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# BRI Cooperation System: General Framework and Development Path

**Summary:** Since the Belt and Road Initiative was brought up in 2013, a wide variety of mechanisms and platforms under its framework have sprung up, which actively led the initiative to a deeper and more practical fashion. OECD, WEF and other mechanisms and platforms with long-accumulated experience can inspire the initiative in building its cooperation system. In order to promote the system, we need to highlight the leading, professional, practical, popularity and justice-based characteristics of those mechanisms and platforms, to connect with which advanced ideas and institutions should be integrated dynamically into the process.

**Keywords:** Belt and Road, cooperation system, cooperation mechanism, global governance

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As a major country with systematic influence, China proposed and is promoting cooperation within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Such cooperation will surely exert important effects over the international order and governance. As BRI cooperation has entered a new era with high quality, it is necessary to reflect on the development of relevant mechanisms and platforms while drawing on experience from cooperation system of various forms, so as to realize better BRI cooperation outcomes.

## General Framework of the BRI Cooperation System

Since the BRI was proposed 8 years ago, relevant cooperation mechanisms and platforms have been mushrooming. Some came into being as a result of top-level design, while some others were “added

bonus” thanks to active participation of cooperation partners. The combination of top-level design and partner actions is basically the framework of the BRI cooperation system.

First, the success of the first and the second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF) has created a concrete “core” for the BRI cooperation system. In particular, the second BRF was more representative, of larger scale, and with richer content. As stipulated by various participants in the Joint Communique of the Leaders’ Roundtable, “We welcome the efforts to further promote bilateral and international cooperation with China under the Belt and Road Initiative. We envisage the Belt and Road Forum on regular basis with possible follow-up events,” and “We look forward to the 3rd Forum” (International cooperation, 2019). A regularly-hosted BRF will

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better play a guiding role in BRI cooperation and offer the most authoritative platform to forge consensus, steer the course and promote cooperation, thus nurturing a strong “core” for the BRI cooperation system.

Second, the signing of more than 200 bilateral and multilateral inter-governmental documents has laid an important institutional foundation for the BRI cooperation system. By the end of January 2020, 200 documents on BRI cooperation have been signed by 138 countries and 30 international organizations with China. These documents are an important part in the BRI cooperation system. In addition, the BRI and its concept of cooperation has also been written into outcome documents of such major international mechanisms as the UN, G20, APEC and SCO. The signing and releasing of these cooperation documents have provided critical institutional guarantee at the international arena for the BRI cooperation system.

Third, the establishment of a series of mechanisms has provided platforms for practice. With the development of “six corridors and six channels serving multiple countries and ports”, various cooperation platforms with the title of “BRI” have also emerged: the CPEC Joint Cooperation Committee was launched by China and Pakistan, the parliamentary committee on CPEC was established in Pakistan, the BRI federal association was opened in Germany,

the BRI research center was jointly launched by the Cambridge University and the Lancaster University, the Japan Research Center on BRI was opened in Japan. Other platforms, including the Silk Road Think Tank Association and the Silk Road NGO Cooperation Network, were also established. They have been promoting BRI cooperation from different aspects, and are increasingly professional and specialized.

Fourth, the on-going improvement of China’s national policies keeps injecting impetus to the BRI cooperation system. The BRI leadership group serves as the major coordinator for BRI development by convening conferences in response to various issues related to BRI cooperation. Departments of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council are developing a coordination mechanism for connectivity in 5 major areas (policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and closer people-to-people ties) as well as the building of the digital silk road, the clean silk road and the green silk road. These departments have been strengthening coordination and introducing new strategic planning and innovative measures. Various localities in China also take part in the BRI development based on their own strengths, with increasingly scientific and precise goals for themselves. In general, a BRI policy coordination system is being shaped in China in top-down and bottom-up ways with innovative measures.

## Basic Framework of Belt and Road Cooperation System

Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation	May 14-15, 2017, the First Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation; April 25-27, 2019, the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation
Intergovernmental cooperation mechanisms	As of January 2021, China has signed 205 documents on Belt and Road cooperation with 171 countries and international organizations. China has developed cooperation mechanisms with governments of related countries.
Functional mechanism	Political Parties Belt and Road Consultation Mechanism Silk Road NGO Cooperation Network The Silk Road Think Tank Association The Belt and Road News Network The Alliance of International Science Organizations
China's domestic policy-supporting system	Leading group for promoting the Belt and Road Initiative at the national level; Related coordinating mechanisms established by agencies of the CPC Central Committee and central government; Leading group for promoting the Belt and Road Initiative at provincial, autonomous regions and municipality level

## Experience of Multilateral Cooperation Mechanisms in History

For something as innovative as the BRI cooperation system, there are no well-developed models or experience. Yet, inspirations could be drawn by analyzing the experience of representative mechanisms and platforms in history.

The first example is the OECD, whose precursor is the OEEC (founded in 1948) and was renamed OECD in 1961. By April 2020, the OECD has developed 37 members and established partnership with such countries as China, Brazil, India, Indonesia and South Africa (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). The OECD promotes objectiveness, openness, innovation, exploration and justice as its values. Apart from annual reports, it releases OECD Economic Outlook and economic surveys on a regular basis. OECD reports have become important reference for the international community to evaluate the global economic evolvments, and the industrial standards set by the OECD in company governance, education, agriculture and taxation have also become international standards. There are several reasons behind OECD's international influence. First, it has a focus. Almost all activities of the OECD are about economic cooperation, without much reference to politics and security. Second, it enjoys professional proficiency. The OECD demonstrates its professional knowledge by publishing quality research reports, which has improved its voice in the field of development. Third, it works on promotion. The OECD strives to introduce various rules and standards to the international community and tries to make them internationally acceptable.

48 | The second example is the World Economic Forum, (World Economic Forum) whose precursor is the European Management Forum (founded by the German professor Klaus Schwab on 8 February 1971). Professor Schwab wanted to build a forum to discuss company management and encourage European companies to learn American management ways. He proposed and promoted the concept of “stakeholder”, urging company managers to take into consideration the interests and concerns of various stakeholders including shareholders, clients, customers, employees, communities and local governments. Later, due to the decoupling of gold from the dollar, professor Schwab extended the theme from management to economy and society, paying more attention to critical topics such as the trend of the world economy. Since 1979, the forum has been releasing regularly the Global Competitiveness Report and research reports of various fields, gradually becoming a center of knowledge. In 1987, the European Management Forum was renamed the World Economic Forum (WEF). At present, the WEF strives to serve as an international organization for public-private cooperation, rallying political and business leaders to jointly make global, regional and industrial agendas. The massive international influence of the WEF is mainly thanks to the following: First, it has been focusing on hot-spot issues in world economy that are systematically important, whether as the European Management Forum or as the WEF. Second, it has nurtured a professional image. In addition to the regular publication of quality reports, the WEF also introduces at conferences such milestone reports as Limits to Growth, which has been leading the international discussions. Third, the WEF champions an objective and

inclusive attitude and encourages to see the world in a rigorous, systematic and objective way. It invites various participants to share their point of view, and rallies members of the international community to cooperate to confront international challenges.

### Future Development of the BRI Cooperation System

The above-mentioned international mechanisms and platforms differ remarkably from the BRI in historic background, functions, positioning, concept, principles and characteristics. Still, their development experience can be inspirational for the development of the BRI cooperation system.

First, the BRI cooperation system should focus on blazing trails. It should strive to innovate systems, explore to establish multinational management systems for major projects, promote liberalization and facilitation in international investment rules and contribute to the building of new international systems of financial rules, so as to lead international cooperation in economy. Meanwhile, it should further tap cooperation potential and encourage the participation and actions of companies, media, think-tanks and NGOs through BRI mechanisms and platforms.

Second, the BRI cooperation system should keep professional. It can focus on the key role of a “platform for cooperation and development”, and facilitate cooperation on projects by collecting and releasing information. Meanwhile, it should publish professional research reports in a regular basis on the economic situation, investment risks, technological advance, security risks and connectivity in policy, trade, finance, infrastructure and people-to-people exchanges. It should promote communication

and exchanges among various partners, translate consensus into systems and rules, and gradually promote advanced ideas, rules and standards to the international arena.

Third, the BRI cooperation system should be practical. It should keep in line with the development of relevant BRI projects to secure its own resilience. Hence, the BRI cooperation system should bear in mind practical needs and problems, promote the building of knowledge centers including the BRI big data base. It should live up to its role of forging consensus and encouraging cooperation, tap the potential of cooperation, avoid unnecessary conflicts, and address disputes, so as to ensure ongoing improvement of BRI development.

Fourth, the BRI cooperation system should uphold justice. The BRI observes the principle of achieving shared growth through discussion and collaboration. To share development benefits is not only the goal of the BRI, but also an important guarantee for sustained development of the BRI. This principle, and the people-centered approach, represent China's stance of upholding justice over interests and outlook of development. The building of the BRI cooperation system should play a unique role in benefiting ordinary people and ensuring sound interaction between projects and local economic and social development.

## Potential Practices for the BRI Cooperation System

Whether to better serve the relevant projects, or to promote innovative development of global governance, “interconnectivity” should be a priority in promoting the BRI cooperation system. “Interconnectivity” should be realized between

concepts, institutions and in practice. In this way, the BRI cooperation system will grow to be more comprehensive and coherent, more compatible with the global governance system and will keep its own quality and resilience.

First, “interconnectivity” can help promote innovation in the concept of global governance. The BRI cooperation system aims at “increase in quantity” based on current global governance system. Hence, it should uphold the UN charter and relevant principles, inject fresh impetus into world economy through BRI development, and increase positive energy for the innovation of global governance. Meanwhile, the BRI cooperation system should call on various parties to innovate, explore new concepts, new modes and new paths for international cooperation and global governance. It should uphold openness and inclusiveness, enhance fairness and justice, and strive to address the negative impacts of protectionism, conservatism, unilateralism and populism.

Second, “interconnectivity” can help to enhance internal coordination of the BRI cooperation system. For various mechanisms and platforms within the framework of the BRI, some lack communication with others, some are redundant, and some are not well-coordinated with others. To make sure that the BRI cooperation system can serve its due role, coordination among these mechanisms and platforms should be enhanced to ensure smooth internal operation of the BRI cooperation system. In detail, interconnectivity and coordination should be improved through top-down guidance and bottom-up exploration to make the cooperation system more professional and efficient. Meanwhile, regulated management should be applied base on the development of the BRI to make relevant work neat, well-organized and efficient.

Third, “interconnectivity” can help promote integrated development of the BRI cooperation system and other cooperation systems. The BRI has already been widely aligned with various cooperation systems at global and regional levels (International Cooperation Summit Forum, 2019). Government departments of China are also carrying out increasing cooperation with their counterparts in partner countries (Belt and Road Forum, 2019). Looking ahead, the BRI cooperation system can further strengthen alignment with such global and regional cooperation mechanisms as the UN, ASEAN, AU, EU and the Eurasian Economic Union. The areas will involve development concept, development planning, economic and social system, cultural values, customs and practices and projects, promoting comprehensive development for all.

Fourth, “interconnectivity” can help to ensure that the BRI cooperation system evolves with the changing times. As this system keeps going forward, it should stay open and flexible to make sure there

is enough room for future reforms. For instance, as the BRI proceeds, some countries will raise new development plans, some others will introduce new development strategies, therefore the cooperation system should leave enough “windows” for these new cooperation plans. The new round of scientific and industrial revolution will change people’s lifestyle in a remarkable way, it will even disrupt some traditional areas and give birth to new models of business. Therefore, the BRI cooperation system should respond to such changes. Moreover, the raging of COVID-19 has illustrated the need for countries to cooperate and coordinate, for which the BRI cooperation system should be prepared.

To conclude, the BRI cooperation system is a significant historic practice that calls for concerted efforts. Let’s keep innovating cooperation ideas, improving cooperation efficiency and sharing cooperation benefits, so as to jointly bring about an even brighter prospect for a community with a shared future for mankind.

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