

**"Eight Major Steps"**  
**Heralds Promising New Decade of**  
**Belt and Road Cooperation**

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## Preface

In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the magnificent Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), marking a milestone in the history of human development. Over the past decade, with joint efforts from all sides, the BRI—centered on connectivity—has transcended geographical boundaries, bridged cultural differences, and aligned development needs. It has pioneered a new framework for international cooperation, built on the principles of consultation, collaboration, and shared benefits. Today, the BRI stands as the world’s most popular international public good and the largest platform for global cooperation. It has become a path of partnership, opportunity, and prosperity for the countries involved.

During the keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation convened in October 2023, President Xi Jinping announced China’s support for eight initiatives aimed at advancing the high-quality development of the Belt and Road. Over the past year, with the concerted efforts of BRI partner countries, these initiatives have steadily progressed and achieved remarkable results, laying a solid foundation for the second decade of the BRI. The experience has demonstrated that in today’s global context, the pursuit of development, growth, and shared prosperity is a common aspiration for all nations. The BRI continues to gain worldwide consensus and has entered a phase of significant opportunity. It is well-positioned to become a ballast for building an open world economy, a driving force for collective growth, and a catalyst for global modernization.

Looking ahead, countries involved in the BRI must further implement the eight initiatives, advance practical cooperation, and jointly promote innovative development. Together, they can address risks and challenges while ensuring the steady progress of high-quality Belt and Road construction on this new journey. The goal is to create a world where peace, mutual benefit, and shared prosperity are the hallmarks of modernization and to contribute to building a community with a shared future for humanity.

## Chapter One

# The Eight Major Steps Propel High-Quality Belt and Road Cooperation to a New Starting Point

## 1.1 Continued and Steady Progress in Connectivity Development

Since the introduction of the Eight Major Steps, connectivity has become a key focus. The construction of the China-Europe corridor, represented by the China-Europe Railway Express and the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor, continues to improve in quality. The “Silk Road Maritime” initiative advances the integrated development of port, shipping, and trade, while the Air Silk Road has steadily progressed. Under the principles of consultation, cooperation, and shared benefits, the economic and social impacts of several landmark projects have become increasingly evident, significantly contributing to the modernization of BRI partner countries.

### —Official Establishment of a Diverse and Comprehensive Connectivity Framework of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor Enhances the Quality of the China-Europe Corridor

In terms of connectivity across the Eurasian continent, the construction of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor has progressed significantly in 2024. On July 3, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev jointly attended, via video link, the launch ceremony for the China-Europe direct express line through the Caspian Sea, held at the Presidential Palace in Astana. This event marks the first time Chinese vehicles reached a Caspian port through direct highway transport, symbolizing the formal establishment of a diverse and comprehensive connectivity framework that integrates road, rail, air, and pipeline transportation.<sup>①</sup>

Gaidar Abdykerimov, Secretary General of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor International Association, explained that this corridor was a multimodal transport route stretching over 11,000 kilometers from China across Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia and extending to Turkey and European countries. It has become a crucial artery for transporting goods from Southeast Asia and China to Europe, with an annual cargo throughput of approximately 6 million tons. Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey have already planned to more than double the corridor’s annual throughput by 2027. He noted that one of China’s Eight Major

<sup>①</sup> <http://www.news.cn/20240703/d9b59485ad8d43df9a0e694ceed6f4fc/c.html>

Steps for the high-quality BRI involves participating in the development of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor, stating, “China’s support has translated into concrete actions, bringing positive news for this project.”<sup>①</sup>

Since 2024, new China-Europe Railway Express routes have been launched via this corridor from Chinese cities such as Xi’an, Nanjing, Qingdao, and Jinan, connecting to countries like Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Italy. Currently, it takes only 29 days to travel from Xi’an, China, to Mannheim, Germany, through this corridor, with the potential to reduce the time further to around 25 days in the future. With 6-7 trains running weekly, this route has been optimized with dedicated container ships for the Caspian and Black Sea segments, significantly cutting transportation time by more than half compared to all-sea routes. This development has greatly shortened transit times, lowered logistics costs, and led to a substantial increase in trade volume.

Driven by significant progress in the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor, the China-Europe Railway Express has continued to upgrade in quality. Over the past year, new records have been set for the number of trains, transport capacity, and area coverage. From January to August 2024, a total of 13,056 trains were dispatched, carrying 1.399 million TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) of goods, representing year-on-year increases of 12% and 11%, respectively. In August alone, 1,653 trains were dispatched, transporting 173,000 TEUs. Since the start of 2024, the number of trains running per month has exceeded 1,600 for six consecutive months.<sup>②</sup> By July 2024, the China-Europe Railway Express had reached 224 cities in 25 European countries and connected over 100 cities in 11 Asian countries, with its service network covering almost all of Eurasia. Within China, 91 scheduled lines have been established for the China-Europe Railway Express, with speeds of up to 120 kilometers per hour, linking 61 cities across the country. The range of goods transported by the trains has expanded to 53 major categories and over 50,000 kinds of products, with a 100% container utilization rate.<sup>③</sup> In June 2024, the governments of China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan signed an intergovernmental agreement for the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project. The railway will start from Kashgar in Xinjiang, pass through Kyrgyzstan, and enter Uzbekistan. In the future, it can extend to West Asia and South Asia. Once completed, it will not only greatly enhance connectivity between the three countries but also effectively promote the development of rail links between Central Asia and Europe.

① <http://www.news.cn/world/20240707/c6e1a7f81a4e4fc4b7aa715ba4c70c47/c.html>

② [http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2024-09/19/nw.D110000renmrb\\_20240919\\_4-10.html](http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2024-09/19/nw.D110000renmrb_20240919_4-10.html)

③ <http://www.news.cn/20240727/f37d543f86b3477cb3bebc7699aac955/c.html>

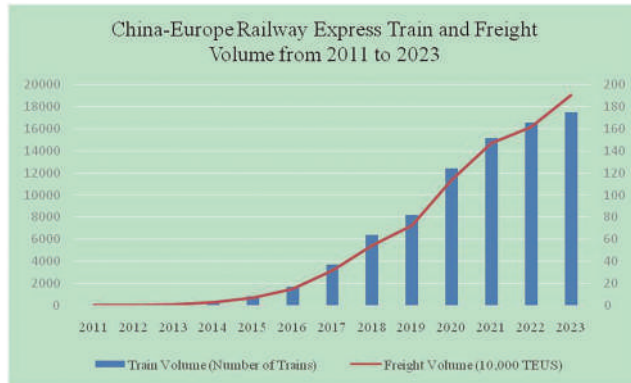


Figure 1: China-Europe Railway Express Train and Freight Volume from 2011 to 2023 (Source: China-Europe Railway Express Portal)



Figure 2: China-Europe Railway Express Train and Freight Volume (Since October 2023) (Source: China-Europe Railway Express Portal)

### —Integrated Development of Ports, Shipping, and Trade of the Silk Road Maritime and Steady Progress in the Air Silk Road Construction

The integrated development of ports, shipping, and trade plays a crucial role in connectivity efforts. On September 7, during the 6th Silk Road Maritime International Cooperation Forum held in Xiamen, China, it was announced that ten new Silk Road Maritime routes were added, bringing the total number to 132. These routes now connect 145 ports across 46 countries and regions. Notably, Piraeus Port and Abu Dhabi Port have, for the first time, been included as recommended named routes.<sup>①</sup>

The integration of ports, shipping, and trade has proven to be mutually reinforcing, with Piraeus Port in Greece serving as a prime example. On February 6, the expansion project of the Herakleous Ro-Ro terminal at Piraeus Port was officially completed,

<sup>①</sup> <https://www.thepaper.cn/detail/28683356>



with a total investment exceeding 20 million euros. After the expansion, the terminal can accommodate 5,100 vehicles, significantly enhancing Piraeus Port's role as a key hub for automobile shipping trade.<sup>①</sup> By the first half of 2024, Piraeus Port had solidified its position as the leading container port in the Mediterranean, the third-largest cruise homeport and the largest ferry port in Europe, the ship repair center of the Eastern Mediterranean, and a transshipment hub for car carriers. During the same period, COSCO Shipping at Piraeus Port had paid over 100 million euros in concession fees and taxes to the Greek government, with dividends for its publicly listed company increasing twelvefold. These activities directly created 4,300 jobs and indirectly generated 12,000 jobs in Greece, boosting the country's GDP by 1.56 percentage points.<sup>②</sup>

Where Air Silk Road development is concerned, China signed memorandums of understanding with several countries, including Kyrgyzstan,<sup>③</sup> Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan,<sup>④</sup> to jointly build the Air Silk Road during the year following the introduction of the Eight Major Steps. Regular flight routes were launched, including China's first scheduled route to Armenia,<sup>⑤</sup> the first direct passenger flight from China to Luxembourg,<sup>⑥</sup> the first direct regular passenger flight from the Chinese mainland to Saudi Arabia,<sup>⑦</sup> and the first regular commercial flight from the Chinese mainland to a South Pacific island nation.<sup>⑧</sup> Additionally, the Siem Reap Angkor International Airport in Cambodia, constructed by a Chinese company, became operational. The coverage of the Air Silk Road continues to expand, with its capacity steadily increasing.

On June 20, during the Second Zhengzhou-Luxembourg Air Silk Road International Cooperation Forum, Luxembourg's Deputy Prime Minister, Xavier Bettel, stated that the Air Silk Road between Luxembourg and Zhengzhou had become an important link strengthening the relationship between Luxembourg and China. Luxembourg is willing to use this forum as an opportunity to deepen cooperation with China in various fields within the Belt and Road framework.<sup>⑨</sup>

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① <http://www.news.cn/world/20240207/090804c012104af0954d5de38e31b8b3/c.html>

② [http://gr.china-embassy.gov.cn/zxhd/202403/t20240318\\_11262127.htm](http://gr.china-embassy.gov.cn/zxhd/202403/t20240318_11262127.htm)

③ [https://www.caac.gov.cn/XWZX/MHYW/202406/t20240617\\_224472.html](https://www.caac.gov.cn/XWZX/MHYW/202406/t20240617_224472.html)

④ [https://www.caac.gov.cn/XWZX/MHYW/202310/t20231020\\_221785.html](https://www.caac.gov.cn/XWZX/MHYW/202310/t20231020_221785.html)

⑤ [http://www.news.cn/2023-12/21/c\\_1130040312.htm](http://www.news.cn/2023-12/21/c_1130040312.htm)

⑥ <http://www.news.cn/photo/20240903/e99581df613e4be49551e02230296378/c.html>

⑦ <https://h.xinhuanet.com/vh512/share/11973574>

⑧ <https://h.xinhuanet.com/vh512/share/11822520>

⑨ <http://www.news.cn/politics/leaders/20240621/d0ee75fb546c49e6a8d4d26d329a425f/c.html>

### **Fact Box: New Western Land-Sea Corridor**

The New Western Land-Sea Corridor is an international trade route developed in cooperation between China's western provinces and ASEAN countries. Centered around Chongqing as the operations hub, the corridor uses rail, sea, and road transport to connect key nodes in China's western provinces with the world via coastal and border ports in Guangxi and Yunnan.

President Xi Jinping emphasized that building the New Western Land-Sea Corridor is of great significance in making new ground in opening China further through links running eastward and westward across land and over sea. Since the issuance of the Overall Plan for the New Western Land-Sea Corridor five years ago, the number of destinations served by the corridor has expanded from 166 ports in 71 countries and regions to 523 ports in 124 countries and regions. Over 30,000 trains have been dispatched, and the range of goods transported has increased from more than 80 types to over 1,150.

As of September 14, 2024, the rail-sea intermodal trains of the New Western Land-Sea Corridor have shipped over 600,000 TEUs. Evolving from a "single line" into a "network," the New Western Land-Sea Corridor has become a vivid representation of China's high-level opening-up to the world.

### **—The Principle of “Teaching to Fish” Highlights the Idea of Consultation, Cooperation, and Shared Benefits, Consolidating Long-Term Mutual Gains**

On May 10, 2024, a ceremony marking the achievements and future outlook of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway over the past six years, as well as the official handover, was held in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. This event symbolized the formal transfer of leading operational management for the railway to the Ethio-Djibouti Standard Gauge Railway Share Company.

The Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, Africa's first cross-border electrified railway, spans 752 kilometers from Addis Ababa in the west to the port city of Djibouti in the east. Built by a subsidiary of China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC), the railway has been in commercial operation since 2018. Under the contract, the Chinese companies provided six years of operational and maintenance services. Over this period, Chinese experts certified and trained 2,840 local employees, laying a solid foundation for a successful handover. Following the handover ceremony, the Chinese team is now focusing on inspection, supervision, and guidance and plans to exit within two years fully.

Where connectivity projects are concerned, the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway serves as a prime example of “teaching to fish” —a hallmark of many Belt and Road

initiatives. Through such projects, BRI countries not only upgrade their infrastructure but also acquire the skills to operate and maintain it, further advancing their modernization.

On January 17, 2024, Chinese President Xi Jinping responded to a letter from Kenyan students and alumni representatives at Beijing Jiaotong University, encouraging them to continue contributing to the friendship between China, Kenya, and Africa. The Mombasa-Nairobi Railway, a flagship project and a successful model of China-Kenya cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, was designed to empower the Kenyan side to manage its operations. China has sponsored 100 Kenyan students to study railway operations and management at Beijing Jiaotong University. These students have since returned to Kenya, joining the Kenya Railways Corporation and becoming a new driving force for local development and enhanced bilateral cooperation. As of May 31, 2024, the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway had been in safe operation for seven years, transporting 12.86 million passengers and 32.87 million tons of cargo. It has directly and indirectly created 74,000 jobs in Kenya and trained over 2,800 highly qualified railway professionals and management personnel.



Figure 3: Contracting Projects by Chinese Enterprises in Belt and Road Partner Countries (October 2023 – August 2024) (Source: Ministry of Commerce)

Under the principles of consultation, cooperation, and shared benefits, the economic and social effects of several landmark projects have increasingly become apparent, fully demonstrating the success of win-win cooperation. According to Chinese statistics, from January to August 2024, the China-Laos Railway handled 3.584 million tons of import and export goods, an increase of 22.8% year-on-year. Notably, imports of Thai durians via the China-Laos Railway reached 73,000 tons, a year-on-year increase of 74.2%. As of March 2024, the customs clearance time for international freight trains on the China-Laos Railway had been reduced from over 40 hours at the time of the railway's opening to less than 5 hours, with up to 18 international freight trains being exchanged per day at peak times. The freight service network has expanded to 12 BRI partner countries, including Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and Myanmar, as well as major cities in 31 provinces, regions, and municipalities across China. This expansion has effectively promoted the development of economic zones such as

the Vientiane Saysettha Development Zone and the Boten Economic Special Zone.<sup>①</sup>

### **Fact Box: China–Laos Railway**

The China–Laos Railway starts in Kunming, Yunnan Province, China, and extends south to Vientiane, the capital of Laos. It is the first transnational railway built and operated in cooperation between China and Laos, using Chinese standards and directly connecting to China’s railway network. The railway spans a total of 1,035 kilometers. In terms of freight transport, since its opening on December 3, 2021, until September 16, 2024, the China–Laos Railway has transported a cumulative 10.002 million tons of international cargo, with a total cargo value of 40.77 billion yuan. For passenger transport, since the launch of international passenger trains on April 13, 2023, the Mohan Border Inspection Station has inspected over 1,260 international passenger trains, facilitating the smooth entry and exit of more than 282,000 passengers from 101 countries and regions by September 25, 2024. The China–Laos Railway is a flagship project for promoting high-quality Belt and Road cooperation and enhancing connectivity between China and Southeast Asian countries, serving as an important link

In Indonesia, as of July 2024, the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway had been in operation for nine months, transporting more than 4 million passengers,<sup>②</sup> with a strong growth in passenger numbers. The number of daily high-speed trains increased from 14 at the start of operations to 52 during peak periods, with a single-day record of 21,537 passengers. The highest occupancy rate reached 99.6%.<sup>③</sup> On April 1, 2024, during talks in Beijing with Indonesia’s President-elect Prabowo, Chinese President Xi Jinping noted, “The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway has become a flagship of high-quality cooperation between the two countries, marking a new phase in China-Indonesia relations as they build a community with a shared future.”<sup>④</sup>

① <http://yn.news.cn/20240320/3981fbef4b834656800d6743844cf361/c.html>

② <http://www.news.cn/photo/20240717/0e7fa6752ad04196b516ad1bb09815e5/c.html>

③ <http://www.news.cn/20240417/8fa72b5a1db94818b4407ec4cace0fb1/c.html>

④ <http://www.news.cn/20240401/1d19b27faca748feb0e2084770924add/c.html>

### **Fact Box: Jakarta–Bandung High–Speed Railway**

The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway connects Indonesia's capital, Jakarta, with the tourist city of Bandung. Spanning 142 kilometers, it is designed for a maximum speed of 350 kilometers per hour. This railway is the first high-speed railway in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, and it serves as a "flagship project" of China-Indonesia Belt and Road cooperation. Officially opened on October 17, 2023, the railway has reduced travel time between Jakarta and Bandung from over three hours to just 46 minutes, providing a safe, green, efficient, and comfortable mode of transportation for the public.

## **1.2 “Green” and “Digital” Energy as Essential Themes of Innovative Development**

With the implementation of the Eight Major Steps, “green” and “digital” have emerged as key themes in the new phase of BRI development. Behind these concepts is China’s active cultivation of new productive forces, fostering a positive synergy with the joint construction of the BRI. This dynamic interaction has significantly contributed to the modernization processes of BRI countries, illustrating how China’s path to modernization supports the development of the partner countries.

### **—Sustainable Development Driven by Green Silk Road**

Sixty-five kilometers south of downtown Dubai in the UAE lies a futuristic megapark covering 44 square kilometers. Towering within it is a 262-meter-high solar power tower, surrounded by approximately 70,000 heliostats reflecting sunlight to the top of the tower. That is the Dubai Maktoum Solar Park Phase IV, a flagship project of the China-UAE Green Silk Road collaboration. In February 2024, all the power units of the project were successfully connected to the grid. They began commercial operation with a total installed capacity of 950 megawatts, comprising 700 megawatts of solar thermal power and 250 megawatts of photovoltaic power. Despite the UAE’s vast oil resources, the country remains committed to optimizing its energy structure. At the project’s inauguration, UAE Vice President and Prime Minister Mohammed stated that the UAE aimed to become one of the world’s most sustainable nations, and the commercial operation of the Dubai solar thermal and photovoltaic power project marks a significant milestone on its path to sustainable development.

As demonstrated by this project, ongoing cooperation in green infrastructure, green energy, and green transportation has become a key focus of the Eight Initiatives. In Côte d’Ivoire, two of the three units at the Gribo-Popoli hydropower station—currently the country’s largest under construction—built by a Chinese enterprise were

delivered in 2024, with the remaining unit set to be operational by the end of the year. The plant's total installed capacity of 112.9 megawatts will add 554 million kilowatt-hours of clean energy annually, helping Côte d'Ivoire meet its goal of increasing the share of renewable energy to 45% by 2030. In Uganda, the Karuma Hydro-power Station, a flagship China-Uganda Belt and Road cooperation project, began full operation at the start of 2024, generating an average of 4 billion kilowatt-hours annually, saving around 1.31 million tons of raw coal each year and reducing CO2 emissions by 3.48 million tons. This project is also expected to lower Uganda's electricity prices by 17.5%. In South Africa, on September 14, the 100-megawatt Redstone solar thermal power plant, built by a Chinese company, was successfully connected to the grid for the first time and will eventually provide electricity to approximately 200,000 South African households, significantly reducing reliance on traditional fossil fuels.

According to the White Paper on China's Energy Transition released in August 2024, China's BRI energy cooperation partnership now includes 33 member countries spanning six continents, including Asia and Africa. To strengthen cooperation on the Green Silk Road and incorporate sustainability principles into every aspect of the Belt and Road Initiative, China has launched the Belt and Road International Green Development Coalition. This initiative aims to help BRI partner countries meet the environmental and development-related targets of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. As of mid-2024, the coalition includes over 150 partners from more than 40 countries, including environmental authorities from over 20 Belt and Road partner nations.

### **Fact Box: The Green Investment Principles for the Belt and Road**

The Green Investment Principles for the Belt and Road is a set of voluntary guidelines for investment enterprises, aimed at promoting green and sustainable development in Belt and Road investments. Officially launched on November 30, 2018, the principles offer seven key initiatives across strategic, operational, and innovation levels. These include corporate governance, strategy development, project management, external communication, and the use of green financial tools. The guidelines are designed for global financial institutions and companies involved in Belt and Road investments to voluntarily adopt and implement. Forty-nine signatory institutions, 20 supporting institutions, and two observer institutions from 17 countries and regions have joined the initiative as of September 2024.

### **—Rapid Expansion of Digital Silk Road into New Spaces**

The Digital Silk Road is experiencing rapid growth in digital service trade and e-commerce. In the first half of 2024, China's digitally deliverable services imports

and exports reached 1.42 trillion yuan, and cross-border e-commerce imports and exports totaled 1.22 trillion yuan—both hitting historic highs. This expansion has created vast new opportunities for participating Belt and Road countries.

At the third Global Digital Trade Expo held in Hangzhou in late September, over 30,000 professional buyers registered, including more than 6,000 international participants. The expo featured a dedicated Silk Road e-commerce section, with a “Silk Road E-Commerce Day” connecting resources for e-commerce cooperation. A special “Silk Road Cloud Products” section was set up to showcase products from Kazakhstan, Thailand, and other guest countries. That same month, the Jiangsu Central Asia Center officially launched in Nanjing, positioning Silk Road e-commerce as a core component of its operations. The center will manage production bases, warehouse resources, and logistics between Jiangsu and Central Asia through digital tools. Earlier, Shanghai’s Pudong New Area released an Action Plan for Advancing the Silk Road E-Commerce Cooperation Pilot Zone, introducing a series of measures to accelerate cross-border data flows, trade facilitation, and digital trade initiatives. The plan aims to establish a comprehensive Silk Road e-commerce service system by 2025, fostering deeper trade cooperation among Belt and Road countries through e-commerce.<sup>①</sup>

### **Fact Box: "Silk Road E-Commerce"**

"Silk Road E-Commerce" is an important initiative by China that leverages its strengths in e-commerce technology application, model innovation, and market scale to expand trade cooperation with BRI countries, sharing digital development opportunities. Since October 2023, China has signed new e-commerce cooperation memorandums of understanding with Serbia, Bahrain, and Tajikistan, bringing the number of "Silk Road E-Commerce" partner countries to 33.

The creation of "Silk Road E-Commerce" cooperation pilot zones is a key measure for promoting high-quality BRI development, as well as expanding institutional openness in the e-commerce sector. Since the approval from the State Council in October 2023 to establish a "Silk Road E-Commerce" cooperation pilot zone in Shanghai, 36 out of 38 construction tasks have been fully rolled out. These efforts have produced institutional breakthroughs such as cross-border e-invoice interoperability and electronic bills of lading, and have established public service platforms for talent training, think tank alliances, and national pavilions for BRI partner countries.

The practices of China’s wealthiest eastern provinces and cities demonstrate that

<sup>①</sup> [http://www.news.cn/local/2023-12/14/c\\_1130027225.htm](http://www.news.cn/local/2023-12/14/c_1130027225.htm)

both digital service trade and the development of “cross-border e-commerce + industrial zones” have become new economic growth hotspots along the Digital Silk Road. As China continues to expand its high-level opening up, the digital economy is bound to become a key driver of growth and a major source of momentum for the Belt and Road Initiative.

In order to support the development of the digital economy, digital infrastructure has become a crucial area of cooperation. With the assistance of Chinese enterprises, Tanzania’s National Fiber Optic Backbone Network project has reduced national communication costs by 57%, earning the title “Information TAZARA” (Tanzania-Zambia Railway). The Smart Senegal project has accelerated the country’s digital economy, injecting new momentum into the implementation of the “Plan for an Emerging Senegal.” Ahead of the 2024 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Summit in Beijing, China announced that it would strengthen digital infrastructure development in Africa, promote high-speed Internet access, support the creation of “smart cities” in Africa, and advance China-Africa cooperation in information and network technologies, including 5G, big data, cloud computing, fintech, and artificial intelligence. The construction of the Digital Silk Road will not only promote comprehensive cooperation and exchanges between countries and regions but also effectively narrow the “digital divide,” helping BRI partner countries build a community with a shared future in cyberspace and enabling them to share in the benefits of digital technology for a brighter future.

### **Fact Box: Action Plan for Science and Technology Innovation in BRI Cooperation**

At the opening ceremony of the first Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation convened in May 2017, President Xi Jinping proposed building the Belt and Road into one of innovation, launching Action Plan for Science and Technology Innovation in BRI Cooperation. This plan involves cooperation between China and Belt and Road partner countries in four key areas: scientific and cultural exchanges, joint laboratory construction, cooperation on science parks, and technology transfer. The goal is to jointly embrace the new wave of technological revolution and industrial transformation, advancing the path of innovation.

As of November 2023, China has signed intergovernmental science and technology cooperation agreements with over 80 BRI partner countries. More than 50 BRI joint laboratories have been established, along with over 20 agricultural technology demonstration centers and more than 70 overseas industrial parks. Nine transnational technology transfer centers have been established, and over 300 technical exchange and matchmaking events have been held, facilitating the implementation of more than 1,000 cooperative projects.



### 1.3 “Small Yet Smart” Projects Achieve Effective Results and Benefit Livelihood

At its core, the Belt and Road Initiative aims to improve the quality of life for people in participating countries. While large-scale landmark projects continue to advance, numerous “small yet smart” projects are also being implemented. These initiatives, ranging from education and training programs to health clinics and from mushroom cultivation workshops to clean water wells, have made tangible contributions to poverty alleviation and improving people’s livelihoods.

#### Fact Box: BRI Chinese Government Scholarship Program

In 2017, the Ministry of Education officially established and launched the BRI Chinese Government Scholarship Program, aimed at cultivating talent from Belt and Road partner countries. The program operates through three models of cooperation: between ministries, between provinces and ministries, and between universities.

#### —The Luban Workshop Becomes a Shining Example of the BRI Vocational Education Cooperation

During the opening ceremony of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation convened on September 5 in Beijing, President Xi Jinping stated, “China will implement with Africa more solidly the Future of Africa—Vocational Education Cooperation Plan, establish together an engineering technology academy, and build ten Luban Workshops.” In recent years, driven by high-level diplomatic efforts, 17 Luban Workshops have already been established in 15 African countries, blossoming into a flagship model of China’s international vocational education cooperation.<sup>①</sup>

In Central Asia, the Luban Workshop in Tajikistan has been operating successfully for over a year, while projects in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are progressing actively. Kyrgyzstan recently inaugurated a smart classroom for its Luban Workshop.<sup>②</sup> The first Luban Workshop in Kazakhstan began trial operations at the end of 2023. During talks in July 2024 between President Xi Jinping and Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in Astana, it was announced that China would establish a second Luban Workshop in Kazakhstan.<sup>③</sup>

Since the first overseas Luban Workshop was established in Thailand in 2016, it has been launched in several African countries under the Forum on China-Africa Coopera-

① <http://www.news.cn/politics/leaders/20240907/35e1ed2f4ec045838f5f56d491e60714/c.html>

② <http://www.news.cn/politics/leaders/20240704/130b35c1192e41979ad417cc34159037/c.html>

③ <http://www.news.cn/20240703/d796ba1a83b6450aa55a6620fc390d4c/c.html>

tion, and more have been set up across Central Asia. As of July 2024, this Chinese vocational education brand has taken root in 29 countries, offering 57 programs in 14 major fields, including artificial intelligence, electric vehicle maintenance, civil engineering, and traditional Chinese medicine. The workshops have enrolled over 10,000 students in degree programs and provided vocational training to more than 22,000 participants.<sup>①</sup>

### —Promoting Access to Basic Health Care for People in BRI Partner Countries

For many years, “small yet smart” medical outreach programs like “Operation Brightness,” “Operation Love,” and “Operation Smile,” which focus on treating cataracts, heart disease, and cleft lip and palate, have been widely welcomed in BRI partner countries. According to incomplete statistics, since 2024, Chinese medical teams have successfully performed nearly a thousand cataract surgeries in countries such as Mongolia,<sup>②</sup> Tajikistan,<sup>③</sup> Uzbekistan,<sup>④</sup> and Sri Lanka.<sup>⑤</sup> In Mongolia alone, the “Belt and Road Brightness Action” has screened 3,178 patients with eye diseases and performed 539 free cataract surgeries. In Cambodia, a 68-year-old named Duk Sarun underwent surgery at the end of January, becoming the 10,000th patient cured under China’s cataract blindness elimination project in the country.

In order to further advance the Health Silk Road, China has also established various partnership mechanisms with BRI countries, assisting in building medical facilities. According to the China-Africa Belt and Road Cooperation Development Report released on August 29, 2024, as of the end of June 2024, China had helped build over 130 hospitals and clinics in Africa, dispatched medical teams to 45 African countries, and established paired cooperation mechanisms with 46 African hospitals. In Laos, the China-aided upgrade project for Luang Prabang Hospital was completed and handed over in mid-August. China constructed new surgical and cardiovascular wards and will provide three years of technical assistance to improve local healthcare and medical rescue capabilities, aiming to make the hospital a central medical hub in northern Laos.

### —Wells of Happiness Quench The Thirst of BRI Partner Countries’ People

In order to promote access to clean water in BRI partner countries, China has initiated projects to provide drinking water facilities in various regions. On July 22, the first well of the 300-well project aided by China in Zimbabwe successfully produced water,

① [http://paper.ce.cn/pc/content/202408/27/content\\_300065.html](http://paper.ce.cn/pc/content/202408/27/content_300065.html)

② <http://www.news.cn/photo/20240910/e5f0072735134587993753ecc3b6e624/c.html>

③ <http://www.news.cn/world/20240706/5cf1d23975994c96ba7fb93a76470bda/c.html>

④ <http://www.news.cn/20240531/a537fa86064042a1a23837b82dfb02cd/c.html>

⑤ <http://www.news.cn/world/20240425/125c589a38c34358847f12d952d74554/c.html>

bringing safe drinking water to local villagers. In 2024, Zimbabwe faced severe drought and food security challenges. To address this, China committed to drilling 300 wells in several provinces. Zimbabwe's Minister of National Housing and Social Amenities, Daniel Garwe, stated, "These wells will greatly alleviate the water crisis in four of the hardest-hit provinces, not only saving livestock and irrigating farmland but also laying a solid foundation for post-disaster recovery." Over the past decade, China has constructed 1,000 wells in Zimbabwe, providing water for domestic use and agricultural irrigation to approximately 400,000 people while also creating thousands of jobs.

China has been making further contributions to water supply for daily use and agricultural irrigation in 2024. In Kyrgyzstan, the first phase of China-aided irrigation system upgrades, covering three irrigation districts, was officially handed over. In Myanmar, the second phase of a rural water supply project in Naypyidaw was completed, significantly improving access to clean water for rural communities. In Sri Lanka, the China-constructed central canal project was completed in May, providing irrigation for nearly 400 hectares of farmland. Each well and every canal benefits millions of people, symbolizing the tangible cooperation and shared development between Belt and Road countries.

### —The “Grass of Happiness” Continues to Drive Poverty Alleviation

In March 2024, China and the Fijian government co-hosted a “Pacific Island Countries Juncao Technology Training Workshop,” attracting dozens of participants from 11 Pacific nations, including Papua New Guinea, Tonga, the Cook Islands, Samoa, and Nauru. Professor Lin Zhanxi, the inventor of Juncao technology, personally trained the participants. Juncao technology, which was first introduced as an official aid project to Papua New Guinea in 2001, has since grown in global significance. By August 2024, approximately 350 international Juncao training sessions had been held, training more than 14,000 people.<sup>①</sup> In Papua New Guinea, giant Juncao grass set a world record by yielding 854 tons of fresh grass per hectare annually. Prime Minister James Marape, during his meeting with Professor Lin in May, emphasized the critical role Juncao and upland rice projects have played in Papua New Guinea’s agriculture and poverty reduction efforts. The government plans to expand these projects further to more provinces. In Rwanda, the Juncao industry chain has supported over 50 businesses and cooperatives, benefiting more than 4,000 households and creating employment for more than 30,000 people. In Fiji, over 2,700 technicians have been trained in Juncao technology, directly benefiting over 3,000 households. To date, the Juncao project has taken root in more than 100 countries, showing great potential in poverty reduction, job creation, desertification control, and power generation, earning its reputation as the “Grass of Happiness” that benefits the world.<sup>②</sup>

① <http://www.news.cn/politics/leaders/20240825/fa904ff239dc4846902b3814f06b24a2/c.html>

② <http://www.news.cn/world/20240802/6d09d74f660a470884459749086cb7e5/c.html>

### **Fact Box: “Small Yet Smart” Projects**

At the third symposium on the BRI, President Xi Jinping emphasized that "small yet smart" projects should be prioritized in international cooperation.

For many years, the BRI has focused on tangible and impactful projects that enhance the sense of satisfaction and happiness among the people of BRI partner countries. These projects cover key areas such as infrastructure, healthcare, green ecology, agricultural cooperation, water conservation, forestry, poverty alleviation and humanitarian efforts, and education and training. Guided by the principles of practicality, public engagement, low cost, and sustainability, the BRI has deeply advanced the development of "small yet smart" projects. Notable examples, such as Juncao technology and Luban Workshops, have become flagship models, with strong demonstrating effects and broad applicability.

## **1.4 Deepening Mechanism Building and Prominent People-to-People Exchanges**

### **—The International Cooperation Mechanism is Improving, and Multilateral Platform Development is Progressing Steadily**

In line with the requirements of the Eight Major Steps, the Secretariat of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation was officially inaugurated on May 11, marking the commencement of its operations. The Secretariat, located within China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is responsible for supporting the forum and coordinating related international cooperation efforts. Over the past year, solid progress has been made in developing multilateral cooperation platforms among BRI partner countries in various fields, such as energy, taxation, law, disaster reduction, anti-corruption, think tanks, and media, with continual new achievements.

### **Fact Box: Secretariat of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation**

In October 2023, President Xi Jinping announced the establishment of the Secretariat of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation during the 3rd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Ma Zhaoxu serves as the Secretary-General.

Take taxation, for example. Over 500 representatives from nearly 50 countries and re-

gions gathered in Hong Kong in September to attend the 5th Belt and Road Tax Administration Cooperation Forum. To facilitate trade and investment for the BRI partner countries, China initiated the Belt and Road Tax Administration Cooperation Mechanism in 2019, aiming to remove tax barriers and create a tax environment that fosters development. Under this mechanism, five Belt and Road Tax Academies have been established in Yangzhou, Beijing, Astana, Macau, and Riyadh, with a new campus added in Macau (Hengqin Campus) in 2024. At the forum, it was announced that the Belt and Road Tax Academy in Algiers had officially opened, becoming the sixth such institution. As of August 2024, the mechanism has trained around 6,000 tax and finance officials from over 120 countries and regions, building a bridge for improving tax governance and facilitating trade and economic exchanges.

Over the past year, various multilateral cooperation platforms, such as the Belt and Road Energy Partnership, the Belt and Road High-Level Conference on Intellectual Property, the Belt and Road International Think Tank Cooperation Committee, the Belt and Road Media Cooperation Alliance, and the Belt and Road International Cooperation Mechanism for Natural Disaster Prevention and Emergency Management, have been advancing the outcomes of the 3rd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation and the Eight Major Steps. These platforms have fostered international cooperation in specific fields, enhanced functional dialogues, and promoted “soft connectivity” between Belt and Road partner countries.

### **—Building a Clean Silk Road for Sustainable BRI Cooperation**

At the Clean Silk Road Forum, held during the 3rd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, Tsinghua University’s Academy for Clean Governance unveiled the Belt and Road Enterprise Integrity and Compliance Evaluation System. In June 2024, the Belt and Road Corporate Integrity and Compliance Evaluation Forum was held in Yiwu, Zhejiang Province. More than 400 representatives from the Chinese government, including the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and the National Supervisory Commission, along with international organizations, businesses, and scholars, participated. The forum focused on building consensus around the integrity and compliance system to promote high-quality corporate development. Guo Yong, Director of Tsinghua University’s Academy for Clean Governance, highlighted that enterprises play a key role as a bridge in BRI cooperation, acting as key drivers in implementing various projects. He stressed that integrity was fundamental to the steady and sustainable development of the BRI, while corporate compliance was central to enhancing global competitiveness. Jaroslaw Pietrusiewicz, Secretary General of the International Anti-Corruption Academy, expressed strong support for China’s Clean Silk Road initiative and pledged the academy’s continued commitment to contributing to its implementation.

In August, the Belt and Road Integrity Construction Local Seminar between Yunnan, China, and Southeast Asian Countries was held in Kunming, exploring practical path-

ways for local exchanges and regional collaboration in anti-corruption efforts. In September, the Hong Kong Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) hosted a nine-day “Anti-Corruption Governance Course for Large Infrastructure Projects,” attended by over 20 participants from anti-corruption agencies in more than ten BRI partner countries. The course focused on using technology to mitigate corruption risks and strengthen anti-corruption capabilities in large-scale infrastructure projects. To further enhance governmental cooperation, China has been actively promoting capacity building for the Clean Silk Road through various programs, including anti-corruption training sessions for BRI countries, international workshops on discipline inspection and supervision, and foreign aid training programs in the field of Clean Silk Road construction.

### **Fact Box: Beijing Initiative for the Clean Silk Road**

The Beijing Initiative for the Clean Silk Road was jointly launched in April 2019 at the Clean Silk Road Sub-Forum during the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. Representatives from China, BRI partner countries, international organizations, and business and academic sectors participated in the initiative's creation. The initiative calls for greater transparency in government information, proactive prevention and resolution of disputes in trade and investment, and enhanced cooperation in finance, taxation, intellectual property, and environmental protection. It aims to establish a stable, fair, and transparent framework for rules and governance within the Belt and Road Initiative. The Beijing Initiative also urges all parties to strengthen oversight of Belt and Road cooperation projects, regulate public resource transactions, and strictly adhere to relevant laws and regulations in project bidding, construction, and management to eliminate rent-seeking opportunities and foster a standardized and law-based business environment.

### **—Promoting Understanding Through People-to-People Exchanges, Fostering Mutual Learning Between Civilizations**

The countries involved in the BRI have diverse historical and cultural backgrounds, with hundreds of languages and scripts in use. This diversity underscores the need for strengthening people-to-people exchanges and cultural interactions to promote mutual understanding and foster mutual learning between civilizations.

On December 3, 2023, the inaugural Liangzhu Forum was held in Hangzhou, China. President Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory letter to the forum, in which he emphasized that mutual respect, solidarity, and harmonious coexistence are the right path for the development of human civilization. He expressed hope that all parties would fully utilize the Liangzhu Forum as a platform to deepen civilizational dialogue with BRI

partner countries, implement the Global Civilization Initiative, enhance cultural exchanges, and promote the values of equality, mutual learning, dialogue, and inclusiveness. Doing so will encourage different civilizations to coexist harmoniously and achieve mutual success while fostering friendship and understanding among the peoples of various nations.

### **Fact Box: Liangzhu Forum**

On October 18, 2023, during his keynote speech at the 3rd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, President Xi Jinping announced that China would host the Liangzhu Forum to deepen civilizational dialogue with Belt and Road partner countries.

“The Liangzhu Site is a sacred place that proves the 5,000-year history of Chinese civilization,” stated significantly President Xi Jinping, then Secretary of the Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee, in July 2003.

In 2016, President Xi also gave important instructions regarding the application for the Liangzhu Ancient City to be recognized as a World Heritage Site. On July 6, 2019, the Liangzhu Ancient City was successfully inscribed on the World Heritage List.

The inaugural Liangzhu Forum, co-hosted by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Zhejiang Provincial Government, took place in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, on December 3, 2023. Themed "Implementing the Global Civilization Initiative, Promoting Civilizational Exchanges and Mutual Learning," the forum brought together more than 300 guests from China and abroad.

Over the past year, in the spirit of promoting “coexistence in harmony and facilitate progress in one another” and “forging friendship and closer bonds with other peoples,” a series of cultural exchange events were held as outcomes of the 3rd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. These events included the Belt and Road Media Cooperation Forum, the Belt and Road Publishing Cooperation Forum for BRI Partner Countries, the 11th Silk Road International Film Festival, the 9th China-Mongolia-Russia Tea Road City Cooperation Conference, and the 2024 Belt and Road Youth Creativity and Heritage Forum. In June, the Silk Road Tourism City Alliance held the “Silk Road Dialogue” in Istanbul, Turkey, marking the first time the alliance hosted an event outside of China. By the end of June, 63 renowned tourist cities from 28 countries had joined the coalition.

The convenience brought by connectivity and the enthusiasm generated through cultural exchanges have made two-way tourism along the Belt and Road increasingly popular. In May, China’s southwestern Guizhou Province launched its first cross-border tourism train, allowing over 200 tourists to travel directly from Guiyang to Vientiane,

Laos, via the China-Laos Railway. Meanwhile, in neighboring Yunnan Province, a large number of Vietnamese tourists have been entering China by high-speed trains. By mid-August, more than 700 Vietnamese tour groups, with over 12,000 visitors, had entered China through the Hekou border, setting a new record. At the Horgos port of entry, due to it being the “Kazakhstan Tourism Year” in China and the signing of a mutual visa exemption agreement between China and Kazakhstan, the enthusiasm for tourism in the public surged. As of late August 2024, the number of people crossing the Horgos border had reached 810,000, an increase of 118% year-on-year.

### **Fact Box: International Tourism Alliance of Silk Road Cities**

The International Tourism Alliance of Silk Road Cities was established in September 2023, jointly initiated by the China Cultural and Tourism Exchange Center of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, along with well-known domestic and international tourist cities. Guided by the spirit of the Silk Road and based on the principles of consultation, collaboration, and shared benefits, the alliance aims to establish a long-term cooperation mechanism for tourism exchange and collaboration among cities, including those along the Silk Road. The alliance plans to promote the sustainable development of tourism in its member cities through a series of thematic activities, such as international forums, joint promotional efforts, and industry matchmaking. As of June 2024, sixty-three renowned tourist cities from 28 countries, including China and others across Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas, have joined the alliance.

To further facilitate foreign nationals’ travel to China, in 2024, the Chinese government introduced a 72-hour or 144-hour visa-free transit policy for citizens of certain countries, including over 20 BRI partner countries. This policy has significantly increased the number of tourists visiting China. On the other hand, BRI countries are also working to attract more Chinese tourists. In September, Sherif Fathy, Egypt’s Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, stated that Egypt currently attracts about 200,000 Chinese tourists annually and will take further steps to increase this number, promoting bilateral tourism cooperation. According to the China-Africa Belt and Road Cooperation Development Report, China has signed bilateral tourism cooperation agreements with 31 African countries and designated 34 African nations as approved destinations for Chinese tour groups. With these reciprocal efforts, tourism cooperation between China and Belt and Road partner countries is reaching new heights.



## Chapter Two

# The Eight Major Steps Create New Opportunities for High-Quality BRI Cooperation

As the world undergoes profound changes unseen in a century, with global political, economic, and social environments evolving rapidly and global economic governance being restructured, the introduction and implementation of the Eight Initiatives align with the common pursuit of development, growth, and shared prosperity among Belt and Road partner countries. These initiatives bring new historical opportunities for the high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In its second decade, the BRI is expected to achieve higher levels of cooperation, greater investment returns, improved quality of supply, and enhanced development resilience. The BRI has the potential to become a cornerstone for building an open world economy, a driving force for collective development, and an accelerator for global modernization.

### 2.1 Promoting Development on a Broader Scale: A Ballast for Building an Open World Economy

In today's world, the trend of "anti-globalization" is rising, with unilateralism, trade protectionism, and hegemonism gaining ground. Certain countries have taken unilateral, aggressive actions, using the banner of "economic security" to promote "decoupling" and "de-risking," erecting unreasonable barriers and standards, attempting to disrupt international production and supply chains, and creating exclusive trade blocs and cooperation frameworks. These actions have intensified instability within the global financial and monetary systems, undermined the multilateral trading system, and increased financial risks. As a result, international trade and investment cooperation have become more difficult, and the global trade landscape is showing signs of fragmentation.

In the face of these challenges, the international community urgently needs a ballast to support an open world economy.

#### —BRI Cooperation Embodies an Inherent Spirit of Openness, Aligned with the Global Trend of Inclusive Economic Globalization

As the saying goes, "Those who share the same vision will not be divided by mountains or seas." The BRI started with the goal of improving connectivity, and over the past decade, it has grown from nothing to a comprehensive network, achieving historic development. Today, more than three-quarters of the world's countries and major international organizations have joined the circle of friends of the BRI co-

operation. Both in theory and practice, the BRI carries an inherent spirit of openness.

The BRI cooperation has consistently upheld the Silk Road spirit of peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning, and mutual benefit. It follows the principles of consultation, collaboration, and shared benefits, promoting cooperation through openness and ensuring mutual success through joint efforts. The BRI has actively pursued a path of cooperation that avoids protectionism, exclusive arrangements, or high barriers. Despite the rising tide of anti-globalization in today's world, the broader trend of inclusive economic globalization remains unchanged. Most countries continue to prioritize development, work to boost their economies, and safeguard global supply chains. Peace, development, cooperation, and win-win outcomes remain the shared aspirations of the international community. As both a participant and beneficiary of economic globalization, China is committed to promoting high-level openness and maintaining the direction of economic globalization. China stands firmly in favor of free trade and genuine multilateralism, working to build an open world economy. Within the framework of the BRI, the prospects for countries to expand openness and strengthen cooperation are broad and promising.

### **—The BRI Cooperation Effectively Connects with the Global Economy Across Multiple Levels and Sectors**

Driven by the Eight Major Steps, the BRI enhances “soft connectivity” in terms of regulatory standards, aligning with international high-standard trade and economic rules, and actively promoting high-level openness in cross-border services, trade, and investment. It encourages deeper participation from more countries and regions, forming a collective force for development through bilateral, multilateral, and third-party market cooperation.

At regional and multilateral levels, the BRI cooperation aligns effectively with global frameworks such as the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the ASEAN Connectivity Master Plan 2025, the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, the African Union's Agenda 2063, and the European Union's Eurasian Connectivity Strategy, supporting regional integration and contributing to global development.

At the bilateral level, the BRI aligns with numerous national strategies, such as Russia's Eurasian Economic Union, Kazakhstan's “Bright Road” new economic policy, Turkmenistan's “Revival of the Great Silk Road” strategy, Mongolia's “Development Road” initiative, Indonesia's “Global Maritime Fulcrum” concept, the Philippines' “Build, Build, Build” program, Vietnam's “Two Corridors and One Belt” initiative, South Africa's “Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan,” Egypt's Suez Canal Corridor Development Project, and Saudi Arabia's “Vision 2030.” These alignments strongly support the economic and social development processes of the BRI partner countries.

## 2.2 Expanding Growth in Broader Sectors as an Engine for Joint Development

The global economic recovery remains weak, with external economic challenges persisting. The delayed effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the spillover impacts of geopolitical conflicts have placed some countries in economic hardship. In contrast, others face crises of poverty and potential regression in poverty alleviation. Many nations now urgently require new, sustainable drivers of growth.

### —Cultivating New Growth Points through New-Quality Productivity

The BRI aligns with the general trends of global economic, technological, industrial, and social development, actively engaging in cooperation in emerging fields such as health, green development, innovation, and the digital economy to foster new growth points for collaboration. In the face of the ongoing technological revolution, China is developing new types of productivity that suit local conditions. This approach aims to support partner countries in jointly pursuing innovation-driven growth. The initiative enhances innovation in areas such as the digital economy, artificial intelligence, new energy, and new materials. It promotes the full-scale, all-encompassing, and entire value-chain transformation of traditional manufacturing through modern digital technologies, the internet, and artificial intelligence. By nurturing the development of emerging and future industries, the BRI drives the deep transformation and upgrading of traditional industries. It accelerates the integration of digital technology with the real economy. It also fosters the deep coupling of digital technology and data elements, accelerates the creation of new business models and industries in the digital space, shares technological innovation achievements, deepens cooperation in digital governance, and establishes new hubs for science and technology innovation cooperation along the Belt and Road.

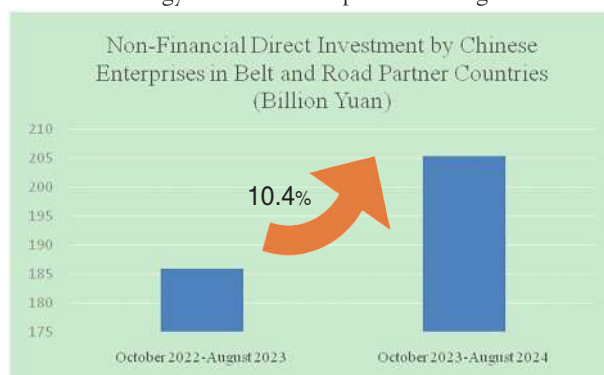


Figure 4: Growth in Non-Financial Direct Investment by Chinese Enterprises in Belt and Road Partner Countries Since the Introduction of the Eight Initiatives (Source: Ministry of Commerce)

## **—BRI Unleashes Potential in Partner Countries, Supporting Long-Term Stable Growth**

The BRI plays a key role in unlocking the existing potential of partner countries by effectively mobilizing various productive resources and turning natural advantages into tangible economic gains. The World Bank predicts that the BRI could reduce transportation time along economic corridors and international routes by nearly one-eighth, potentially boosting global trade by more than 6%. Data from Thailand's Ministry of Rail Transport indicates that once the China-Laos-Thailand Railway is fully operational, freight transportation costs are expected to decrease by 30% to 50% within three to five years. Such cost reductions will lead to more effective natural resource development, more efficient use of human resources, faster economic activity, and improved exchange of production outcomes.

Driven by domestic and international market demand, the BRI is transitioning from its initial “pillar and beam” phase to one of steady development. Currently, internal trade among BRI partner countries accounts for over 30% of total trade, with intermediate goods comprising more than 60%, indicating the formation of closer industrial and supply chain relationships. On this foundation, the initiative will provide strong support for the long-term, stable growth of partner countries as long as the various BRI initiatives continue to be steadily implemented and economic stability within the BRI framework is maintained.

## **2.3 Deepen Shared Prosperity to Accelerate Global Modernization**

Due to the current global political and economic landscape, some countries lack the internal momentum needed for economic development and transformation, leading to issues such as political polarization, growing income inequality, social divisions, and a rise in populism. Developing countries face the pressing challenge of achieving modernization, while developed countries are confronted with maintaining their modernization achievements and sustaining their level of economic and social modernization.

China is now advancing its goal of national rejuvenation through the Chinese path to modernization. It is not a modernization that China seeks to achieve in isolation, but rather one that aims for joint modernization with other developing countries and the world at large. The ultimate goal of China's modernization is to improve the lives of its 1.4 billion people. For BRI partner countries, this represents access to a vast market and unprecedented cooperation opportunities, injecting powerful momentum into global modernization efforts.

## **—Promoting Peaceful Modernization Through High-Quality BRI Cooperation**

President Xi Jinping has emphasized that the BRI adheres to the principles of con-

sultation, collaboration, and shared benefits. It is not a unilateral endeavor but a shared responsibility where all parties benefit equally. Consultation promotes multilateralism, encouraging collective decision-making that takes into account the interests and concerns of all involved parties, incorporating wisdom and creativity from all sides. Over the past decade, the BRI countries have embraced dialogue over confrontation and cooperation over conflict, resolving issues through diplomacy rather than violence and rejecting hegemonic and coercive thinking. Rather than a solo performance, the BRI countries have collectively played a symphony of cooperation. In the future, the BRI will continue to strengthen cooperation platforms and mechanisms, deepen dialogue and consultation across various sectors, and make “people-to-people connectivity” a fundamental pillar of high-quality Belt and Road development. The peaceful approach to achieving global modernization will continue to be widely supported and welcomed by countries around the world.

### **—Promoting Modernization for Shared Prosperity Through High-Quality BRI Cooperation**

The BRI’s original aspirations are to achieve joint development for partner countries, improving the lives of their people. Without shared growth and prosperity, true global peace and stability cannot be achieved, and the results of global modernization will be difficult to sustain. In the face of widening global gaps between the Global North and South, increasing challenges for developing countries to catch up, and worsening income inequality within nations, the BRI offers a realistic path to modernization for developing nations. The BRI reflects China’s deep understanding and unique perspective on modernization, encompassing not only material improvements but also comprehensive social progress. It adheres to a people-centered approach to development, focusing on poverty alleviation, job creation, and improving livelihoods, ensuring that the benefits of the BRI reach all people and contribute to the local economy and society. Projects that are “small yet smart”—those that directly improve the well-being of local populations—help reduce income inequality, bridge the North-South divide, and align with the sincere aspirations of people worldwide for a better life. These projects form a key foundation of support and opportunity for the high-quality development of the BRI cooperation.

## Chapter Three

# Advancing the Eight Major Steps and Embarking on a New Journey for High-Quality BRI Cooperation

The Eight Major Steps encompass various areas, such as infrastructure connectivity, development model transformation, innovation in cooperation mechanisms, and international exchanges and training. They are a concentrated reflection of the high-quality practices and achievements of the BRI cooperation over the years and serve as a roadmap and timetable for the next phase of higher-quality and more advanced development. In order to push forward the high-quality implementation of the Eight Major Steps, we must continue to follow the guiding principles of consultation, collaboration, and shared benefits; openness, green development, and integrity; and a focus on high standards, improving livelihoods, and sustainability. Doing so will require consolidating practical cooperation, fostering innovation-driven growth, strengthening risk management, and improving systems and mechanisms to promote “hard connectivity,” “soft connectivity,” and “people-to-people connectivity” between nations. Together, we can create a more open, inclusive, peaceful, and mutually beneficial future.

### 3.1 Strengthening the Foundations of Cooperation to Build a More Resilient Connectivity Network

Looking ahead to the Eight Major Steps, BRI partner countries, regions, and international organizations must continue to enhance strategic alignment, deepen practical cooperation, and refine the integrated land-sea-air-space connectivity network to build a more resilient and multidimensional connectivity system. At the same time, it is essential to translate policy consensus into tangible outcomes that benefit people’s livelihoods. Such an endeavor requires identifying priority areas for cooperation, detailing specific action plans, and drafting a list of key cooperation projects to establish a virtuous cycle of interaction.

#### —Coordinating the Development of Flagship Projects for Smoother and More Efficient Connectivity

Infrastructure connectivity remains central to the Eight Major Steps. Advancing it requires not only optimizing existing resources but also expanding new development opportunities. A coordinated effort is needed to develop flagship projects that will establish an integrated, intelligent, and modern multidimensional connectivity network. Data

from Pakistan<sup>①</sup> indicates that by 2030, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is expected to boost Pakistan's economic growth by 2.5 percentage points and create 2.3 million jobs. According to estimates from Uzbekistan,<sup>②</sup> the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan (CKU) Railway, once completed, will handle 15 million tons of freight annually and reduce transportation times by seven days. Peru's Ministry of Agricultural Development and Irrigation predicts that once the Chancay Port is operational, the time for Peruvian agricultural products to reach Asia will decrease from 28 days to 16 days, with shipping costs expected to drop by 30%, significantly expanding agricultural trade.<sup>③</sup> Additionally, the Tanzania-Zambia Railway Authority estimates that following the full implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding on Revitalizing the Tanzania-Zambia Railway signed by China, Tanzania, and Zambia, the railway's capacity will increase significantly, with annual freight volume rising from the current 500,000 tons to approximately 2 million tons.<sup>④</sup> The advancement of these flagship projects will not only generate growth but also drive development and yield long-term economic and social benefits.

### **—Enhancing the Quality of “Small Yet Smart” Projects to Deepen Strategic Alignment and Win-Win Cooperation**

The BRI is centered on improving people's well-being. Projects that are “small yet smart” and directly impact regional livelihoods and overall welfare are key priorities under the Eight Major Steps. According to World Bank estimates,<sup>⑤</sup> by 2030, the BRI could lift 7.6 million people out of extreme poverty and 32 million people out of moderate poverty in BRI participant countries.

As the BRI increasingly focuses on areas such as healthcare, agricultural production, food security, water resource cooperation, clean energy, ecological protection, and education and training, a series of “small yet smart” demonstration projects—characterized by low investment, quick returns, and strong economic, social, and environmental benefits—is expected to accelerate in formation. These projects will generate more grassroots-level, people-centered cooperation outcomes. Take vocational education, for example. During the launch ceremony of the track construction for Malaysia's East Coast Rail Link at the end of 2023, a flagship project of high-quality BRI cooperation

① <https://www.radio.gov.pk/25-11-2020/cpec-is-win-win-project-of-china-pakistan-economic-cooperation-shibli>

② Congratulatory Message by Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the Signing of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway Project Trilateral Government Agreement on June 6, 2024 [https://uza.uz/en/posts/presidents-message-to-the-participants-in-the-signing-ceremony-of-the-agreement-on-the-construction-of-the-china-kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan-railway\\_605632](https://uza.uz/en/posts/presidents-message-to-the-participants-in-the-signing-ceremony-of-the-agreement-on-the-construction-of-the-china-kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan-railway_605632)

③ <https://agraria.pe/noticias/peru-se-prepara-a-exportar-fruta-congelada-a-china-36385>

④ <https://www.tazarasite.com/successful-signing-mou-concession-tazara>

⑤ The World Bank's June 2019 report, *Belt and Road Economics: Opportunities and Risks of Transport Corridors*.

between China and Malaysia, the China-Malaysia Railway Modern Craftsman Academy, jointly established by Chinese and Malaysian universities, was inaugurated. By the end of 2026, the academy is expected to enroll 50 students in degree programs, offer vocational skills training to 100 participants, and cultivate a core teaching staff of 60.<sup>①</sup> In the future, vocational education projects linked to major flagship projects like this will have significant room for expansion. The individuals trained through such programs will not only meet the needs of specific projects but will also contribute to the long-term development of the local workforce in partner countries.

### **3.2 Expanding Innovation and Unlocking Potential in New Areas of Cooperation**

Looking ahead, the Eight Major Steps aim to foster the development of new productivity by focusing on green and digital growth while further expanding cooperation in emerging fields. In addition, they will continue to promote institutional openness, leveraging the advantages of new cooperation models and exploring the potential for trilateral and multilateral market cooperation.

#### **—Creating New Hubs for Innovation Cooperation and Advancing New-Quality Productivity**

Innovation serves as the core driving force behind the Eight Major Steps. Since the launch of the Belt and Road Science, Technology, and Innovation Action Plan in 2017, joint laboratories have become a crucial means of promoting technological innovation and cooperation. To date, China has established 53 Belt and Road joint laboratories with BRI partner countries, spanning key sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, information technology, new energy, and basic research. Over the next five years, China aims to expand this network to 100 joint laboratories,<sup>②</sup> further empowering industrial and technological advancements in partner countries and enhancing their capacity for innovative development.

Building the Digital Silk Road is a key pathway to advancing innovation cooperation under the Eight Major Steps. As the systematic and multidimensional framework of the “six corridors, six routes, multiple countries, multiple ports” becomes more refined, upgrading traditional infrastructure—such as ports, railways, highways, airports, energy, and water resources—through digital transformation will enhance the operational efficiency of economic corridors and international routes. This digital upgrade involves utilizing technologies like big data, cloud computing, the Internet of Things, and artificial intelligence for intelligent management and operation. For example, in the case of digi-

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① China-Malaysia Universities Jointly Establish Railway Craftsman Academy to Support Talent Development for the East Coast Rail Link

<https://www.gx.chinanews.com.cn/kjwt/2023-12-12/detail-ihcvvqfu6721482.shtml>

② <https://www.ceweekly.cn/cewsel/2024/0913/455206.html>



tal logistics cooperation between Vietnam and China, Nguyen Xuan Hung, Vice President of the Hanoi Logistics Association, pointed out that in recent years, Vietnamese and Chinese companies have mainly cooperated in the warehousing and distribution stages of digital logistics. However, in the cross-border logistics sector, Vietnamese and Chinese companies are unable to fully track the stages of cargo in real time after it enters the destination country. There remains significant potential for further development in cross-border logistics digital cooperation.

### **—Unlocking Practical Cooperation Potential and Building Open Platforms Together**

Openness is a key pillar of the Eight Major Steps. In order to advance these initiatives, efforts must focus on enhancing cooperation efficiency by deepening alignment in regulations, standards, and oversight among countries. Various forms of collaboration—such as public-private partnerships (PPP), bilateral cooperation, third-party market cooperation, and multilateral cooperation—should be encouraged, allowing more countries, businesses, and institutions to participate deeply and jointly in promoting the development of an open world economy.

Cross-border e-commerce, as a frontier of open cooperation, is strongly driving innovation in global trade. From the broader perspective of Belt and Road cooperation, this sector can effectively leverage the advantages of connectivity, industrial development, and an open economy. Promoting international cooperation in green finance will also be a key focus for achieving high-level openness within the Eight Initiatives. According to the latest United Nations estimates,<sup>①</sup> the annual financing gap for developing countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 ranges between \$2.5 trillion and \$4 trillion. Establishing green financial systems in developing countries and emerging economies is crucial. The Capacity-building Alliance of Sustainable Investment (CASI), co-founded by China and multiple institutions, was officially launched at the end of 2023. It is expected to provide sustainable finance capacity-building services to 100,000 participants from developing countries by 2030.<sup>②</sup>

### **3.3 Mitigating Risks and Laying a Solid Foundation for Long-Term Stability**

Looking ahead, the successful implementation of the Eight Major Steps will require deepening solidarity and cooperation to jointly address external risks and build stronger internal consensus among BRI partner countries. At the same time, it is crucial to enhance the risk awareness of enterprises, guided by the principles of “enterprise-led, market-driven, government-guided, and internationally rules-based.” Efforts must con-

① 2024 Financing for Sustainable Development Report, P16  
<https://sdg.iisd.org/news/annual-sdg-financing-gaps-measured-in-trillions-fsdr-2024/>

② [https://www.financialnews.com.cn/cj/sc/202312/t20231207\\_283686.html](https://www.financialnews.com.cn/cj/sc/202312/t20231207_283686.html)

tinue to optimize the business environment along the Clean Silk Road and improve security measures for both projects and personnel.

### —Cooperating to Address External Risks and Challenges

The essence of the Eight Major Steps lies in win-win cooperation. In the context of major changes unseen in a century, strengthening unity and resilience, along with collaborative development efforts, is fundamental to advancing the implementation of the steps. In addition to the political and economic risks mentioned in Chapter Two, the BRI must also remain vigilant against systemic negative propaganda promoted by certain countries. The propaganda includes false narratives that label the BRI as a “debt trap,” “neo-colonialism,” or a form of “systemic export,” which aims to undermine and tarnish the initiative’s image. Such negative campaigns can erode existing achievements, hinder project progress, and create a toxic political and social atmosphere in partner countries. A report published in April 2023 by Bruegel, a European think tank, indicated that, while the BRI’s international image is largely positive, it is not immune to negative noise, much of which is driven by specific interest groups. In response to these challenges, BRI partner countries should collaborate in addressing external risks, particularly in countering smear campaigns against the BRI. Strengthening internal consensus and delivering timely, effective responses to these attacks is essential. As Mladen Ivanić, former President of Bosnia and Herzegovina, pointed out, there are many misconceptions in Western countries about the true nature of the BRI, and it is necessary to correct and eliminate these biases.<sup>①</sup>

### —Strengthening Risk Management for Key Stakeholders

Key stakeholders play a crucial role in implementing the Eight Major Steps. As part of advancing the initiatives, it is essential to encourage these stakeholders to enhance their awareness of safety and incorporate political, economic, and cultural risks into their project planning. Analysis shows that international Belt and Road infrastructure projects are increasingly moving up the value chain, with the “investment, construction, and operation integration” model being explored. This shift places new demands on corporate management and risk control capabilities, requiring that projects meet legal and compliance standards, demonstrate financial reliability, ensure environmental sustainability, and provide social benefits. In practice, large enterprises, particularly in the energy sector, have already recognized that adhering to international market rules

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① Speech by Mladen Ivanić, Former President of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Member of the Board of Directors of the Nizami Ganjavi International Center, at the Think Tank Exchange Forum of the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, October 18, 2023.  
[https://www.brsn.net/spjj/gjfi/detail/20231214/19435555\\_%E5%A7%86%E6%8B%89%E7%99%BB%C2%B7%E4%BC%8A%E4%B8%87%E5%B0%BC%E5%A5%87.html](https://www.brsn.net/spjj/gjfi/detail/20231214/19435555_%E5%A7%86%E6%8B%89%E7%99%BB%C2%B7%E4%BC%8A%E4%B8%87%E5%B0%BC%E5%A5%87.html)

and local laws in project decision-making and operations is critical to ensuring the long-term sustainability of Belt and Road cooperation projects.<sup>①</sup>

### **3.4 Improving Cooperation Mechanisms to Ensure the Effective Implementation of the Eight Major Steps**

Improving cooperation mechanisms is essential to ensuring the successful implementation of the Eight Major Steps. Advancing these initiatives requires continued efforts to strengthen multidimensional connectivity mechanisms, deepen trade and investment cooperation mechanisms, solidify people-to-people connectivity mechanisms, refine green development mechanisms, and improve consultation and coordination mechanisms.

Strengthening multidimensional connectivity mechanisms involves further integrating transportation, energy, and information networks with industrial development. Economic corridors, built on existing foundations, should lead the way, supported by major transportation routes and digital highways, with railways, highways, airports, ports, and pipelines serving as the backbone. The aim is to enhance the quality and efficiency of these systems.

Deepening trade and investment cooperation mechanisms means exploring ways to deepen free trade zone development and optimize investment environments, fostering closer ties within industrial and supply chains.

Solidifying people-to-people connectivity mechanisms focuses on giving more attention to the “soft power” of the Belt and Road Initiative by promoting cultural, tourism, education, and grassroots interactions, creating a comprehensive framework for people-to-people exchanges along the BRI.

Refining green development mechanisms entails reinforcing the foundations of green mechanisms, supporting green investment and financing projects, and enhancing international cooperation on natural disaster prevention and emergency management to ensure that the BRI maintains its focus on sustainability.

Improving consultation and coordination mechanisms requires accelerating the establishment and enhancement of cooperation coordination systems for the BRI, which involves strengthening the functionality of existing BRI platforms, continuously assessing cooperation results, and promptly addressing challenges that arise during collaboration.

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① Speech by Yu Guo, Executive Director of the Economics and Technology Research Institute of China National Petroleum Corporation, at the Plenary Session of the Belt and Road International Think Tank Cooperation Committee, October 17, 2023.

[https://www.brsn.net/spjj/gjfr/detail/20231221/19435622\\_%E4%BD%99%E5%9B%BD.html](https://www.brsn.net/spjj/gjfr/detail/20231221/19435622_%E4%BD%99%E5%9B%BD.html)

## Conclusion

In his speech at the opening ceremony of the 3rd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasized that the original aspiration of the BRI is to draw inspiration from the ancient Silk Road, with connectivity at its core. The aim is to strengthen policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and closer people-to-people ties with all countries. BRI will inject new momentum into global economic growth, create new opportunities for global development, and establish a new platform for international economic cooperation. The Eight Major Steps are a concrete manifestation of China's commitment to supporting high-quality Belt and Road cooperation in this new phase, reflecting the world's aspirations for peace, development, and cultural exchange.

The BRI cooperation originated in China, but its fruits and opportunities belong to the world. Over the past year, the significant achievements of the Eight Major Steps have laid a solid foundation for the second decade of the BRI. As they look ahead, partner countries are expected to continue working together to uphold the Silk Road spirit of “peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning, and mutual benefit.” By deepening international cooperation under the BRI and further advancing the Eight Major Steps, we can foster higher-quality and more advanced development, promote the modernization of countries worldwide, and jointly contribute to building a community with a shared future for humanity!

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