



Intercultural Learning in Response to China’s One Belt One Road Initiative

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Abstract In this paper, I would like to discuss the importance of Intercultural Learning for Indonesians in Response to China’s One Belt One Road Initiative. There are several reasons for this argument. First, the underlying idea of One Belt One Road Initiative is ‘connectivity’ for integrating regional economy, if not the world economy, and Indonesia as an archipelago occupies quite a strategic position in connecting various parts of the world which is separated by the sea and ocean. Second, the key to the success of this initiative is cooperation between participant countries, and such cooperation should not only involve the national governments but also the people, known as ‘people to people communication and connection’. Third, in the future, global connectivity will change the way people live. ‘Global citizenship’ might become a new objective. Intercultural learning is one way to change the people and the world, because intercultural learning and ‘global citizenship’ are intimately interconnected (AFS, 2017).

Introduction

Irrespective of China’s One Belt One Road Initiative, we have already experienced globalization through ‘the ease of travel’ and ‘the opening up of labour and financial markets’, and consequently the world is more inter-connected than ever before. As Prof. Ted Cantle (2013:1) said, “[g]lobalization has created an era of ‘super diversity’”, that is to say “each country will find that its population is increasingly made of more people from many different cultures, nationalities, faiths and ethnic backgrounds – and become ‘super diverse’”. Cantle suggest ‘interculturalism’ as a new approach because he believes that multicultural policies are “no longer appropriate to mediate this new era [of ‘super

diversity’] and do not contribute sufficiently to the promotion of community cohesion” (Ibid.). This is undoubtedly owing to the fact that multiculturalism focuses “largely on managing public order and relations between majority and minority populations by allowing ethnic cultures and practices to mediate the process”, which as a result, “far from being as system that spoke to the whole society, multiculturalism spoke only to each specific minority in isolation”. This then “served to maintain the exoticism and essentialism of minority cultures hindering a two way conversation with the majority culture” (Ranjit Sondhi in Cante, 2013:7). In view of that, Cante maintains that ‘interculturalism’ is not defined by ‘race’, and “unlike multiculturalism, embraces all areas of difference” (Cante, 2013:1). For him, multiculturalism that has been firmly rooted in racial constructs –to encourage racial and ethnic harmony and cross-cultural understanding, “has failed to notice that ideas about difference have profoundly changed” (Cante, 2013:8). Contrary to the multiculturalism which “position[s] identity as static and bounded –or ascribed and fixed”, ‘interculturalism’ “recognises that cultures are more fluid than ever before and the inter-connectedness of the world demands interaction between and within cultures to build trust and understanding, and that a high level of cultural navigational skills will be necessary to enable people to accept and endorse the change process” (Cante, 2013:5&1). Hence, the significance of inter-cultural learning is to develop ‘cultural navigational skills’. But, before we discuss the importance of intercultural learning, first the understanding of One Belt and One Road Initiative is essential.

China’s One Belt and One Road Initiative

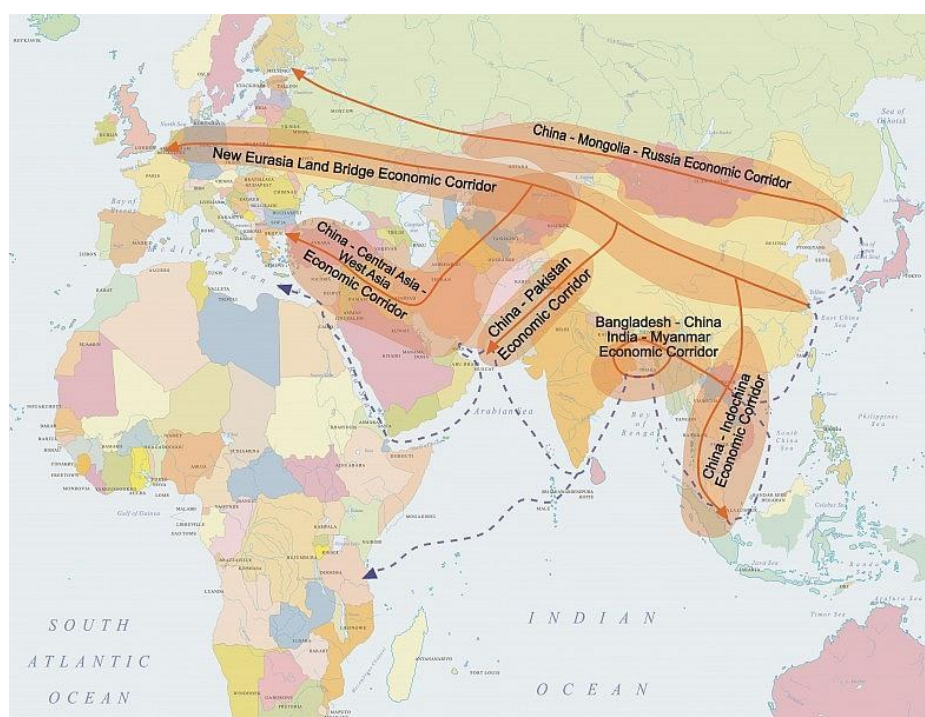
China’s mega project to physically and financially link 70 countries across Asia, Europe, Africa and Oceania known as One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative is underway, particularly since India, Pakistan, Russia, New Zealand, and Poland --which together make up at least a third of the world’s GDP-- have all joined in the project. Also, eventhough Britain and the US isn’t part of Belt and Road, western multinational companies like General Electric and Caterpillar in the US, and DHL in Germany, have all signed trade agreements to build Belt and Road projects (Ma, 2017). It is a development strategy proposed by Chinese Government that aims on connectivity and cooperation between Eurasian countries.



Source: “One Belt One Road Initiative: What is One Belt One Road Initiative?”, Top China Travel, <https://www.topchinatravel.com/silk-road/one-belt-one-road.htm>, accessed on June 25, 2018.

The main focuses of the “Belt and Road” initiative are infrastructure, transportation, and energy, even though the real target is a massive trade project to link China to economies of those areas. It consists of two parts: The “Belt,” which recreates an old Silk Road land route, and the “Road,” which is not actually a road, but a route through various oceans (Ma, 2017). Fujian is approved to be “the core area of the 21st century maritime silk road” while Xinjiang is positioned as the “core zone of the silk road economic belt”. There are two main trends for One Belt, starting from China and ending in Europe. One goes to Europe via central Asia and Russia. The second route is through central Asia and west Asia to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean countries. Meanwhile, the 21st century maritime silk road, or “One Road”, is the economic cooperation between China and southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, north Africa and Europe along the maritime silk road. There are two main directions for One Road: the first is to reach the Indian Ocean from China's coastal ports and extend to Europe. The second is from China's coastal ports through the south China sea to the south Pacific (One Belt One..., n.d.). For the Belt, there is a freight train that directly runs from Kouvola, Finland, to Xi'an, China. The trip takes 17 days, and China says it's faster than sea travel and cheaper than air. A 9,800-kilometre railway helps transport electronics, machinery, clothes, and shoes from Guangxi, China to Malaszewicze & Lodz, Poland despite the snow. The trains carry food

and drink from Poland on their return (Ma, 2017). However, Belt and Road isn't all about transportation. The idea is to develop “six major economic corridors” as “the site of energy and industrial clusters” that “will be created through the use of rail, roads, waterways, air, pipelines, and information highways”. Those six corridors are The New Eurasian Land Bridge, China-Mongolia-Russia, China-Central Asia-Western Asia, Indo-China Peninsular, China-Pakistan, and Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (Tian, 2016). China has invested at least \$900 billion (£635 billion) in projects along the belt and road, that included a [natural] gas pipeline in Pakistan and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), a motorway in Hungary, and a high-speed rail link in Thailand (Ma, 2017).



Source: Winter, Tim, 2016, “One Belt, One Belt, One Heritage: Cultural Diplomacy and the Silk Road”, *The Diplomat*, 29 March 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/03/one-belt-one-road-one-heritage-cultural-diplomacy-and-the-silk-road/>, accessed on July 6, 2018.

Belt and Road Projects in Indonesia

Indonesia plays a very critical role in China's One Belt One Road Initiative because some of Indonesia's islands “falls under the route plan for the One Road” known as “the New Maritime Silk Road”, which aims “to connect China, Africa as well as the Mediterranean region through Southeast Asia” (Kargo, 2017). North Sulawesi, North Sumatra and North Kalimantan are identified as “the nearest provinces from the Maritime

Silk Road, an ancient trading line leading to South China Sea” (Prasetyo & Azhari, 2017). Officially, Indonesia views China’s One Belt One Road will undoubtedly bring some benefits to Indonesia, particularly when there are potential cooperations between China’s One Belt One Road and Indonesia’s Global Maritime Fulcrum Strategy (Hou, 2017), known also as the Sea Toll Road Programme planned to boost Indonesia’s maritime capabilities. As part of the Sea Toll Road project, 24 out of 111 commercial seaports will be expanded, including five hub ports – Belawan/Kuala Tanjung in Sumatra, Tanjung Priok/Kali Baru in Jakarta, Tanjung Perak in Surabaya, Makassar in South Sulawesi, and Bitung in North Sulawesi, as well as 19 feeder ports, such as Batam in Sumatra, Tanjung Emas in Semarang and Sorong in Papua (RHB, 2017:25). According to a report, titled ASEAN Connections, written by the Economist Corporate Network on behalf of law firm Baker & McKenzie (Siniwi & Yuniarti, 2016), “Indonesia stands to be the biggest beneficiary of China's One Belt One Road initiative in Southeast Asia which will pump around \$87 billion into infrastructure projects”. The Committee for Acceleration of Priority Infrastructure Delivery (KPPIP) has identified 30 projects – out of 225 national strategic undertakings – as priorities for the 2016-2019 period. These include the Balikpapan-Samarinda, Manado-Bitung, Serang-Panimbang and Trans-Sumatera toll roads, Soekarno-Hatta International Airport Express Railway, Jakarta mass rapid transit (MRT) (South-North Line), Makassar-Parepare Railway, light rail transit (LRT) lines in Jakarta and South Sumatera and several other port and power plant projects (RHB, 2017:24). Nevertheless, as indicated by RHB, “[c]ollaboration between China and Indonesia appears to be slow in warming up”, limited only to the following projects:



Source: Yamada, Go & Stefania Palma, “Is China’s Belt and Road working? A progress report from eight countries”, Nikkei Asian Review, 28 March, 2018, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Cover-Story/Is-China-s-Belt-and-Road-working-A-progress-report-from-eight-countries>, accessed on June 25, 2018.

Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail with a design speed of 250-300km/h, known as the Ya-Wan high-speed rail, will connect Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, with its fourth largest city, Bandung. The total length of this line is about 150 kilometers that will be reached within 40-45 minutes after the completion of the high-speed rail in 2020 (One Belt One..., n.d.). Manado-Bitung Toll Road with the length of 39 kilometers will connect Manado-Airmadidi-Bitung, aiming to enhance tourism sector as well as economic growth in Manado, North Minahasa and Bitung. This toll road will also serve as “the main access road to Bitung Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and Bitung International Hub Port” (KPPIP, n.d.).

Reservations about China’s Belt and Road Initiative

The reservations are partly due to concerns that have emerged in the socio-cultural interactions between China and regional countries over past decades, but “a greater challenge in the BRI implementation lies in the not-so-good reputation of Chinese investments in the infrastructure and resources extraction sectors such as in Myanmar, Indonesia, and Vietnam” (Gong, 2018).

“Some Chinese investors seem to have difficulties understanding and adapting to local employees’ work ethics. Their Chinese managers value efficiency and thus can be quick in dismissing local workers as inefficient and falling short of their expectations. Chinese investors feel frustrated when they realise that local employees are not even motivated by financial incentives to increase productivity. Therefore, they prefer to bring in workers from China, a move often harshly criticised by the local community for depriving its people of employment opportunities.

Many Chinese companies investing overseas lack knowledge of how labour unions work and often do not respond adequately to demands of employees.

Worse, some Chinese firms bypass the laws and regulations without offering contracts or insurance. Such Chinese companies are simply accustomed to their domestic approach of relying on a variety of connections and resources to settle various problems.

In China, due to the fierce competition for jobs and insufficient legal protection, employees are generally accepting of the demands of the employers. Some Chinese investors mistakenly believe this is also the case overseas, resulting in an increasing number of workers’ strikes by labour unions in countries such as Indonesia.

In one case in 2017, Chinese managers of one company threatened to dismiss the local workers and even intimidated the leaders of the union that demanded for better working conditions.

This led to massive demonstrations in front of the Chinese embassy by unions such as the SEBUMI-NANBU (Serikat Buruh Bumi Manusia-Nanbu) and the KASBI (Kongres Aliansi Serikat Buruh Indonesia, one of the largest unions in Indonesia). The issue dominated headlines in the Bahasa-language media in Indonesia, leading to an outcry against the company in question” (Gong, 2018).

Since China heavily controls the media, such a negative publicity might have no chance of appearing in China’s domestic media. Certainly, China public might not be aware of such issues and how they should be dealt with, particularly with the complicated history of Chinese in Indonesia which “may feed anti-Chinese sentiments” (Gong, 2018). As Gong Xue indicated, China tends to highlight the role of Chinese diaspora in Belt and Road Initiative without realizing that this can produce a backlash when bearing in mind the previous experiences of China using overseas Chinese for political purposes (Gong, 2018). Since China claims that “culture is an important pillar in China’s strategy for expanding international influence” (Ibid.), more positive cultural and social exchanges through intercultural learning might help to reduce anxiety and misunderstanding between Indonesian and Chinese peoples, particularly since one of the Belt and Road’s core “Cooperation Priorities” is that of “‘people-to-people’ connections” (Winter, 2016). Moreover, Xi Jinping in his speech to the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference in 2015 also indicated that “Belt and Road will ‘promote intercivilization exchanges to build bridges of friendship for our people, drive human development and safeguard peace of the world’” (Ibid.).

Intercultural learning as a new strategy

Intercultural learning comes from the new concept of interculturality and interculturalism. Interculturalism is “the sharing and learning across cultures that promotes understanding, equality, harmony, and justice in a diverse society” (Ponciano & Shabazian, 2012:23). With interculturalism, “individuals learn from each other and engage in an ongoing exploration of the historical and cultural contexts that influence individual development” (Ibid.). Meanwhile, an intercultural environment is “one in which there are authentic and meaningful exchanges of information about each person’s individual experiences that transform all involved” (Ponciano & Shabazian, 2012:23).

Even though it is more influential to teach children in their early childhood, but as teachers or educators play a crucial role in laying the foundation, so they themselves must be ready to “[adopt] multiculturalism and anti-bias curriculum frameworks to address issues of culture and diversity” (Ponciano & Shabazian, 2012:23). The first thing to do is to become “more aware of their own implicit and explicit biases that influence their teaching practices” (Ibid., p. 25). Moreover, they have “to increase their sensitivity to different cultures, family compositions, religious practices and languages”, as well as to “avoid generalizing the traditions, beliefs, and values of an individual to a group or, conversely, from a group to an individual” (Ibid.). It should be noted that, as Elena Caleva reminded (2012: 54), “to manage the diversities of students, it is not enough to just appreciate and recognize their differences”, but it becomes absolutely critical “to teach universal values and to outline their importance” as the first step in underlining to the students that “every human being has to be respected and valued”. The key factor for teachers and educators to increase intercultural sensitivity is ‘reflection’, that is “[t]he ability to think critically about oneself and others”; to “[think] about alternative perspectives [for] decision making” (Ponciano and Shabazian, 2012:26-27). It is essential to built this reflection into the pedagogy.

It was suggested to make “racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse materials (dolls, people figures, books, pretend food, music, pictures of strangers with varying abilities and races are commonly displayed)” which “represent[s] the larger society” readily available in high-quality, multicultural ‘academic’ classrooms (Ponciano & Shabazian, 2012:27). Learning environment should also be arranged for “a powerful conduit of values”, including “the way time is structured and the roles expected for everyone” (Ibid.). Daily routines should be “filled with implicit or explicit cultural messages” or stories and games from different cultures to “counter ethnocentrism and negative messages”, to “promote image that convey the complexity of cultural, family and individual differences”, as well as to develop respect for differences (Ibid., p. 27-28).

This intercultural learning is part of “global ways of thinking” in the efforts “to stem tides of violence and broaden narrow perspectives”, to introduce “new ways of living in the world together”, as well as to develop ‘active citizens’ known as ‘global or world citizens’ since, as stated by Larry Samovar, Richard Porter, and Edwin

McDaniel, “successful intercultural communication is a matter of highest importance if humankind and society are to survive” (as quoted by O’Brien & Eriksson, 2008:17). Through intercultural learning, we must “learn how to see things through the eyes of others and add their knowledge to our personal repertoires” in order to develop intercultural communication competencies which are particularly “practical when individuals or group members are about to go to many different countries” (Ibid.). Such competencies will be useful when, thanks to China’s One Belt One Road Initiative, the future world is more inter-connected than ever .

Intercultural Learning pertaining to One Belt One Road Initiative

With the launching of One Belt One Road initiative, there is a clear demand for a large number talented people, especially those who have good global vision and intercultural competence. For that purpose, it will require ‘university internationalization’ that could “prepare students to function in intercultural contexts” (Dzienis, et.al., n.d:155). Based on the experience of collaboration between China-Poland higher education institutions through cyclical summer school, non-Chinese and Chinese students should be “educated in the field of New Silk Road concept as a new Eurasian transport corridor, especially with regard to conditions required for transport corridors and logistic infrastructure” (Ibid., p. 158)¹. They were also “taught about STEEPVL analysis² and applied the newly possessed knowledge to the assessment of the NSR potential”, as well as to develop “scenarios of NSR development” (Ibid.). Guiyu Dai & Yi Cai (2017:97), on the other hand, offered ‘Cross-Culture Management’ as a strategy for “handling cultural discrepancies and formulating appropriate acculturation” among different countries along the Belt and the Road. The strategy consists of three tentative ways, that is: (1) Investigating the local markets and identifying the culture differences [between the host country and the target country]; (2) Cultivating intercultural communication competence

¹ It is interesting to note that there is a ‘Silk Road School’ at Renmin University of China in Suzhou that offers ‘Master of Contemporary Chinese Studies’, with the goal: “to train future elite leaders for countries along the BRI that have a passion for Chinese culture, understand profoundly the path, model and experience of China’s development”. (http://www.puc-rio.br/ensinopesq/cci/download/outros_china_silk_road_school.pdf, accessed on July 7, 2018).

² STEEPVL is a method of strategic management and it involves identification of factors determining a certain issue of high importance in the future. STEEPVL as a multidimensional method helps to identify the potential driving forces of the analysed research field. Apart from defining the driving forces shaping the scenarios of development, the STEEPVL analysis is applied to identification of unprecedented events, the so called wild cards ...or to enhance SWOT analysis outcomes.... The factors are grouped in seven dimensions: social, technological, economic, ecological, political and related to values and legal aspects. The acronym of these dimensions is STEEPVL. The analysis was introduced by Johnson Research Associates (JRA) in the 70s (Loveridge 2002). (J. Nazarko, K. A. Kuimicz as quoted in Dzienis, et.al., n.d.:158-159).

of the cross-culture employees; (3) Acculturating to the local society and making innovation based on culture fusion (Ibid, pp. 102-103). By referring to Guan, they distinguish cultural diversity into three types, that is: different basic values, different living habits and different professional knowledge, and argue that “[t]he basic values of the local people are hard to change; differences on living habits can be alleviated through cultural exchanges, though it takes time; differences incurred by management styles and management skills can be overcome by learning from each other, which is quite easy” (Ibid., p. 102). By identifying the existing cultural differences, it becomes possible to take relevant and appropriate managerial measures, such as ‘cultural sensitivity training’: employees with different culture background are assembled “to have a specific culture training, field study, situational dialogue as well as role plays, etc. so as to break the cultural barriers and shake off the bondage of roles” (Ibid., p. 103). In short, as Guiyu Dai & Yi Cai stressed, “[i]n order to be well received in the host market, managers should be acculturated and glocalized to the host culture and give full play to its advantage of bi-cultural background” (Ibid).

Limited study on the significance of intercultural learning for Belt and Road Initiative leaves us with a lot of unanswered questions, but I believe this paper has been able to provide a preliminary stage of understanding about the topic. Further studies are in order, particularly in the specific context of China-Indonesia socio-political and cultural differences.

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