

# The World Needs the Belt and Road, and the Belt and Road Needs Poetry



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TAKING ITS INSPIRATION FROM THE historical Silk Road, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) sets out China's aims for the future and its methods of achieving these, while at the same time providing Asian nations on the rise with the potential to realise their economic and cultural dreams. It is especially the latter notion that has served to arouse the interest of many historically oppressed nations who are now developing economically and who view the BRI as a pathway to fulfilling their needs and aspirations. As the BRI takes ambitious steps towards spanning continents, the philosophy on which it is founded overlaps closely with the notions of sharing and inclusiveness that have traditionally been a feature of human society in Asia. Indeed, at the very moment when the West's imposition of policies of exploitation, aggression and discrimination is failing, the BRI appears to offer a peaceful, unifying and communal vision of the world based on these Asian values. From its beginnings, the BRI has garnered the attention and trust of many great intellectuals, and in the eyes of many nations is seen as a path by which they may deliver themselves from the hegemony of the West.

Primarily, the BRI invites developing nations and oppressed peoples who feel the need for revolutionary change to come to agreement on fundamental shared interests. This, of course, is a challenging process, given that there exist conflicts of interest both materially and non-materially. The former may be more easily overcome, but it is the latter that

pose the greater risk. It may prove most difficult of all to uproot enmities and reactionary ideas and prejudices that in some cases have been nurtured over hundreds of years. In working towards resolution of these conflicts, we must look to culture and the arts and make use of their potential.

### **The World Needs the Belt and Road Initiative**

In these early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are witnessing many Asian nations struggle to free themselves from the West's meddlesome and exploitative practices, and it would appear that the launch of the BRI in 2013 by China's President Xi Jinping offers hope to oppressed peoples and developing nations that a path can be forged through the 'iron mountains' they face.

At the time of the Maoist revolution in China, Mao himself referred to the Ergenekon of Turkish mythology when he declared; "We will cross over the iron pass", and we can echo this mythology in explaining the events of today, as oppressed peoples engage in an international movement to break the chains that have bound them. Indeed, we may refer to the BRI in terms of an 'International Ergenekon'.

The BRI is a call for revolutionary change. It is historically rooted, yet deeply relevant today and, as such, has found itself many supporters in the intellectual world. Among these is myself, and my poem 'The Awaited Call' is a celebration of my heartfelt belief in this project:

*The awaited call has come, and made tyrants sheathe  
their swords.  
Come! Open your doors and extend your hands.  
Do you know from whom, from which hero,  
the call has come?  
It is a comrade's letter, a scorched letter of love,  
that has come,  
passing over the bones of fallen heroes that shine on stony  
mountainsides,  
over the heights and rivers of the steppe,  
not from the hands of mortal gods, but from  
immortal people.  
The awaited call has come, and it is from our  
comrade-in-destiny China.  
The commander-in-chief of armies flowing with  
the Yellow River  
speaks to us not of starstruck, but of earthbound plans  
to lift the rock of death from Asia's breast.  
Speaks to us of homes reliant on each other, with dreams  
from door to door.  
Speaks to us of the shared happiness we can embrace  
along the paths beneath our feet as the children of a  
greater family.<sup>1</sup>*

China's President Xi Jinping has spoken to us sincerely of how his nation hopes to forge "a greater family with shared goals", and it now falls on us to transmit his message to millions of others. We must respond to the call of the BRI, and in doing so take ownership of its concepts and message with openness, honesty and truth.

Enriched with multi-faceted opportunities, the BRI has appeared on the world stage at a turning point in history, offering both intellectual value and solutions to the needs of the developing world.

Associated with the notion of a socialism specific to China, the BRI also provides a chance for national democratic revolutionary movements to fi-

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nally come of age<sup>2</sup>, and nations to usher in an era in which imperialism has ceased to be, the powers of production have been liberated and societies move towards the principles of socialism.

By placing harmony, fellowship and the transmission of friendship to future generations at the core of its principles, the BRI also serves notice to warmongers. In a September 2013 speech in Kazakhstan, President Jinping's words were of particular significance to Turkey and Turkic peoples of Asia:

"Through peaceful development, China is determined to maintain its policy of independence and peace in all its foreign relations. China respects the freedom of all nations to choose the domestic and foreign policy paths they follow as they develop. We will never intervene in the domestic affairs of any Central Asian nation. We neither seek to establish Chinese spheres of influence nor to impose any directional will on regional affairs. Instead, working alongside Russia and all Central Asian countries, we are ready to tirelessly engage in efforts to develop communication and coordination with the ultimate goal of regional harmony."<sup>3</sup>

The BRI also offers oppressed and developing nations the opportunity to make revolutionary changes on the national level. Hence, it leaves no space for any potential notions of hegemony, but instead offers a platform on which nations can discuss and develop shared interests in a shared destiny.

<sup>1</sup> The Awaited Call will appear in its entirety in the Culture & Arts section of upcoming issues of BRIQ. (Ed.)

<sup>2</sup> Perinçek, D. Yüzyılın Tecrübesiyle Ekim Devrimi'ne Bakışlar. *Teori*. Nov. 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Xi, Jinping. (2017). *Çin'in Yönetim*. İstanbul: Kaynak Yay. p. 338.

## The Belt and Road Needs Poetry

This international enterprise needs too to find expression through artistic endeavours. As poets, we may provide a helping hand in resolving challenges that the BRI faces, some of which may appear to be beyond the world of politics. The poets of the Belt and Road must play their part in awakening consciences.

In times of struggle, the job of poets and their works is to stir the conscience with which we all come into this world and which lies at the heart of our living together as individuals in societies throughout the world. Hence, in the progress of any society, conscientious responsibility plays a central role in defending truth, and it is both the job and power of poetry to awaken instincts of sound judgement and the human conscience.

**"The aim of poetry and words is to use their power to bring about a world in which peace reigns, in which no human being is exploited or killed by another; a war-free, exploitation-free unified world."**

The aim of poetry and words is to use their power to bring about a world in which peace reigns, in which no human being is exploited or killed by another; a war-free, exploitation-free unified world. This is the role indeed that all art forms have played throughout human history.

This, then, is why poets must have this aim at the heart of their creative endeavours during their lifetime. Protecting today's world of nation-states will mean protecting the 'One World' of tomorrow, our world, which Yunus Emre<sup>4</sup> has described as "a



Yunus Emre

red and green adorned bride on whom we never tire of gazing”.

In reflecting the human spirit, poetic works reflect reality, and thus allow us glimpses of the future. As the BRI seeks to win people's hearts and minds, the revolutionary change it brings and the human consciences it wishes to awaken must be clearly reflected. The human conscience is revolutionary, and poetry, as one of its products, is a revolutionary virtue. Indeed, this is what has granted poetry its special place throughout human history.

For all that they can bring to this project therefore, art and poetry are of great value and importance to the BRI. It is true that bringing together peoples of differing understandings, faiths and cultures to a common goal is no easy task. Throughout history, all great revolutions and transformational social movements have come about only by means of revolutionary war and revolutionary cultural and art going hand in hand.

The Chinese revolutionary leader, Chairman Mao said; "In our struggle for the Chinese people, there are several fronts, among which are the pen

<sup>4</sup> Yunus Emre (1238-1321): One of the greatest poets of Turkish language. He lived during the Crusades to West Asia, the Mongol invasions spreading to Anatolia and the long wars caused by the establishment of the Ottoman Empire.

and the sword, in other words, the cultural and the military fronts. In order to defeat the enemy we must rely on the army. But the army by itself is not sufficient. We must combine our efforts and to truly defeat the enemy we must also have a cultural army.”<sup>5</sup>

There is now great urgency to the work of poets of the Belt and Road, and that is the driving force behind our call to come and create together a Community of Poets of the Silk Road.

With democratic, revolutionary and communal culture and the power of poetry, we can fend off

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any cultural and artistic attacks by imperialism and reactionary ideas in their attempts to make us fail. Poetry must especially work to awaken the human conscience. It must work to cleanse it of any selfishness or fear and replace these with courage and joy. Poetry gives direction and courage to people as they move towards the future, it brings forth virtuous thinking and action, and without its power the BRI will remain soulless and stunted. We must remember that no great historical mass movement has succeeded when lacking the support of art and poetry.

Only with its own literature and poetry, can the BRI 'body' feed itself and grow healthily, with a heartfelt unity throughout its many variations. If we fail in this task, the result inevitably will be a 'body' that is truncated, awkward, lacking harmony in its various operations, and with its dream unfulfilled.

For many years now, globalist imperialism has spread only by working to undermine the development and even destroy the accumulated cultural and artistic capital of peoples, and draw them into

the ethno-cultural trap. The BRI organises itself in such a way as to encourage each nation to stand together in a united defence against these reactionary attacks. Our job as poets is to confront these attacks at their origin by creating the artistic and cultural 'belt' for this new world.

"Long live One Road, One Belt, One Thousand Poets!"

### Time for Poets to Come Forward

News, good and bad, arriving each day from different regions in Eurasia tells us that the BRI is a growing influence in the world as peoples recognise the need for such a movement. The path towards power and resource sharing for nation states is being opened up and secured by the BRI.

It is only through art, literature and poetry that long-standing, long-nurtured prejudices between peoples can be overcome. If great Russian literature and Turkey's national literature had not been penned, then Russia and Turkey would still be at the mercy of Tzar and Sultan, with the mind-sets of that age, and their respective revolutions having never come about.

Inspired by the BRI, the natural love of poetry among Asian nations can become a transformative power in the hands of poets. This is why we poets must now formally organise ourselves so we can come to the fore and unite peoples.

Just as great social movements throughout history have needed poetry, so too does the BRI now. If we as poets are trying to do what President Xi Jinping says is the need "to grow the soft power of culture and provide moral support to the world", then the "The Poetry Belt of the Silk Road" gives us this opportunity. Poetry can enter hearts in ways that politics cannot. If we want to weave a silken path to a more free and ethical future for humanity, then as poets we must set to work.

5 Mao, Z.(1999). *Kültür Sanat ve Edebiyat Üzerine*. İstanbul: Berfin Yay. p. 36.

## A CALL TO POETS ON THE BELT AND ROAD

I write from Turkey, the greatest bridge in Eurasia, to poets of the East and the West. I call on the armies of poets living within the borders of Belt and Road countries, poets who serve and are masters of the poetic tradition, to collaborate. Now more than ever are poets needed as humankind strives to emerge from the shadows of imperialist hegemony. With the power our peoples have granted us, let us work together do what we must for the future of humankind.

In the words of the greatest poet of Asia, Yunus Emre: “Come let us know each other and make our lives easier”. Let us all listen to his sacred words and remain faithful to their call for collaboration. Let us come together from the cities of the Belt and Road and create an assembly in which we can get to know each other and look each other in the eye. We’ll soon see that we can overcome challenges. Eight hundred years ago as he witnessed battles between East and West, Yunus summed up the knowledge we can search for in a thousand books by telling us simply; “Let us love and be loved. The world will belong to no one”.

A Turkish proverb tells us; “Lives end, but journeys never end”. It does not encourage us to take each day as it comes, but refers instead to the ceaseless human struggle to reach fulfilment and create the future. Today, we are taking our first determined steps towards the future along the New Silk Road, and we will be moving along this path for generations to come.

This is the new path which lies close to the heart of President Xi Jinping; “The path towards the building of a shared future for humanity”. Does anyone know of another path that can lead us to peace, well-being and tolerance rather than fear, poverty and contempt? As songs are sung and poems read, and people embrace each other on the Belt and Road, journeys will be pleasant, distances will be diminished and lives will be extended.

We share a language; that of the heart, poetry and humanity. It’s not a difficult language. We can all speak and understand it perfectly, so come and let us make

use of this language of humanity. We don’t need to attend courses or schools because our minds and hearts understand it.

We can create wonderful land, sea and air pathways from continent to continent and it is important that we do so. Along these, peoples and cultures will travel, so come and let us make these pathways of the heart, come and let us make lives easier. Come and let us add wings to our hearts and fly towards our shared future. This is how pathways from heart to heart can be created, and it is how mountains and seas can be crossed.

All along these pathways people will need the language of poetry and the heart, and we call on the poets of the Belt and Road to play their role by establishing themselves in. Come and let us express our joys and sorrows in the healing language of poetry. Let us have apple trees blossoming in winter and streams flowing in the dry steppe.

We aim to have world poets come together in the Silk Road Poetry Associations in order for us to open doors and create mountain passes to a shared future. Let the Silk Road be the road to our house and our village. Come let us hold the hand of our future childhood and set off on a journey to a ceaseless eternal life.

I call poets of the Belt and Road to duty. It’s time for poets of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to emerge. Come and let us set to work bracing ourselves with the spirit, bravery and goodness of the great Eurasian poets. Come and let us set up the Silk Road Poetry Belt. Come, Li Bai, Rudeki, Yunus, Goethe and Shakespeare. Come, Pushkin, Nazım and Lu Sun.

Let hearts take flight and distances diminish. Let longing come to an end. If we cannot make the Silk Road the road to Paradise, then let us all be damned together. Long live “One Road, One Belt, One Thousand Poets”. 🌸