth discusses how the development of the Maritime Silk Road promotes agricultural civilisation; episode 3, Trade with Different Countries describes how Maritime Silk Road links different market; episode 4, The light of

Wisdom talks about how advanced science and technology provided by Chinese companies promote ASEAN's economic and social development; episode 5, Fusion and Mutualism discusses how Maritime Silk Road promotes the collision and blending of different cultures; episode 6, The Connection between Heart and Motherland narrates the Maritime Silk Road as a road with good-neighbourly and friendly values, which attracts a lot of foreigners to migrate to China; episode 7, Sailing for the Future tells audiences that new ports and navigations have been increasingly expanded, through which China and the countries around the Maritime Silk Road will become a whole organic community.

Nostalgia within Nationalist Discourse “Chinese Dream”

This part draws on ancient Maritime Silk Road, contemporary Chinese diasporic community, and political discourse “Chinese dream” to analyse how nostalgia is figured in the documentary. Nostalgia is generally described as an emotional process about past time or place. Sociologist Fred Davis (1979) defines nostalgia “as a socio-cultural response to forms of discontinuity, claiming a vision of stability and authenticity in some conceptual ‘golden age’” (Davis, 1979, P. 52). In this article, the golden age is situated in the period of ancient Maritime Silk Road, which is depicted as a glorious and prosperous Imperial China by the documentary. More importantly, this part suggests that this historical imagination is based on contemporary Chinese political discourse that Chinese government attempts to construct a regional community along the ancient Maritime Silk Road.

This documentary presents this specific nostalgia at two levels: historical and diasporic. Firstly, the glory of ancient Maritime Silk Road is presented to express historical nostalgia. Broadly speaking, one can treat this nostalgia as a specifically displayed discourse that is seen as irreversible, and as practices and emotions that the ancient is imaged as glorified lost forever. All of these are not necessarily implying the experience of first-hand memories. As some scholars suggest, historical nostalgia is generated from a time in history that the respondent did not experience directly, even a time before they were born (Marchegiani & Phau, 2010, P. 86). Therefore, historical nostalgia is a kind of simulated emotional process towards the history that we may not be involved in. As discussed in the former part, the ancient Maritime Silk Road had become popular since the Han dynasty (BC 202 – AD 220). From the Tang dynasty, many Chinese silks and ceramics traversed this vital trade route to Europe through Southeast Asia, India, and the Middle East (Geoffrey, 2016, P.3), which facilitated the economic success of several Chinese dynasties. Therefore, the Han and Tang dynasties are traditionally regarded as two relatively strong and flourishing dynasties in the era of Imperial China, which helped form a hierarchical system that China was seen as the centre of the world. Then, the maritime trade became further developed in the era of the North and South Song dynasties (960-1279). Stuart-Fox (2004) notes that this Road promotes a Sinocentric world order, which is often referred to as the “tributary system”(as cited in Womack, 2012, P. 40). In the documentary, ancient Maritime Silk Road is constructed as China-centric and much merchandise were carried on through it. However, based on some scholars' research, Japan, Korea, and the Islamic world were also important components of this maritime

trade (Hamchi, 2017; Dadabaev, 2018). Here, the documentary defines China as the centre of this ancient route, attempting to win the leadership in this Initiative. In this sense, historical nostalgia is successfully adopted to construct contemporary Chinese government's identity. For today's China, the ancient Maritime Silk Road represents a golden, grandeur and pre-eminence era that Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is attempting to re-establish through its "Chinese dream" and "the Belt and Road".



Figure 1 in episode 1



Figure 2 in episode 1



Figure 3 in episode 1



Figure 4 in episode 1

Many grand historical scenes and stories in Imperial China especially plots of Han and Tang dynasties are made by the technology of CGI (Computer-generated imagery), through which a fantasy period of maritime civilisation and the ancient strong Imperial China are represented. As Kirsten Thompson comments, digital techniques in current epic films are important technical and aesthetic innovations, which create a sense of historical eventfulness (as cited in Burgoyne, 2011, P. 3). More specifically, for example, figure 2 constructs an image of the busy maritime trade from China to the Indian Ocean. Tens and thousands of merchant ships berthed at the ports of India to obtain food and fresh water. In figure 3 and 4, CGI simulates a busy trade at Quanzhou port that was a big port in the world. Every day, many ships coming from different countries would arrive here. Therefore, Quanzhou was not only a major international port that attracted many foreign businessmen but also a platform that different cultures coexisted. The documentary tells audiences that it is a good evidence that many of the masjids built thousands of years ago can be seen today in Quanzhou city. Through these depictions, the documentary attempts to imply that a strong and glorious Imperial China was the centre of the world.

Further, this constructed ancient glory is connected with current political discourse: "Chinese dream". As Theresa Fallon (2015) argues, "the Belt and Road initiative" sits well with Xi's

“Chinese dream” of “great national rejuvenation” because it is an expression of China’s confidence and international clout (P. 143). The glorious period of Han and Tang dynasties that the documentary constructs is also a flourishing period that Xi’s “Chinese dream” attempts to revive. This national rejuvenation can be fulfilled by its maritime trading that China lost its dominance during “century of humiliation”³. As Xi Jinping (2014) himself puts, Chinese dream is the inner meaning of upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics. Its essence was a rich and powerful country, revitalising the nation and enhancing the well-being of the people.

Secondly, the documentary narrates many stories about overseas Chinese who live in countries of ASEAN to show its diasporic nostalgia. Based on the Foreign Office research analyst articles published on 9 December 2014, there are more than 50 million Chinese ethnics in South East Asia, making up more than 10 percent of the region’s population and 83% of the global Chinese diaspora (Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014). Many terms have been applied to refer to Chinese migrants and their descendants as the Chinese diaspora. For example, huaqiao means overseas Chinese; huayi is called for the people who are Chinese descendants; huazu is understood from the discourses surrounding nation, race and ethnicity; huaren is generally adopted for Chinese people who live on the outside of China and reflects the connections, negotiations, and dialogue between Chinese and other nations and races; xin yimin is described as a collective community of new Chinese migrants. These names not only reflect certain periods of Chinese migration but also show various relationships between China and the immigrant countries. For example, huaqiao was a historical name that turned up since the Second World War. Many Chinese merchants and coolies living in Malaysia and Singapore supported the anti-war campaign of Japanese aggression into China (1937-1945) and the establishment of the Republic of China. Simultaneously, as Yow Cheun Hoe (2016) argues, the mentality of the Chinese diaspora was increasingly shaped by China’s national and patriotic discourses (P. 841). Huaqiao remaining loyal to China, was partly because of the proliferation of China’s nationalism. Therefore, in the context of “the Belt and Road”, the documentary narrates many Chinese diasporic stories to convey that today’s huaqiao not only engage their passion to join the construction of this global project but cooperate with all people along the Road.

Many overseas Chinese have become foreigners and lack a strong common “Chinese” identity. However, the documentary depicts that some of them still keep the tie with “motherland” through returning journey spiritually and physically. For example, Chen Kaixi is the third generation of overseas Chinese and operates a big international company in Malaysia (episode 6). He worries about the situation of Wenchuan earthquake in 2008 and donates much money to help local reconstruction. At the same time, he also tells his son that he should undertake his responsibility if China suffers from any problems. Julia Kuehn (2013) argues that diasporic Chinese can obtain some national consciousness and national identities through engaging with and making a contribution to the “motherland” (p.8). Through these diasporic stories, the documentary presents that overseas Chinese keep an enduring cultural connection with China all along.

³ This humiliation includes for example, Western unequal treaties defeat since the Opium War (1840) and Japanese aggression (1895 and 1937), led to an unequal status for China.

However, the relationship between China and ASEAN is changing with a complex political and economic influence. For example, many diasporic Chinese in Indonesia were killed in 1998 (Wikipedia, The May 1998 riots of Indonesia). Then, with the rise of China's status, a good relationship between China and Indonesia provides many opportunities for overseas Chinese. Here, the documentary is potentially implying that "the Maritime Silk Road Initiative" intends to overcome the trauma of humiliation. This discourse of national revival attempts to stimulate Chinese national confidence. In other words, the success of current China is related to the failures of China's national humiliation, especially for the overseas Chinese. This implication can also be understood by a Chinese idiom: if the lips are gone, the teeth will feel cold (*chunwang chihan*). Further, the documentary potentially emphasises that cultural and economic communication should be proceeded under the umbrella of government-to-government relations, which would provide a reassuring framework to protect the interests of overseas Chinese. Therefore, "motherland" is a kind of conceptualization which is intertwined with documentary's nationalist intention, overseas Chinese yearning, and external political influence.

These diasporic communities play an important role in their countries. They also provide a substitutive capital to develop China's economy in the context of Chinese economic "new normal". From this perspective, it is reasonable for the documentary to focus on this community. For example, Lin Shizhong is a tea merchant of Malaysia. As the third generation of overseas Chinese, he does business with Chinese for many years. The documentary tells audiences that he has invested a tea factory in Yunnan province, China. Most tea produced from his factory will be delivered to Malaysia. From this example, the documentary illustrates that economic incentive integrating with ethnic affiliation can shape the identity of overseas Chinese. Diasporic nostalgia is not just an emotion but is an actual experience that is related to the profit when overseas Chinese do business with China.

This transnational Chinese community may prove to be one of the main determinants in securing "Chinese dream". Therefore, the documentary constructs a picture that there is a trend that more and more diasporic Chinese choose to come back to China to do business. As Trissia Wijaya argues, overseas Chinese have an edge over other diasporas in the world when it comes to the Chinese market: personal networks (*guanxi*). Through these networks, the "borderless economy" has reality before globalisation discourse became popular. With these networking advantages, alongside the significant capital they have accumulated, overseas Chinese can become major lynchpins and beneficiaries of "the Belt and Road" (Wijaya, 2016). It can be seen as a reminder that China's burgeoning economy has provided a huge market for overseas Chinese, some of whom feel diasporic may gain national identity in the process of doing business with China. At the same time, Chinese government also need international capital to stimulate its economic sustainable development.

This diasporic nostalgia is not only experienced (constructed) by overseas Chinese but is also shown from some foreigners who live in China. The documentary narrates that a prince of Ceylon which is called Sri Lanka today, as an envoy, visited China during the Ming dynasty. But he had to stay in Quanzhou forever because of a coup in Ceylon in 1459. Today, the prince's descendant

Xushi Yin'e brings a piece of soil picked from the family grave back to her motherland Sri Lanka more than 600 years later after the death of the prince (episode 6). Through this typical ceremony, not only does the prince return home, but Xushi Yin'e herself as a descendant of a foreigner gets to assert her identity. This nostalgic journey not only helps Xushi Yin'e fulfil her individual identification and family responsibility but also provides a historical picture that Imperial China kept a good relationship with countries around the ancient Maritime Silk Road.

In this part, the documentary adopts history of ancient Maritime Silk Road to express that 21st-century Maritime Silk Road will bring new memory, wealth and dream for the people around the Road. This contemporary political and economic Road is symbolized from Chinese government perspective to present a dream of national rejuvenation. Therefore, historical and diasporic nostalgia is very related to Chinese government's political discourse. In next parts, this article will further analyse how the documentary adopt this nostalgia to promote Chinese government's political rhetoric: "mutual benefit", "coexistence", and "community of common destiny" to fulfil its political intention.

Political Rhetoric: Mutual Benefit and Coexistence

This part focuses on the meaning of "mutual benefit" and "coexistence" which are constantly emphasised by the documentary. Some scholars and countries have expressed their worries about "the Belt and Road". This part will analyse how the documentary presents "mutual benefit" and "coexistence" as ideological and practical strategies, and what their metaphorical signifiers might be.

The concept of "coexistence" (gongcun) can be understood as a kind of acceptance, tolerance, equality and patience, no confrontation, and mutual respect when we face with different culture and viewpoint from others. This understanding can be found in ancient Chinese classics: The Book of History (shangshu) and The Analects of Confucius (lunyu). Now, the concept has been adopted to promote a diplomacy to deal with conflicts, which promotes the idea that China welcomes multiple ideologies, cultures, and religions. Based on the discipline of coexistence, the documentary further puts forward the idea of "mutual benefit" between China and the countries around the Road. It continuously emphasises that only by adopting the principle of coexistence can different countries accept the diversity and otherness. Therefore, coexistence, as a kind of political attitude, is the precondition of the cooperation that the documentary presents and mutual benefit is the effect of cooperation through "the Belt and Road Initiative".

The ideologies of coexistence and mutual benefit are presented in the aspect of cultural communication in the documentary. For example, it narrates a story about the religious communication between China and Sri Lanka. In the Eastern Jin Dynasty (AD 410), eminent monk Faxian came to Sri Lanka to learn the Buddhist doctrine; meanwhile, the monk Latalaxi in Abhayagiri temple also came to China in 2007 to learn Buddhism (episode 5). The documentary constructs monk Latalaxi as a contemporary Faxian and China is presented as the centre of the

contemporary Buddhist world. Importantly, this historical inheritance and cultural communication are based on the discipline of coexistence. At the same time, this documentary also refers to a peaceful and friendly environment of Islam in China. In Quanzhou city, for example, there are many ancient mosques, which shows that in ancient and contemporary China, people can choose religion freely. This represents a historical and contemporary situation of cultural communication, which tells the world that different belief, religion, and culture will be respected and coexist. 21st-century Maritime Silk Road inherits ancient spirit and creates a suitable environment for international cultural and economic communication.

The interaction between the religion and trade has not only promoted the expansion of Islam along the Land and Maritime Silk Road, but also developed a close relationship between China and the Islamic world. Now Islam is one of the most influential and widely distributed religions in the world. Being in the core sections of Land and Maritime Silk Road, the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia are the areas where Islam is the dominant religion. Therefore, as Li Fuquan (2018) argues, for China, good relations with Islamic countries are very critical for the successful implementation of “the Belt and Road Initiative”. China’s over 23 million Muslims (especially the Hui People) know two cultures (Chinese and Islamic), have two identities (Chinese and Muslims) and are the natural bridge between China and Islamic countries. Chinese Muslims are playing an important role in the development of Islamic finance and production of Muslim licit (halal) food products which are two potential cooperation areas between China and Islamic countries (P. 38). For China and Islamic countries, it is necessary to expand cultural exchanges to eliminate some misunderstandings with each other.

The documentary produced by Chinese local television stations seems as the mouthpiece of the Chinese government, and shows China’s commitment to peacefully addressing conflicts and sincerity to find common interests to fulfill coexistence. However, some questions are frequently discussed, for instance, why does the world worry about China’s rise? What kinds of conflicts do they have? Why do not they believe this “coexistence”? How does China deal with these conflicts especially when China shows its ambition in more and more international affairs? I summarise three kinds of viewpoints about this controversy before analysing it. Firstly, as Li Mingjiang (2009) argues, the Chinese culture in the era of Imperial China emphasised on social hierarchy and sought a Sino-centric international order in Asia, which generates suspicions among some international observers (P. 3). Therefore, the themes of “harmony” or “peace” become popular sources when many Chinese analysts now talk about the Chinese culture because China’s soft power has essentially touched on the core interest of others. In other words, some Chinese actions are perceived as illegitimate or may bring disadvantage to other states.

Secondly, China is suspected to undermine ASEAN unity’s efforts to obtain support from other countries. For instance, it is the first time not to issue a joint statement at the 45th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting hosted by Cambodia in July 2012. Cambodia refused to accommodate requests to include references to incidents in the South China Sea in the final communique. It is known that one of the reasons of ASEAN is to fight against Chinese communism (Ba, 2003, P. 625). In recent years, many Southeast Asian countries recognize that China’s proposition about

nine-dash line has seriously violated their national interest and challenged their territorial integrity. For example, China has conflicts on maritime sovereignty with Vietnam, Indonesia, and Philippines. Therefore, China is suspected to exert its influence to disorganise this alliance. The third worry is that Chinese infrastructure investment and trade initiative could be interpreted as strong political and security implications from the perspective of some Asian countries. Some construction in aspects of transportation and infrastructure such as pipeline, railroad and highway construction are largely beneficial to China, which will pave the way for the expanding penetration of cheap Chinese consumer goods into Southeast Asia, leaving little opportunity for local production capacities (Dadabaev, 2018, P.36). Some ASEAN countries feel puzzled about whether “coexistence“ is a political rhetoric or a cooperation initiative when China is regarded as the biggest winner through this Road.

Summing up all these worries and the most potential concern may be that no one wishes to see another Imperial China. In the context of the Belt and Road, the result may be that the higher the levels of interdependence on China, the greater the concerns about the possibility of Chinese domination of economic development.

From these countries’ perspective, the rise of nostalgia may associate with conservative politics. Here, nostalgia is used for either “retreat” or “retrieval”. Further, from a historical perspective, this nostalgia about Imperial China may associate some memories about Nazi’s fervent promotion of the authentic old-fashioned and quaint country. As critic Robert Hemmings (2008) summarizes in his book *Modern Nostalgia*,

Dangerous consequences result when nostalgia’s contempt for the present is applied to the political realm, as occurred in the modern period. The use of modern technology to impose the pattern of pre-industrial society on modern society produces fascism [...] While all forms of nostalgia may not be politically conservative, it is certainly true that modernist nostalgia in these terms is rightly described by critics as reactionary, regressive and dangerously ignoring or distorting the complexities of contemporary life in favour of the imposition of an idealized construction of past order (p.10).

In the context of Chinese government’s Initiative, Ancient Maritime Silk Road is constructed as a China-centered world in this documentary. It is a dangerous signal and desire from some Asian countries’ perspective such as Vietnam that China attempts to recover its tributary system through the Belt and Road.

With regards to these worries, Chinese senior official Tan Jian said, “we are not imperialists and we do not want to colonise the world. The Maritime Silk Road is a concept of peace and economic cooperation. Those who participate will benefit from it” (Zand, 2016). Actually, many ASEAN countries are in an embarrassing situation, on the one hand, they want to join in “the Belt and Road Initiative” with the attraction of huge economic interests; on the other hand, they also worry about Chinese economic and political invasion. Beijing’s Maritime Silk Road may be a trade initiative, but economy and politics are difficult to be separated. As the documentary shows, there is not any narrative about Philippine, Vietnam and India who have border disputes with China.

For some countries, these worries have become true and China's projects have harmed their interest. India is a distinct example, which as the biggest country around the Indian Ocean pays serious attention to the construction of port and petroleum pipeline in Pakistan. From its perspective, the new port in Pakistan can be used for the Chinese military, which threatens Indian national security. More seriously, the China-Pakistan economic corridor will come cross Kashmir that is administered by Pakistan and a disputed area between India and Pakistan. The documentary narrates a nostalgic story that an old Pakistani man keeps decades to look after the grave that buries many Chinese who died during the period when China helped Pakistan build the railway. However, India thinks that the cooperation between China and Pakistan has violated Indian interest and sovereignty. Therefore, "mutual benefit" as an ideology does not benefit everyone and sometimes is a political rhetoric repacked by nostalgia to express Chinese government's political and diplomatic purpose that China wants to be the centre of Asia.

Overall, economic development and national/regional securities are two major concerns for China and ASEAN countries. The documentary focuses on two core interests from the aspects of China's sovereignty, security and economic interests. Although the documentary as a mouthpiece continually refers to the discourse of "coexistence" and "mutual benefit" to eliminate the worries, this article puts forward a question: who will be the biggest winner if China makes rules for the Initiative?

Sinocentric Community of Common Destiny

In the former parts, this article has analysed that the documentary adopts the ancient civilisation of Maritime Silk Road to build 21st-century's Silk Road and propagandises Chinese diplomatic discourse "coexistence" and 'mutual benefit to fulfil Xi's "Chinese dream". In the third part, I will borrow the concept of "community of common destiny" that emerges in the documentary for many times to further suggest that Chinese government attempts to build an invisible regional community through the Road. This community is described as a kind of "home" and Chinese government creates itself as the leader of this big family.

Community normally is seen as a geographical place that "citizens sharing a common interest" (Sigley, 2016, P. 101). It is as Gerard Delanty (2013) argues that "the popularity of community today can be seen as a response to the crisis in solidarity and belonging that has been exacerbated and at the same time induced by globalization" (P. 2). However, the community in this documentary does not respond to some lost traditions as a result of globalization but is an urgent need to recover national identities in the context of China becoming more powerful. China wants to construct a nostalgic community to recall the glorious era of Imperial China after experiencing hundred years of humiliation. China needs success to respond to this historical discontinuity. Therefore, the concept of community in "the Belt and Road" and the documentary is a symbol that connects Chinese constructed past and the complex external situation at present.

The documentary emphasises this controversial concept of “community of common destiny“ from two aspects. Firstly this community is interpreted as a way of commercial community. This road serves as a symbol of modernization such as the cooperating infrastructures: China-Pakistan friendship road, Madeleine island port of Indonesia, and Mombasa port of Kenya. These roads not only bring Chinese communication technology, manufacturing technology, and high-quality products to the ASEAN countries and the Middle East but also bring crude oil, seafood, and agricultural products to China. For example, in episode 3, the documentary focuses on how the development of 21st-century Maritime Silk Road, the popularity of the Internet, and convenient transportation make international trade more prosperous. According to the data, China had a total of more than the \$4 trillion overseas assets and the investment in ASEAN under the strategy of “the Belt and Road” (State Administration of Foreign Exchange, 2015). Thus, the documentary narrates that the “community of common destiny” through this economic road has infiltrated into many people’s lives and eliminated the boundary of the nations, which will bring modernization for the people around the Road.

The second level of community is presented from the cultural perspective. One example is Chaozhou opera has become popular in Thailand (episode 5). Zhuang Meinong is an overseas Chinese who has learned Chaozhou Opera in China for ten years and creates new style Chaozhou opera with Thai cultural elements, which shows ASEAN countries and China have a similar cultural tradition. The documentary tells audiences that Chaozhou Opera is an old form of Chinese music, which was spread to the overseas through the ancient Maritime Silk Road; while it renews its artistic value through 21st-century Maritime Silk Road. Overseas Chinese have a large population in Southeast Asian countries. Although they live in other countries and even many of them are foreigners, the documentary tells audiences that they still pay attention to China and Chinese culture. It is this similar value and civilisation that provides a cultural connection between Chinese and overseas Chinese to form a “community of common destiny“.

However, this constructed community could be a metaphor for military expansion, colonialism, and capitalist globalisation from some countries’ perspective, which may lead to regional instability. As narrated in each episode, the products are shipped from Chinese ports to the countries around the South China Sea and the India Ocean. Meanwhile, these ports also can be used by Chinese government for military purposes. Especially, India has expressed a strong opposition about the ports in Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Christopher Len (2015) observes that this maritime network has the capacity to dramatically reduce Indian authority throughout South Asia and the Indian Ocean, where it regards as its core sphere of influence (P. 3). Even some infrastructures that are signed to cooperate also bring about some controversial debates. For example, Chinese companies abroad do not care about workers’ right; some infrastructures have broken local natural balance (China's Maritime Silk Road CNA Insider, 2016). It is a reasonable consideration from the perspective of China to build these ports as it is beneficial for Chinese economic development; However, its political rhetoric “community of common destiny“ seems to have less reflection in these examples. Randall Peerenboom (2007) provides a considered view that if democratisation is at a lower level, then the wealth is in general not likely to lead to development even hinder growth (P. 7). He further suggests poor authoritarian regimes (China) on

the whole are not likely to be all that much better at sustaining growth (P. 7). This viewpoint may be a typical representation to reflect that the world is worried about the negative effect of Chinese potential social and political issues when it plans to go out.

The documentary emphasises repeatedly that the strategy of “the Belt and Road” will help achieve a community of common destiny. Only by respecting different paths and modes of development and seeking common interests, can a community of common destiny be achieved. It is clear that despite China’s claims of the policy’s benign objectives, strategic mistrust for the initiative is alive amongst many Southeast Asian states. This is because there is a hesitation to support a Chinese re-emergence that could reinstate the hierarchical and Sinocentric tributary system that was present during the era of the first Maritime Silk Road (Callahan, 2016, P. 13). The community of common destiny has been perceived by some countries as a hegemonic union that is led by China. As Anushree Bhattacharyya (2010) notes, “countries in Southeast Asia believe that building large-scale infrastructural networks is a discrete way for China to increase its strategic footprint in the region” (P. 54). These roads and ports could be used to quickly transport troops during a potential future conflict.

Chinese government presents a nostalgic community in the context of “the Belt and Road” to persuade Asian countries to join it. However, one question may be asked by many other countries is who will be the leader of this community? If China intends to be the leader in this community, then how does China solve the territorial dispute with some relative countries? What role does China act in this community, as an empire or a communist? Therefore, it is difficult for other countries to trust China before it gives satisfying answers rather than political rhetoric.

Conclusion

This article analyses the documentary: Maritime Silk Road produced by Chinese local television stations from three aspects. Firstly, the historical and diasporic nostalgia is presented with Xi’s nationalist slogan: “Chinese dream”. The second part borrows concepts of “coexistence“ and “mutual benefit“ to explain the intention of the Road. The third part suggests that the documentary conveys its core ideology: the community of common destiny that is proposed by President Xi to fulfil his political frame of “Chinese dream” and obtain the leadership around the Road.

Through analysis of these political narratives, this article considers that the contents of ancient Maritime Silk Road are constructed based on the international and domestic environment that Chinese government faces at present. It is conceivable that the notion of the Maritime Silk Road is always in the process of being constantly shaped, imagined and re-interpreted. In this documentary, the narratives of ancient Maritime Silk Road and “the Belt and Road Initiative” are initially a political and economic strategy which attempts to build a China-centred regional organization, through which China seeks to expand its influence. One of the most difficult tasks is how to frame this constructed nostalgia in a way that other countries would accept.

Overall, some efforts have been adopted by the documentary to package this hostile strategy. This article prudently argues that the documentary adopts nostalgia to depict CCP's political aspiration, that is reviving China as a powerful and regional hegemon in the strategy of "the Belt and Road".

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