

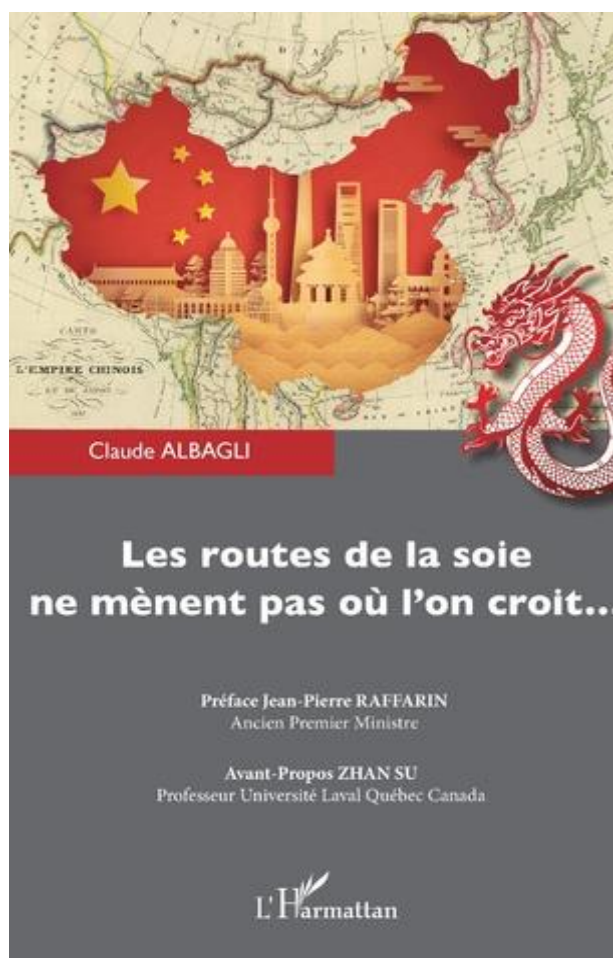
BOOK REVIEWS

LES ROUTES DE LA SOIE NE MÈNENT PAS OÙ L'ON CROIT...

CLAUDE ALBAGLI

L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2020, 276 pp.
ISBN 978-2-343-19828-6

Reviewed by ANTONIETTA IVONA,
University of Bari Aldo Moro, Italy



The promotion of the New Silk Road began in 2013 by the Chinese President Xi Jinping when he presented the “One Belt, One Road” project with the clear aim of increasing infrastructure connections (railways, roads, ports, gas pipelines,

oil pipelines, etc.) and trade between the People's Republic and the rest of the Eurasian continent and Africa. The OBOR, now renamed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), constitutes the pillar of Chinese foreign policy, on the basis of which the Chinese government intends to build a future world order that will have its reference pole in the People's Republic of China. A global transport network is turning into a cooperation network between China and the countries involved. The largest post-war infrastructure investment plan was met with controversial judgments; they range from the "pivot of contemporary relations", the engine of a new globalization, the Chinese solution to world problems, the Chinese Marshall Plan, up to a "political-financial error", a pretentious plan. In short, the great Chinese geopolitical strategy has not gone unnoticed.

Inevitably the breadth, the complexity and the singularity of this project have favoured the confusion and the controversy. Free trade treaty, investment program, cooperation platform or even multilateral organizations also embody a strategy within the dimension, framework and flexibility described by numerous actors in the world.

The disorientation also stems from the fact that for the first time the BRI seems to put an end to the hegemonic Western vision since the end in force since the end of the Cold War.

With the arrival of Xi Jinping to power, China is ambitiously outlining a new world strategy with the aim of reshaping the new global political and economic assets. Through the BRI China is strategically projected into the world by distancing itself from the Western model and also offering developing countries an alternative way to that

Western model. The stakes are very high and as Claude Albagli states in the text "For the first time in half a millennium that a new planetary momentum is not driven by a Western country".

As a careful development scholar and through his rich knowledge of China, the author has included in his book a very enriching point of view on the BRI and more generally on the type of development China is undertaking; above all it is a look without partisanship. The goal is not "to predict but to inventory" and therefore this book essentially consists in discerning the effects of this Chinese strategy and identifying the key elements of its realization without wanting to be either an exercise in speculation or prediction of the results of this project still in progress. implementation phase.

The book is structured in two large and strictly interconnected sections; in the first "The foundations of a coherence" Albagli analyzes the dynamics and processes. In the second, "The stakes of a strategy", the analysis moves to tools, configuration and impact. However, the current strategy cannot be understood except by retracing the historical excursus that has led China, in over forty years, to weave / build a dense network of alliances and infrastructures that have allowed it geo-economic and geostrategic alliances with at least one hundred and forty countries. In the first part, the contemporary evolution of China is considered with particular attention and more generally it is considered that in order to understand the current situation well and try to imagine the future evolution of China, one must be able to examine the situation as it evolves over time. Some dates are fundamental for understanding China today: 1978, 1992, 2001, 2008 and 2013 determined the evolution process of China today and help to understand how the initiative of this modern silk road fits perfectly and coherently with Chinese development. According to the author, we cannot make the mistake of considering this project as a simplistic revitalization of a fascinating and mythical trade route.

The second part of the book is entirely reserved to the Belt and Road Initiative. The tools used for its design and that China has skilfully used for its international prospecting. The project is outlined through three implementation are trade, finance and the forums concentric belts; the first is the Asian one which involves numerous countries in the area such as Vietnam, Laos; Burma. Its gas

pipelines from Central Asia will enter the country through the Pakistani corridor, but also the Siberian axis of the great Russian neighbour. The historical belt is taking shape through the Eurasian railway corridors and the bifurcation of the Mediterranean towards Piraeus, Genoa and Trieste. Finally, the continental one which includes the Arctic route, Latin America and Africa reached by different routes, from the Djibouti bridgehead to the southern ramp via Angola. The impact of the strategy is defined as "a palette of adhesions with nuances" given the multiple responses to its implementation and equally multiple heterogeneities of the countries involved. Awareness of the final outcomes makes the BRI a terrain of easy disagreement. According to Albagli, the fundamental question is whether China will be able to transform the BRI into a truly beneficial multilateral project.

In this context, Europe is probably the most exposed to the consequences of the Silk Road for its identity and its relations with the world; due to its history, its absence of a spirit of territorial domination and its diversity, it is also the most suitable for establishing a dialogue with China first and for carrying it on. However, a common vision between China and Europe is needed so that the main actors involved, public and private, can use the same language and an ambitious and pragmatic approach at the same time.

Albagli's text therefore represents a useful tool for scholars and researchers to reflect on China's new hegemony and on the consequences that the BRI is already generating in the world.

The book begins with a preface by Jean Pierre Raffarin, a great connoisseur of China, and a preface by Professor Zhan Su, a specialist in Chinese politics at Laval University in Quebec. Both confirm the author's analysis in his description of the reality of the Chinese project.

Concluding Albagli's book tries to outline the new path of Chinese polarization at both the regional and international levels, also taking into account the trends relating to the original concentration and subsequent geographical disintegration of the productive activity that occurred in the last stages of the globalization process. It represents an interesting contribution to understanding the new trajectories of global development but also the composition of new geopolitical alliances unimaginable only until a few years ago. The Silk Road is not just a geo-economic plan but above all a strategic vision for the near future.