



## The “Belt and Road” Initiative and Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia

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### Abstract

*Since China's proposal of the “Belt and Road” initiative in 2013, the relationship between China and Southeast Asia has continued to develop. This achievement is inseparable from a large number of overseas Chinese living in Southeast Asia. As an indispensable and unique force to promote the construction of the “Belt and Road”, the Southeast Asians Chinese have played an irreplaceable role: such as support of Chinese culture spreading, building confidence and disambiguation among countries, and economic and trade cooperation. The problems and challenges facing Chinese culture in Southeast Asia are not only related to the development of Chinese society in Southeast Asia but also the current development of Chinese native culture. To overcome the problems and challenges encountered in the process of inheriting Chinese culture in Southeast Asia, we must clearly understand the status of overseas Chinese and the role that overseas Chinese can play to maximize their role and influence as carriers and bridges.*

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### Background

Since China's proposal of the “Belt and Road” initiative in 2013, the relationship between China and Southeast Asia has continued to develop. 2014 is the year of beginning China-ASEAN cultural exchange. 2015 is the first year of China’s “Belt and Road” initiative. In 2016, China-ASEAN economic cooperation was further deepened. 2017 was designated as the China-ASEAN Tourism Cooperation Year. The progress made by China and Southeast Asia in the political, economic, social, and cultural areas of the “Belt and Road” construction has made Southeast Asia as a pioneer in China's “Belt and Road” construction (Zhang & Weiwei, 2018).

#### *Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and the “Belt and Road”*

This achievement is inseparable from a large number of overseas Chinese living in Southeast Asia. As an indispensable and unique force to promote the construction of the “Belt and Road”, the Southeast Asians Chinese have played an irreplaceable role: such as support of Chinese culture spreading, building confidence and disambiguation among countries, and economic and trade cooperation (Yuanyuan & Mengling, 2018). The following sections exposition four aspects of the social performance of Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, namely the inheritance of Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia culture, the new characteristics of Chinese enterprise development, and the analysis of the participation of the Chinese community and Chinese media. The construction of the “Belt and Road” initiative has revealed

some new trends and characteristics of the times of the overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia in recent years (Zhang & Weiwei, 2018).

### *Indonesia*

With the new development of China-Indonesia relations, overseas Chinese in Indonesia actively seize the opportunities of the "Belt and Road" construction and promote the sound development of China-Indonesia relations.

In 2015, overseas Chinese in Indonesia explored opportunities offered by China-Indonesia cooperation through various activities. For example, on January 28, 2016, the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, the Chinese Embassy in Indonesia, the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the National Science and Technology Commission of Indonesia, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, and the Indonesian Economic Development Association jointly held a "One Income, Indonesian Revenue" meetings, and seminars.

These seminars have discussed investment opportunities in the "Belt and Road" initiative. Zhang Jinxiong, deputy chairman of the Chinese Indonesian Chamber of Commerce said, "It needs to be actively played that the role of overseas Chinese businessmen in Indonesia, because about 70% of Indonesia's private economy is Chinese companies. The private company economy is a very dynamic part. Overseas Chinese businessmen are deeply rooted in Indonesia and have become the mainstream of society." He also said that to understand the investment policies of Indonesian companies, Chinese companies have invested a lot in Indonesia and are familiar with the national conditions and Indonesian Chinese culture. Under the general trend of reform and opening up, he has built a bridge for friendly cooperation between China and Indonesia and will continue to play the role of bridge. China and Indonesia will develop strategic links in the future (Xiaoqian, 2016).

### *Malaysia*

Under the "Belt and Road" initiative, Wang Xiaoping, vice president of the China Youth Exchange Association and the China Youth Overseas Exchange Association, has established a platform for cooperation and exchange between the Malaysian Chinese community and Chinese businessmen. He said China Overseas Exchanges Association will lead more overseas Chinese companies to Malaysia. Join the country in construction and investment along the "Belt and Road" initiative.

In recent years, China-Malaysia economic and trade relations have also made significant progress. In 2017, bilateral trade volume reached 96 billion U.S. dollars, and it is expected to exceed 100 billion U.S. dollars by 2018. China has become Malaysia's largest trading partner for nine consecutive years and is currently the largest general contractor in Malaysia's engineering sector. Malaysia is the first country to respond to China's "Belt and Road" initiative. Over the past five years, several important cooperation projects have been promoted between the two countries. Malaysia has become one of the countries that have gained the most from the "Belt and Road" initiative. Land, aviation, and network forms rapidly that promoted connectivity. Some highlights of the cooperation have attracted people's attention: such as the construction of Malacca Port in Malacca, the construction of Malaysia's East Coast Railway and the "high-speed railway" project.

Chinese ethnicity are the second largest ethnic group in Malaysia. China's political parties and trade unions are very active, China's economy continues to develop, and China's cultural activities are also positive. When promoting China's "Belt and Road" initiative, Chinese Malaysians living on the "Maritime Silk Road" should play an active role in promoting the development of various social and cultural resources.

## *Singapore*

Since China's proposal of the "Belt and Road" initiative in Southeast Asian countries, Singapore's geographical location and the financial status of global financial centers have made Singapore a booster for this initiative. Economic transformation and upgrading Singapore have reason to participate in the "Belt and Road" initiative. However, Singaporean society has two different views on the "Belt and Road" initiative. One thing they should be actively involved in the initiative, and the other side skeptical of the initiative. Therefore, to promote the construction of the "Belt and Road" initiative, China needs to make full use of Singapore's unique advantages and strengthen their understanding of the "Belt and Road" initiative. Under the new opportunities, China and Singapore should work together to achieve common development and mutual benefit and win-win results (Jiawen, C, 2018).

Singapore has long been the "Belt and Road" initiative supporter and it is very active. According to data from China's Ministry of Commerce, nearly half of China's "Belt and Road" investments are in Singapore. Singapore's investment in China also accounts for 85% of the total investment of the "Belt and Road" countries in China. We are currently building four platforms to help develop the "Belt and Road" initiative.

It is not only necessary to rely on Chinese businessmen to promote economic and trade cooperation, but also necessary to spread Chinese culture, in doing so profoundly affect the culture of local Chinese people, and implement the "Belt and Road" initiative. At the same time, China must rely on local Chinese media to form culture and identity.

## *Thailand*

Among overseas Chinese, Thai Chinese use the platform of the Thai-Chinese Chamber of Commerce, which the Thai government attaches great importance to, to discuss exchanges and cooperation between China and Thailand. Overseas Chinese in Thailand play the role of bridge, coordinate China-Thailand relations, and promote cooperation in the China-Thailand railway project.

Overseas Chinese lives in Thailand are mainly to continue to complete two main tasks. First, by actively attracting the Chinese capital of Thailand to participate in major projects in China's domestic construction and the "Belt and Road" construction, a good investment environment will be created. In recent years, China's investment in Thailand's infrastructure has been increasing, especially the construction of the China-Thailand railway, which is not only conducive to the overall development of the Pan-Asia Railway (Kunming-Singapore Railway), but also the construction of Southwest China and regional transportation networks in Southeast Asia (Yingying, 2018). The formation of this transportation network will promote the economic development of the southwestern region and solve the employment problem along the railway (Chen, 2018). This is very important for the development of East Asia. The economic and trade cooperation between Southwest China and China in Thailand has a certain foundation. In the future, it is necessary to attract Thai Chinese businessmen to continue to increase their ability to attract investment and increase investment in the Southwest.

The next is to cultivate human resources who are familiar with the national conditions and languages of the two countries and actively establish a foundation for cooperation. First, it can be achieved by expanding the scale and channels of Thai students' enrollment. It also plays a role in public diplomacy while promoting education in China. Second, encourage exchanges and learning between scholars and students of the two countries. Huaqiao University in China attaches great importance to the admission of Southeast Asian students and has established Confucius Institutes and China Television in cooperation with Thai Agricultural University and Thai Thammasat University. After the "Thai Government Officials China Project" was

launched, students from various Thai provinces were recruited to study in China. Also, it established the Thai Institute to conduct research on China and special research with Thailand, the National Research Council of Thailand, and Thailand's Thai-Developed Relationships-in cooperation with the China Cultural and Economic Association "China-Thailand Strategy Seminar"-chaired. The conference has been held annually in China and Thailand since 2012. Similar to university practice and experience, it can play an active role in promoting the Belt and Road strategy.

### *Laos*

Laos has played an intermediary role in China-Laos relations. Laos learned that the development of the cooperative economy between China and Laos has promoted the peaceful development of China and Laos. The active role of Laotian overseas Chinese in the development of China-Laos relations will play a role in the construction of the "belt and road" initiative and will have a greater impact and role.

The first is the role of promotions. As practitioners and beneficiaries of China-Laos relations, the vast number of overseas Chinese in Laos personally understand the friendly and cooperative relations between China and Laos and the spirit and essence of China's opening-up policy. I understand that their development is an image. Explain that in daily contact with people from all walks of life in Laos, explaining the "Belt and Road" initiative in their language helps Laos understand and accept it. Also, China and Laos provided the "China-Laos Cooperation Forum", a platform for full exchanges. The overseas Chinese businessmen, enterprises, and institutions in Laos discussed, exchanged and promoted practical cooperation in the atmosphere created by the forum.

Second, the role of bridges. In terms of China's comprehensive understanding of Laos, strategies and policies, overseas China, Laos take full advantage of Laos with Chinese and network resources, and the interconnected strategic China "Zhiquan District" actively participates in Laos' integration. In 2015, the Lao Chinese business elite and the business elite private sector promoted and strengthened the Lao People's Republic by effectively utilizing Laos' overseas living, living, working and network advantages. It was established to integrate into corporate groups. Cooperation, communication and common development between companies between government, business, and the private sector (Yun, 2018). In February 2018, the Lao China Chamber of Commerce cooperated with the China Economic Information Bureau of Xinhua News Agency to establish an "Integrated Information Service Platform". The Lao Chinese community plays a multi-channel role in the political and business community of Laos, relying on the national level of the "Belt and Road" constitution. Information service platform-"New Silk Road" information platform. Provide one-stop integrated services for Lao Chinese institutions and companies and established institutions and companies going to China.

### *Myanmar*

Although the power of Myanmar's overseas Chinese is relatively limited, it can still play a unique role in China's "Belt and Road" construction.

Economically, China has strong economic strength in Myanmar, and China has invested valuable resources in Myanmar. Chinese companies' overseas expansion strategies can make effective use of Chinese business networks. Through them, Chinese companies can obtain effective information and help. To choose projects with stable expected returns and low investment risks, reduce economic recession caused by lack of experience and overcoming "cultural barriers" in cross-border projects.

## *Cambodia*

After the Cambodian election in 2018, the new government paid attention to economic development, and the national economy maintained a rapid growth rate. The Cambodian government strongly supports the construction of the “Belt and Road” initiative, and many Chinese companies are interested in investing in Cambodia. In Cambodia, more than 90% of businessmen are Chinese, and Cambodian Chinese occupy an important position in economic development. Therefore, Cambodia also welcomes the circulation of the Chinese yuan in Cambodia. This created favorable conditions for the development of Cambodian Chinese-funded enterprises, and also provided a good historical opportunity for the development of the Cambodian Chinese Chamber of Commerce.

The ancient Silk Road was a route formed over the years, but since the Middle Ages, the Silk Road has gradually declined on land, mainly using the Silk Road of the sea. In history, during the Han Dynasty, in addition to the seven large-scale voyages and peace for about 30 years in the earthquake and bright era, the country also actively opened the Silk Road. In Southeast Asia, businessmen and Chinese from China have moved abroad. However, on the Maritime Silk Road before the nineteenth century, it not only formed a history of trade networks but also played an important role in this regard. Modern Chinese Southeast Asian social groups in China and Chinese companies in China use their networks with Asian and other industrialized companies Cooperation, not only countries but the world will invest (China Overseas Chinese Studies Institute, 2019).

The "Belt and Road" initiative concept was originally promoted by the Chinese government, and its content and scope are unprecedented. This is the result of the deepening and blockade of the global economy. It is understood that this is also an extension of China's economy in the future. Many factors have caused the old Silk Road to decline many times, but one of them is infrastructure issues. In terms of trade with the countries along the railway, the Chinese government's goal is to realize the internationalization of the RMB. It is expected that the original loans will be further expanded. The "Belt and Road" initiative concept has aroused widespread interest in the international community, and if it goes well, it can be expected to be beneficial and become another important driving force for global economic growth. But the risks above cannot be ignored. The "Belt and Road" initiative concept provides huge business opportunities for China and railway countries. At the same time, China and the countries concerned will have a consensus that it is not a smooth road. In China, politicians in the Han Dynasty from historical lessons. Trade in the Ming Dynasty severely restricted or banned private trade, and the balance of national trade was broken. This is also a fact of influence.

Besides, the political, economic, cultural, and religious conditions of neighboring countries are different. It is only for economic benefits that it is difficult for all countries to mobilize. Also, in the established international order, China can, therefore, coordinate with existing international rules. It is regarded as one of the issues for China's economic development in the future. With the appearance of US President Trump, the Trump administration's policy is to strengthen bilateral free trade agreements. The realization of RCEP (East Asia Inclusive Economic Partnership) and the “Belt and Road” agreement by Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia companies is expected to further expand business opportunities. The Chinese capital is the capital of China on the axis of the nation, but from the national axis, it is the private sector of a country. Chinese capital as part of private capital is closely related to the interests of the country of residence. If the country's economy is sluggish, the impact on businesses will also be significant. If a company is in a downturn, it will also hurt the country's economic takeover. This is something that both the government of the country of residence and the Chinese themselves know. Under the influence of the social and political environment, the

company conforms to its interests, national interests, the interests of the investees, and social interests. Keeping balance, such as contribution, will become a shortcut to the company's success, and Chinese companies are no exception. Although we can guess their investment experience and investment industry to a certain extent.

This is an anxious character about future sports. So far, Chinese capital has played an important role in China's economic development and infrastructure construction. In the 1970s, as in the 1980s, Asian economic growth was supported by Japanese companies and Chinese companies in the future. The role played by the Chinese in Southeast Asia in realizing the "Belt and Road" initiative and RCEP. However, Chinese companies may Increasing competition with foreign capital and Chinese companies. To win the R & D while leveraging the power of China's network, it is important to strengthen technical and management knowledge. Also, pay attention to the risks of recurrent problems such as economic differences and ethnic groups. To solve these problems, it is necessary to prepare to solve them regularly.

## Conclusion

With the steady progress of the "Belt and Road" infrastructure construction, the existence of "one-way" seems more important than ever. Of course, in the geopolitical context, the importance of Southeast Asia as a "one-way" heavyweight is growing. Besides, "a cooperation with ASEAN and China, Japan and related countries will be further strengthened. RCEP and the "Belt and Road" initiative are the result of the deepening of economic globalization and regional integration. The ability to alleviate political conflicts by deepening economic ties to the world Peace and stability are vital. Therefore, reducing poverty and correcting economic differences is not limited to one country. Various absorptions are needed all over the world. Regional integration can improve the global economic balance. This is also the most important point of the "Belt and Road" initiative.

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