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OPERATIONS, INFORMATION & TECHNOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Challenge and perspective for Digital Silk Road

Bora LY^{1*}

Abstract: A Digital Silk Road (DSR) strategy is increasing within the BRI since countries are expected to collaborate on emerging technology for development and trade. Digital connectivity and evolving digital economies, as can be seen in China and some BRI countries, can have a positive effect on growth. However, there are some complexities and risks to DSR arising from the fact that the declared ambitions in the Chinese state differ drastically from the elusive existence of active Chinese participation, particularly in terms of the digital aspect of the strategy. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the perspectives and challenges for DSR, and the implication of BRI goes digital. Drawing from Nethpolitik and Liberal lens, this paper offers a broad overview of the communication and information segment of the initiative, which has so far been undervalued or even overlooked in the existing literature. The study asserts that DSR will broaden economic transition, strengthen regional integration, and support financial sources to boost global multilateralism and political stability. Accordingly, some risks cannot be ignored for DSR, such as political, ideology, data, and privacy hazards.

Subjects: Chinese Studies; Political Studies; International Politics; International Relations; Politics & the Media; Government; ICT; Political Communication; Public Relations; Technical Communication

Keywords: BRI; China; cyber politics; digital BRI; digital divide; great leap growth; Industry 4.0; Industry Internet; Internet plus; netpolitik

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1. Introduction

Inaugurated as one of the connectivity targets under the BRI in 2013, the Digital Silk Road (DSR) was conveyed in July 2015 as a mere area of multilateral cooperation with China to the business community and governments at the China-EU Digital Cooperation Forum. In 2017, China declared a new initiative to create a Digital Silk Road (DSR) as a part of the BRI project.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Within the BRI, the Digital Silk Road (DSR) approach is emerging since states are supposed to cooperate with emerging technology for development and trade. The study affirms that DSR is broadening economic transition, reinforcing regional integration, and promoting financial resources to improve global multilateralism and political stability. Also, some consequences for DSR, such as political, ideological, data, and privacy issues, cannot be overlooked. This paper provides a snapshot of the communication and information segment of the initiative, which has been underestimated or sometimes ignored in current literature.

According to President Xi emphasized at the BRF in 2017, it does not only the integration of communication services but also information sharing (Xinhua, 2017). DSR is a crucial component of the overall BRI strategy, and China will use technology to increase its impact on the way. Opportunities exist in the deployment of telecoms infrastructure, data centers, and smart cities. Technology security concerns will be a significant hurdle for Chinese vendors as they move to deepen and widen the technology footprint of BRI. The DSR has become the focal point of the BRI as controlling the flow of data becomes increasingly essential for shifting the balance of geopolitical power for China. According to Liang and Zhang (2019), digital BRI is an “inherent requirement for constructing a ‘digital power,’ it will also provide an opportunity for the digital development of countries along the Belt and Road route” (p. 39). Also, it will “facilitate the economic and social development of countries along the route, improve the level of national governance, generate new international competitive advantages” (Liang & Zhang, 2019, p. 39).

Thus, the ability to use this communications infrastructure to overtake markets, standards, and political elites would provide the multi-regional base for China to develop its norms, systems, and networks to the broader international arena. In the long run, this will not only give Chinese companies a competitive advantage but also enable them to spread more widely over other markets. This aspect can have significant implications both in global economics and geopolitics.

2. Literature review

A significant achievement of China in e-commerce growth, artificial intelligence, financial technology, and so on are crucial in the transition to digitalization on the New Silk Road. The implications of BRI go even further, encouraging other major powers to develop their global schemes (Teo et al., 2019). The implementation of DSR would promote economic growth, boost economic development efficiency, generate jobs, and enhance the welfare of the people. It also opens up new opportunities to incorporate the concept of sustainable economic growth (Lazanyuk & Revinova, 2019). Given the profound business and economic consequences of BRI, structuring, and simplifying the discussions is essential in identifying fundamental mechanisms and cause-effect relations that it creates (Visvizi et al., 2019).

Some scholars have emphasized the geo-economic aspect of the BRI, suggesting that the initiative was motivated primarily by pressing economic problems at home, for example, unequal regional development, industrial overcapacity and the rise of Chinese financial capital interests (Cai, 2017; Summers, 2016; Tsui et al., 2017). They accept that building infrastructure—from ports to roads to railways and gas pipelines—has become the heart of the BRI (Kennedy & Parker, 2015). However, the DSR, which has been given little attention. Massive digital infrastructures (e.g., fiber-optic cables and data centers) that have been built up alongside transport and energy initiatives have been overlooked or misunderstood in the current debate (Brown, 2017; Rolland, 2015). Besides, with the rise of some Chinese internet giants on domestic and international markets, there has been increasing political debate in China over recent years, focusing on creating a DSR. In March 2015, for instance, the National Development and Reform Commission of China, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Commerce jointly issued their first official BRI blueprint and specifically issued a call to “create an information Silk Road” including the establishment of bilateral cable networks, the plan for transcontinental submarine cable projects and the improvement of satellite passages (Xugang et al., 2018, p. 65). In 2016, the State Council released the “13th Five-Year Plan for National Informatization,” focusing on the construction of a DSR and encouraging Chinese internet companies to take part fully in the program (State Council, 2016). In 2017, China declared a new initiative to create a DSR as a part of the BRI project. According to President Xi emphasized at the BRF in 2017, it does not only the integration of communication services but also information sharing (Xinhua, 2017). He also suggested that the hybrid energy mix and the convergence of energy and information technology would use incentives to create a global energy interconnection to achieve green growth and low carbon development. He vowed to step up new urban growth and renewable, low-carbon,

integrated and prosperous way of life and function, and to work together to attain the objectives of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030.

This paper explores the emergence of the DSR phenomenon in Chinese policy discourse, the BRI digital networking dimension, and some of China's proposed and current developments in telecommunications and e-commerce in the overseas markets. These China-funded initiatives and businesses may bring economic benefits, but they are also attached to China-centric governance architecture. It enhances the current discussions of BRI in the literature of communication by transferring from a media coverage dimension to an infrastructural dimension, with an emphasis on the role of internet infrastructure (Fang et al., 2016). It also expands the existing scholarship for Chinese Internet research by changing the emphasis from domestic to global dimension (Shen, 2016) and engages in the growing discussion on the globalization of Chinese digital businesses (Negro, 2017). Furthermore, given the broader, sweeping, and often ambiguous policy debate around BRI (Johnson, 2016), it remains far from clear in the current discussion and needs further study on what a DSR entails as well as its challenges and perspectives.

All these sources are analyzed through a liberal and Netpolitik perspective in order to have a full picture of China's motivations behind the BRI goes digital.

Liberalism can be divided into several strands. Moravcsik (1992) is one of the liberalists who emphasizes on the rationales behind the actors, the forces shaping their interests, and forces shaping their outcomes. For Moravcsik (1992), a state is involved in both its domestic and multinational society, which are the drivers for its economic, social, and cultural interaction across borders. Liberalism also "strives for, and believes in, improvement of the human condition and provides a rationale for building cooperative institutions that can facilitate better lives for human beings" (Keohane, 2012, p. 127). The state may decide to pursue a policy that may facilitate or hinder such interactions, resulting in benefit or challenge for some domestic groups who will then pressure the government to pursue policies that are according to their needs and help realize their objectives. Such pressures from the people, which are communicated through domestic political institutions, characterize what is called "state preferences"—that is, the set of social objectives that drives a state's foreign policy. These state preferences determine a fundamental interest in the international issues that a government is surrounded by (Moravcsik, 1992). As Burchill (2005) pointed out, "liberal states, founded on individual rights such as equality before the law, free speech and civil liberty, respect for private property and representative government, would not have the same appetite for conflict and war [...] peace was fundamentally a question of establishing legitimate domestic orders throughout the world" (p. 113). According to Keohane and Nye (2012) argue "interdependence affects world politics and the behavior of states [...] by creating or accepting procedures, rules or institutions for certain kinds of activity, governments regulate and control transnational and interstate relations" (p. 5). Therefore, states interact with each other under the assumption that increased interdependence produces mutual growth and international cooperation. Differently from realism, liberalism is based on the assumption that economic exchanges, international organizations, and societal norms increase beneficial interdependencies, promoting positive-sum interactions between states.

While the liberal perspective supports its evidence on China's significant growth with its neighboring countries, China's engagement in regional multilateral frameworks, and China's responsible commitment to the international community, it also sees the BRI as an instrument for enhancing economic integration through infrastructure development. Thus, the BRI is inherently open and inclusive. Since 2013, China has inked 173 deals with 125 countries and 29 international organizations under the massive BRI (Chan, 2019). The DSR, on the other hand, falls under the sub-goals of the BRI that emphasized the agenda of strengthening digital infrastructure, developing conventional technology standards, and deepening space cooperation (Chan, 2019).

According to Bollier (2003), “Netpolitik is a new style of diplomacy that seeks to exploit the powerful capabilities of the internet to shape politics, culture, values, and personal identity [...] unlike Realpolitik—which seeks to advance a nation’s political interests through amoral coercion—Netpolitik traffics in ‘softer’ issues such as moral legitimacy, cultural identity, societal values, and public perception” (p. 2). In political practice or even foreign diplomacy, this would be a form of soft power, which the power “in the global information society depends less on the territory, military power, and natural resources. Rather, information, technology, and institutional flexibility have gained importance in international relations. The power of knowledge, beliefs, and ideas are the main tools of political actors in the efforts to achieve their goals” (Bollier, 2003, p. 4). The new era of communication led to a different scenario for politics. Thus, network politics is a modern form of diplomacy distinct from real politics. Also, it emerges with the synthesis of the internet, and politics provides society with a new phenomenon. It has led to a new form of power that individuals, corporations, NGOs, and even governments can use.

Additionally, it incorporates the concept of soft power, mainstream, and electronic media on the world stage. Enabling information exchange and transmitting information allows different interest groups to express their views, regardless of their strengths. Individuals from some of the world’s farthest regions can now link to the most prosperous centers of civilization every day (Bollier, 2003).

Nevertheless, Cyber politics, Net politics, or Infopolitics, whatever they are converted into, reflects the impact of the IT network on real-world politics. Internet politics intersects national connectivity and generates virtual space, and digital network technology impacts international politics (Choucri, 2000). As Bollier claimed, the web and other IT technology are not the fringes of world affairs anymore but a strong motivating force for change. The new computer network not only disrupted the world, but it also transformed the principles, culture, and social practices of the citizens. However, such changes occur in numerous unforeseeable transnational interactions, not only in the state’s boundaries (Bollier, 2003).

This study believes that cyberspace is a dynamic, interconnected, and cohesive technological environment. It helps users to access a wide range of internal and global information, coordination, and unity across modern communication networks for some specific aspects of human activity (Hill & Hughes, 1998). Throughout international politics, anarchy is mainly based on information sharing without centralized control technology (Newhagen & Rafaeli, 1996). It is also transboundary, but it is a world without boundaries (Smith & Smythe, 1999).

Stevens and Betz (2011), much like Nye (2010), focus on state strategy and cyber power, although they by no means exclude the role of non-state actors in cyberspace. Indeed, they understand cyber power as “the variety of powers that circulate in cyberspace and which shape the experiences of those who act in and through cyberspace” (Stevens & Betz, 2011, p. 44). It implies that the new era of the internet has evolved from the traditional political scenario of the 20th century and brought in a unified, globalized, and fluid procedure that can be used in various ways.

3. Methods

This work utilizes the inductive method to articulate the research issue and the China Digital Silk Road as a case to investigate. The phenomenon of BRI going digital has been selected to test the hypothesis. The data collection focused primarily on the qualitative approach, which contained both primary and secondary. In order to impartially evaluate China’s motivations through both a Liberal and Netpolitik lens, the study covered four main sections to investigate the phenomenon of BRI going digital. They are: (1) the growth of the internet has contributed to the digitalization of BRI, (2) the shift in global internet policy inspires the BRI, (3) the significance of digital BRI, and (4) the risks of digital BRI. The following analysis will distill from the four main sections. It maps out the implementation of the DSR and critically interrogates its challenges and prospects.

4. Analysis

In May 2017, President Xi proposed at the Belt and Road Forum International Cooperation that “We should pursue innovation-driven development and intensify cooperation in frontier areas such as digital economy, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, and quantum computing, and advance the development of big data, cloud computing, and smart cities to turn them into a Digital Silk Road of the 21st century” (Pamlin, 2017, para. 7). On the 3 December 2017, at the 4th World Internet Conference, relevant departments of China, Laos, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Thailand, Turkey, UAE, and other countries jointly initiated the “One Belt and One Road” Digital Economy International Cooperation Initiative, opened a new chapter on the Digital Silk Road (Belt and Road Portal, 2017). Four years after it was proposed in 2013, the government of China began to promote a 21st-century DSR, using state-of-the-art technologies such as big data and cloud computing to form a borderless digital economy (Li, 2019). Accordingly, Alibaba and other internet firms continued to focus on building the DSR, which would bring Chinese products to the international market. Goods are purchased and sold globally on the DSR created by these internet giants, and the core is cross-border e-commerce. The DSR, a multi-field, multi-level internet-based information and the economic zone between China and the BRI countries, is to improve the network interconnection and exchange of information. The government has expanded the connotation of the DSR to include various Internet apps and attaches great importance to its economic value.

4.1. The internet growth has contributed to the digitalization of BRI

The speed of internet development in the 21st century is beyond the imagination of anyone. The exponential growth of the internet suggests that the information age has arrived. Governments around the globe have proposed specific policies for developing the information age, particularly in America and the EU. Moreover, China has the exclusive benefit of advancing cross-cutting digital cooperation in the BRI region based on China’s demographic dividend, state support, and BRI implementation.

4.1.1. Digital networking is rapidly rising

The Group of Eight (G8) created the “Okinawa Charter of the global information society” at the start of the 21st century. It claims that ICT is a crucial driver of social change in the 21st century and that it will eventually be a significant driver of global economic growth (Charter, 2000). This opinion was a basis for a clear timeline for the international ICT growth of the national strategy of economic and technological progress, including the US, EU, Japan, and South Korea, among other nations. ICT involves IT, including the telephone, Wireless Local Area Network (WLAN), mobile phone, and other network devices, through electronic communication. The advantages of capital have been brought to the ICT sector to achieve technical advantages by developed countries such as the German “Industry 4.0” plan and “Industry Internet” approach in the USA are the most popular.

At the Hannover Industrial Expo in 2011, the platform “Industry 4.0” was initially developed in Germany (Lydon, 2014). Originally, the goal was to increase Germany’s production levels through new technologies like the Internet of Things (IoT). In 2013, Germany integrated the Industrial 4.0 initiative into ten main potential “High-tech 2020” ventures, driven by industry and academia. German also presented the following plan to achieve industry 4.0. First, create a system of information-physics networks that link physical devices and the internet and allow it to interact with monitors, autonomy, and so on to merge the realm of networks and the real world. Second, establish smart factories, realize the intellectualization of production processes, and apply advanced technologies such as human-machine interaction, intelligent management, and 3D printing to the whole production process to form an intelligent and networked industrial chain. Third, achieve vertical integration, horizontal integration, and an end to end integration.

The introduction in Germany of the Industry 4.0 plan is to tackle the new industrial development movement. In the modern era of science, technology and industrial development, new energy, new materials, and others have been driven by the production and growth of information and communication. Germany has always had a robust automotive scent, and the 4.0 agenda of the

organization is to counter the new technology revolution's potential for debate. The second concern is the external pressures. The US and other industrialized states are reviving industrial as the strategic agenda in recent years. Emerging states, like China, have remained active in the manufacturing sector. Germany concentrates on Industry 4.0, in line with the manufacturing equipment industries to address innovations and vulnerabilities in technology. It also consolidates the domestic innovation plan and increases the innovation capacity of the organization. Accordingly, Germany has sought to change the potential of the incremental style of innovation, boost and address the shortage of revolutionary technological innovation, and resolve innovation framework shortcomings. Therefore, the disruptive forces of innovation effects will be given greater importance, the economic potential of innovation will be extensively excavated, and technological modernization in the field will be facilitated by innovation.

The Industrial Internet was presented in November 2012: the implementation of modern internet concepts, to tear down the borders of mind and technology (Evans & Annunziata, 2012). It collects data from intelligent machines and networks using a framework for the processing, analysis, and emulation of big data to potentially provide smart information or make smart decisions. The industrial internet can realize the virtual circle between the computer, information, device network, and human. Also, it can learn and interact with others. The distinctions between the industrial internet and the IoTs are extensive data analyzes and the logical interactions between computers and humans (Evans & Annunziata, 2012).

The emphasis of digital technology is created to reshape the manufacturing landscape through computer technology to transform the existing industrial system. To rebuild the produce industry from top to bottom, the US utilizes technology like apps, software, and the internet utilizing big data analysis tools which go against Germany's critical thoughts and IT. While promoting the rough production of the equipment, the German industry supports the new process of the industrial revolution while the US relies more on soft activity.

4.1.2. Progress of IT in China

The change in growth in the world's leading economies became the norm, and the new industrial revolution prospered. China has introduced a state-led industrial policy called "Made in China (MIC) 2025" aimed at making China influential in global high-tech development to keep up with the global trend. The "Internet Plus (Int+)" (Chinese, 互联网+) is apparent in encouraging technological development and modernization, raising the industrial level, and supporting the computerization of the manufacturing industry.

In a government work paper on 5 March 2015 (South China Morning Post, 2015), Chinese Premier Li Keqiang is recommended to keep pace with the technology phenomenon, analogous to Information Superhighway and Industry 4.0. According to the Chinese official website, Int+ was among the most current phrases of the two sessions (PRCC and the PPCC, Chinese: 两会) of the year and was included in 2015 in the list of critical economic keywords (People Newspaper, 2015).

In 2015, Ma Huateng, CEO of Tencent Inc., and a representative of the People's National Congress introduced the Int+ initiative. He claims that using internet platforms and ICT is an effort of the Int+ program (Wu, 2015). Also, it represents a new economic model, which offers the internet the maximum ability to maximize the distribution of output capital to creativity and convergence, incorporates the innovation of the internet into an industrial system in different fields, encourages progress and competitiveness of the real economy and creates a new, more comprehensive form of economic growth. The roadmap reflects on rapid change and improvement, apparent integration innovations and places of interest to people, the guideline-recommended eleven entrepreneurship and investment actions including cooperative industrial, e-commerce, inclusive finance, public services, efficient logistics, modern agriculture, green ecology, smart energy, convenient transportation, AI and clear departmental responsibilities (The The State Council, 2016). The effort to strengthen global communication

and social networking collaborations, and to actively use the social media network and new media outlets to build a harmonious and supportive public awareness culture and environment (The State Council, 2017).

The population of China had been 854 million internet users by 30 June 2019, and 847 million (99.1%) of them had access to the internet through mobile networks (Yingwei, 2019). The number of internet users rose by 25 million at the end of June, comprising 61.2 percent of the total population, as compared to the figures measured by the end of 2018. Around January and June, the number of mobile Internet users rose by 30 million to 847 million, which triples the New York City population (Yingwei, 2019).

According to Statista Digital Market Outlook, a two trillion USD goal will be reached by the global e-commerce industry in 2019. China is number one for e-commerce with a revenue of USD 634 billion in 2018, and the report reveals that it remains leading by 2023. The variation in purchasing ability from the USA and Europe to China and Southeast Asia has started, driven by the growing numbers of Asian consumers, especially on mobile devices, gaining access to e-commerce (Statista, 2019). So, the BRI will establish transnational e-commerce to boost domestic economic growth. The new engine and stimulus are supposed to be generated for China's economic growth. Generally, multinational e-commerce has shown excellent signs and trends. All transnational e-commerce firms have undertaken valuable import and export explorations. In China, Jingdong, Koala, Tmall, and Vipshop, the leading platform is also becoming accessible for business. With the sponsored logistics infrastructures, payment and settlement services, and technologies already established, China's domestic e-commerce network has grown evermore. With the possibility to replicate patterns and external production. The BRI countries have a massive demand for infrastructure building and business transactions. The expansion of transnational e-commerce platforms and export promotion, financial services, and other support must be improved throughout this phase.

The German Industrial 4.0 strategy, industrial Internet policy, and Int+, from a global perspective, are expected to lead to healthy market competitiveness and, based on industry size, growing demand, and development potential, the three countries are likely to be tripartite in high-tech manufacturing. China will exploit development opportunities for the third industrial revolution. It is crucial to recognize the development of ICT technology, accelerate Chinese from MIC to create an excellent industrial base that makes China a significant step forward in the third industrial revolution.

4.2. The shift in global internet policy inspires the BRI

The invention of the internet gradually destroys the way people live at unprecedented speeds. The internet, like the 18th-century steam engine and electrical technology in the 19th century, is a time of period. The internet provides people with a new approach that reaches beyond the limits of the traditional field and is gradually improving in cyberspace, a new lifestyle, social standards, and political awareness and creating networked communities.

The internet has the following characteristic: decentralized and international, the globe is more interconnected because it links all countries and regions worldwide, interacts internationally, communicates locally and borderless, shares the same information, and transfers the same information across intercultural networks and reaches. Besides, there are no limitations for the country or the area so that people are not limited to local or national borders, contact people from all over the world, connect a network internet device, and experience barrier-free internet navigation. Furthermore, the exchange is bi-directional; digital exchange on the internet is no longer a conventional one-way reception and dissemination, but engagement. The information source may be an entity or an individual. Everybody can use the Bulletin Board System (BBS) via the internet and e-mail and learn about the information disseminated by other users. Netizens are not only the platform for dissemination of information but also information disseminators.

The internet has thus expanded through geometric development throughout the world, with autonomous and global, open, and relatively democratic bi-management, entering all facets of human existence, changing social, militaristic, and political nature. Netpolitik notes that internet growth changes traditional international politics, as stated in the theory section. More important technology, more influence among non-governmental players, more interdependence between nation-states and, to some degree, weak countries can affect international agendas, or general directions are the most common.

4.2.1. *Technological strength is becoming more important*

The logic of globalization, which has been evident over many years in the global expansion of physical infrastructures, cultures, markets, and ideologies, is also visible in ICTs (Feijóo et al., 2020). Because of ICT inequalities in various nations lead to a digital gap. So, information distributed over the internet remains part of soft power. The modern empire is called the digital imperialism, and digital colonialism by some scholars (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Jin, 2015), and information hegemony is named more often as Joseph Nye has also suggested the idea of soft power and claims that leverage shifts from “rich capital” to “rich information” (Nye, 1990). It will enable the government, through monitoring and the use of intelligent services, to participate in world political activities, track or impact the global environment. It cannot only substantially increase the basis of state power, but also leverage information technology to reach a multiplier of strength. Also, some states worried about potential social unrest within their borders may find ways to use technology to achieve enforced social harmony and stability (Griffiths, 2018). Following the logic of this scenario, in mid-2018, China started to promote a so-called DSR, an extension of the BRI. It included 5 G, quantum computing, nanotechnology, AI, big data, and cloud computing and was helping other countries to build digital infrastructures and develop internet security. According to the Chinese government, it will help to build “a community of common destiny in cyberspace” (The Economist, 2018, para. 2). The goals of such an initiative would be to “create export markets for Chinese technology, establish a bigger base for Chinese technological development through access to data, provide physical infrastructure for the BRI, and boost goodwill towards China in beneficiary markets” (Gold, 2018, para. 2).

However, even as more people use technology, the gap between the haves and have-nots grows more in-depth and broader. According to Spannos (2016), the positive facets of digital technologies are real, but their advantages are not shared equally. When more than half of the world’s citizens are isolated from the internet, they are removed from its advantages, growth, and governance. The digital divide parallels existing inequities in the allocation of goods and services (Spannos, 2016).

The term applies to the “digital divide” as regards exposure to IT and internet operations, the division between people, households, enterprises, and regions with different social and economic classes based on the OECD (Joseph, 2001). This division takes place between various nations and populations in one region. It encourages mutual dependence in international politics and economics, but also raises the distance between information intensity and lower technology. The info age can be a double-edged sword. The rise of the digital divide has added more attention to the gap between developing and information-poor countries. In the world of information technology, the considerable difference between the ICT haves and the have-nots is continually widening. Thus, the information revolution not only narrowed this gap in the global community, but it also amplified digital inequality in a new form.

Developed states challenge the idea of hegemony in technically emerging states by using the benefits of IT. Developed states have monopolized advanced information technologies, which makes poor information countries in data dissemination and economic growth inert. Throughout emerging economies, the information is monopolized by computer chips and critical information processing systems (i.e., in emerging nations, the information is dominated by developed states). Such excessive dependency inevitably leads to a loss of sovereignty in society. The developed

countries are also more effective in the formulation of international rules. Due to their reliable economic power and technical superiority, the developed countries often devise relevant international laws according to their needs. Emerging countries should compromise only their desires for adjustment to the directions.

Although the information revolution and internet development have generated a digital divide, this is also a great leap forward. The information revolution has taken the benefits of IT to the advanced countries, and it has acquired national power in particular through soft power. It benefits developed countries very much. Nevertheless, this is also an opening for the information of underdeveloped countries. Through making use of the advantages of later development in order to reduce the gap with the advanced nations and even to transition other advanced states, emerging nations would make it possible for developers to move forward within the wave of the information revolution.

The leap forward growth ensures that retroactive countries meet the results obtained by developed nations in a relatively short and cost-effective period, even throughout the development process, exceeding the stage that advanced states face. Through the information technology revolution, developing countries will skip through particular technological research and development stages, relaxed exposure to modern, less expensive information technology such as skipping a collective copper wiring into the fiber optic networking step in the device building process, wireless communications. To date, about half of the population of India remains illiterate, but it took advantage of the information revolution and successfully developed the technology sector. Therefore, the great leap can be anticipated if the digital divide is resolved.

4.2.2. Non-governmental power player

The collectivism of the central political authority is a primary reason to alter the internal governance structure. Political power must also be democratic to be legitimate, the right of individuals and groups in a country, to develop and implement political policy, and to administer public resources. Also, the political power network is subject to social reality, which can be divided into three groups. Firstly, as a carrier of political power, as an implicit or explicit body, the source of political power and the fundamental power of the citizen of the net (Netizen). Secondly, political groups, political parties, and civil society, religious organizations, for example, network societies, to pursue a common political goal. Finally, the political body that consists of state power and public law appendices, which manage and govern society at large, in the name of democracy, overpowering society and with specific violence, is at the center of political power and is a systemic governing force, as the network nation, of society at large.

The accessibility feature of the internet often gives the public a specific power of speech, including the disadvantaged group and the minority party. Generally speaking, everyone on the net is the source of political news, and websites require both web users and organizations to sign onto the websites and exchange political information openly. The influence of tightly integrated individuals and minority groups in the cyber community can be fully revealed in this setting.

4.2.3. Intensified interdependence

The emergence of the information revolution and globalization also brought closer relations between countries. The information revolution, as claimed by Joseph Nye and Robert Keoghan, has taken the political process of many countries closer to the ideal paradigm of interdependence. The internet considerably decreases space and time between nations and regions, dramatically lowers wholesale connectivity costs, business transactions, and information sharing cost and boosts the globalized economy. In the same period, emerging nations gradually become the market economy group. The era of global market segmentation has ceased to exist, and the space of economic globalization is broader. Global economic convergence and interdependence through collective growth are being developed worldwide. Since the US has used the IT revolution to grow, countries have started to emphasize research, technological, and economic growth. Many

researchers suggest that highly developed IT has complicated the blockage of development significantly and thus has contributed to the exponential proliferation of technology. IT actively encourages the rapid growth of international trade and the cooperation of science and technology. The comprehensive deployment of efficient IT has also promoted globalization, political liberalization, and financial integration of international flows of capital. The growth of multinational corporations has become a new phase in the global penetration of the information revolution. An essential element of the global economic system has become the global network of multinational corporations, which has actively promoted collaboration between countries and decreased competitiveness incentives between countries for economic and trade policy.

4.2.4. Emerging nations with global norms

State struggles not only with national security but also with the growing and diverse challenges of the foreign policy of the nation. An extraordinary new agenda has arisen around us, as Kissinger said. The topic of energy, capital, climate, citizens, space, and ocean consumption takes the same important position as the current diplomatic agenda of military security, policy, and territorial rivalry. While a powerful nation plays a significant role in global politics, it has the benefit of the total power in a country, but it does not mean that it has benefits in all concerns. Some of the fields may also have benefits for emerging countries. The weak states may relate these benefits to other important matters and concessions or reimbursement from active states.

The distribution of information through the network has grown considerably, and the state has lost much control over its information. These states that wish to increase their level of development cannot conceal their political and financial role and are more open and transparent in the dissemination of information. An emerging state can be taken out by disseminating information about a particular problem, which is generating nationwide outrage. Through a network, small and weak states will draw the attention of people to the goal of successfully enforcing the agenda.

4.3. The significance of digital BRI

Due to changes in international politics on the internet, the new Silk Road strategy of the Beijing government will take full advantage of its power and control the era of info evolution. The study will offer some indications of China obeying the emerging aspect of global politics as Netpolitik presumed to move forward the global BRI. In this regard, China will benefit from the BRI going digital, and its importance would be interactive.

4.3.1. Boost technical ability to achieve great success

Although China has already tackled the digital divide, the requirements for the growth of domestic IT are developed. Int+ allows virtual links to the digital world and the physical world possible. If a network occurs, Int+ is critical, and the internet has dramatically altered the circumstances of bandwidth overreliance. Cloud technology, big data, IoT, and mobile internet continue to build and endorse and provide a strong foundation for digital economic growth. The relevant sectors are continually growing, and the digital technology sector is continuously improving, creating new applications and platforms and fostering integration and growth of conventional industries.

The China Internet development survey revealed that as of June 2019, the number of internet subscribers had exceeded 854 million, accounting for 61.2 percent (Xiaoxia, 2019). The statistic rose by 25.98 million from the end of last year, up 1.6 percentage points from the Internet access average, according to the China Internet Network Information Center. A total of 847 million Chinese people have used mobile phones to surf the internet, up from last year's 29.84 million (Xiaoxia, 2019).

Digital technologies accelerate the broad convergence of the social and economic sectors, becoming a significant engine of the economic and social transitions of the consumption of China to build a nation's new competitive edge. Alternatively, China wants a great leap forward from the development of the internet and the digital economy. By leaps and bounds of the Int+

networks, it will achieve economic growth. For instance, first of all, the traditional model of economic development meets the bottleneck. After the reform and expansion, China has accomplished impressive milestones and in 2010 became the world's second-largest economy, but China has faced increasingly severe environmental and energy constraints with a long-term ambitious economic development. China's excessive reliance on energy and international markets increases economic system instability (i.e., Chinese oil imports are rising, and their reliance on foreign oil is growing).

The effects of the financial crisis and the post-financial crisis have contributed to a starting effect of export shortage, little pulsation of domestic demand, overproduction of low value-added goods, substantial energy-consumption growth, serious environmental problems, and eventual green sustainable development. Hence, Int+ offers the opportunity to resolve this problem. In the growing internet service industry, domestic demand has been dramatically stimulated, signaling the way to solve the current dilemma in growth.

4.3.2. Boost non-government involvement in raising political resistance

The BRI has been proposed for more than six years. These projects have received extensive support from nations and regions and have achieved great collaboration achievements. At the same time, in recent years, China has made significant progress in applying internet technology and developing business models like Alibaba, Huawei, and Didi. China's internet sharing economy can be said to have been at the leading of the sphere.

The BRI has greatly surpassed an economic strategy for a country or region, according to Jack Ma, Chairperson of Alibaba. The goal is to make the world more creative, diverse, fair, and inclusive. Throughout his view, SMEs and individuals throughout BRI countries and regions will trade freely without barriers, which will contribute to surprising shifts in the global economy. BRI, together with the global e-commerce network, would give SMEs and developing nations new opportunities. In the future, as more nations respond and participate, a new digital platform will also be creating an international DSR and providing additional trade routes (Sina, 2017).

The forerunner of Chinese corporations moving abroad has always been state-owned companies (SOEs). SOEs also dominated the BRI, bearing the interest of China and profitability, from Pakistan's Gwadar port to Ethiopia's Yachi railway, for instance. So, the BRI cake is sufficiently large. The social forces need more input in the construction process and the involvement of all types of businesses.

Chinese Internet firms have already taken the lead in expanding international travel in 2013. Currently, China has over 6,000 tech companies, more than 10,000 products abroad, and customers in more than 200 countries worldwide (Sina, 2017). Chinese leading innovations and business models are continually exported. Nonetheless, private internet firms such as Alibaba and Huawei have driven China to expand around the globe. After the announcement of the "discarded banknotes" last year, the "Indian Alipay App," supported by Ant Financial, was the top winner, making payment issues for the Indians enormous as an example. Alibaba Cloud has established a data center in countries and regions along BRI, Hong Kong, Singapore, Dubai, and Europe, and its large-scale, independently-developed computerized "Flying Sky" operating system goes far abroad and is linked to millions of servers worldwide. As a result, it transforms into a supercomputer providing public online services to the global computational power (Sina, 2017).

In April, AliExpress, the B2 C e-commerce site for Alibaba, announced a customer base of approximately 100 million in the overseas and regions (Sina, 2017). Overseas customers are loving more and more MIC 2025, and the local landscape is also slowly shifting. In the world of mobile connectivity, Huawei's Chinese products have already challenged the trend that foreign companies such as Apple and Samsung had traditionally controlled. As an illustration, Africa has no power connection in mostly rural areas, and the ultra-long standby mobile phones of Huawei are the

option of local citizens. Huawei also gradually started to compete with Apple in the field of high-end machines. Take the example of the Southeast Asian industry. Huawei's top-end market share in Malaysia of over USD400 shops (about 25 percent); in Thailand, its high-end market share by USD400 (about 10 percent) or more (Sina, 2017).

4.3.3. Strengthen interdependence to create an excellent cooperative environment

The internet economy as a whole is part of the service industry. Many services became tradable with the rapid progress of information technology, transport, and globalization. The opening of the service industry in China followed a similar pattern in the manufacturing sector: opening brought competition, increased efficiency and service quality, and facilitated the reform of domestic policies (Zhou, 2017). Chinese reform and expansion are primarily international economic cooperation or trading in commodities dependent on refining and production for more than thirty years. This method of engaging in global economic collaboration is affected very little by foreign policies. Nevertheless, with the gradual increase in participation in global economic cooperation, China will be more involved in the political and economic frameworks of world cooperation to ensure the better protection of the intellectual property and interests of Chinese companies, especially as trade-in goods are transformed into service trading.

To date, the Belt and Road Cooperation Agreements with China have been signed between 126 countries as well as 29 international organizations (Huaxia, 2019). The first International Cooperation BRF took place in Beijing in 2017, with the emphasis on two issues: on enhancing cooperation in policy-making and development strategies and on fostering pragmatic collaboration in interdependencies. In Beijing, a second BRF, attended by representatives of 40 countries and international organizations, was conducted in 2019, while the Forum concluded with an unveiling of a joint communique of 283 concrete results in six categories (Belt and Road News, 2019). In other terms, the BRI has already been influential in fostering regional economic growth.

Also, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) was set up in 2015, which is China's first multilateral financial institution and a cooperation body between governments. Since December 2019, AIIB has 102 representatives from around the globe (AIIB, 2019). While the focus of the AIIB is predominantly on the development of infrastructure, it also includes hardware network building that is closely associated with the dot-com economy, and that enables the Internet economy to leave the country. Again, China also has a substantial share of funding in the BRICs Development Bank, which is also favorable for Chinese companies to operate in the BRIC and helps the internet economy shift towards the BRIC nations.

4.3.4. Develop international rules for the global internet economy

One source of the BRI's worldwide attention is that the BRI focuses strongly on the growth of underdeveloped countries. Most developing nations are lagging behind economic and social development on the BRI, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, etc. It is the world's most focused area, excluding Africa. The BRI, therefore, suggested the participation of these countries in external interconnection, cooperative growth, and shared development cooperation and has produced robust positive responses worldwide.

Several underdeveloped states listed above are in the pre-steam period. In this scenario, the style and direction of leap forward growth are to be anticipated. The emergence of the internet economy has given these underdeveloped countries with a robust technological tool to bring progress and make up their position.

As an example, take communications. Backward regions often have challenging terrain, and cliffs cover some places, and there are severe gaps in contact. Following the trajectory of developed Western countries' first popularized telephone and telegraph interactions, then popularized fixed-band internet communications, then mobile internet connectivity is eventually general, and its investment period is exceptionally long. The infrastructure of the mobile internet has now been

well developed. Telephone, telegraph, and the internet are not available in the least developed regions. Mobile internet age can be concretely achieved. To citizens in rural areas, mobile phones are cheaper and more convenient for accessing the internet and messaging than conventional phones and portable personal computers. Not only can reverse regions create the Internet transport systems via the Cloud or other vehicles like Didi with the “curve passage” of mobile connectivity, but substantial resources also are not necessary for establishing general taxi services and, with the help of mobile communication technology, make leaps and limits on the internet.

For example, underdeveloped countries often have poor infrastructure, education coverage, and quality. In these circumstances, the costs of schools are high, and efficiency is relatively small, given the fact that institutes are established one by one in cities, and qualified teaching staff is used to publicize schools. They are even complex safety hazards. The development and implementation of online training via the internet in these regions will have a broader impact. New concepts for the dissemination of backward culture and education were also generated by the growth of Internet information-sharing technology and Internet schooling. Although it is still difficult to fully substitute for face-to-face school education, promoting the education of the internet in deprived regions in a short time would lead to the future spring growth of backward regions.

Over recent years, as the internet grows, countries all over the world become profoundly integrated and interrelated, becoming a shared future society. Through virtual networking environments, people around the world may join foreign exchanges through global, geographical, cultural, multicultural, religious, social systems across all sorts of tangible or intangible boundaries. Such collaborative cyberspace interaction is very beneficial for the development of human society. When cyberspace evolves, the emerging physical silk road is the expected phenomenon. Through greater interdependence, Virtual Silk Road would make the internet a more useful resource for expanding the networking effect to a broader range, focused on the development of the internet's hardware infrastructure.

4.4. The risks of digital BRI

The internet has become a powerful way to disseminate information in the information age and has greatly influenced the international community by its rich and sophisticated functionality. Because of the decentralized and multinational, transparent, reasonably similar, bidirectional, and secret characteristics of the internet, China is also faced with a range of risks when BRI goes digital.

4.4.1. The initial ideology is influenced

As a significant information carrier for communication with people, the network becomes the prime location where complex social consciousness articulates themselves. The creation of the internet has introduced new developments to human communication and networking through the proliferation of social media. The way information is spread been secure, information mobility has not been hampered, cultural exchange rates and connectivity in every country have increased, and cultural stability has been preserved.

The traditional critical media is a core, space-restricted, downstream one-way communication system including journals, books, magazines, radio, television, videos, advertisement. In between are the information controller and the provider, the community, and the government, and the citizens are passive users. In the digital age, though, pluralism, democracy, interactivity, virtuality, and anti-centrality in network connectivity have been a significant influence on and have questioned the conventional networking and communication paradigm. Network communication is a type of mutual interactive communication method that permits the exchange of information to be a qualitative leap in the direction and the thinking of internet users and gives them equal opportunity and the right to share channels of communication. Netizens are not only passive users of information but also producers and publishers of content. The parties and government bodies do not have to approve and review. They create individual websites, openly connect and share necessary info, disseminate

news in many forms, and voice their opinions. Furthermore, the hegemony of philosophical indoctrination in the age of digital determines ideological dissemination. There are also significant challenges facing mainstream politics, communications systems, and media.

As Alvin Toffler claimed, in the power information people's hands, the planet has left conflict and regulation over energy, resources, and the future of puzzle world politics. They are taking advantage of the rights to control the network and distribution of information in their hands, using the influential culture of English to achieve the objectives that violence and money are unable to conquer (Toffler, 1990).

Throughout Western countries, the power of information processing and its impact are introduced, their philosophy, political systems, beliefs, society, and perception have been conveyed to the globe. The technological challenges of cyberspace make it very hard for sovereign states and authorities to manage and control, as is generally done by individual countries, the content of transnational communication and demonstrations. The scope of BRI for political philosophies, like China, Russia, and the principles of interest regulation, is exclusive, insufficient enough for the modern experience in media management that always undermines the field of public opinion.

4.4.2. *The propagation of cyber terrorism and crime*

DSR's closer collaboration would expand the visibility and impact of cyber terrorism. The growth of extremism has become more and more intertwined with cyberspace in recent years. Extremist groups are rapidly using the internet to disseminate the idea of terrorism, attracting recruits and followers, disseminating extremist knowledge, and gaining political influence. Simultaneously, extremist groups have never stopped trying to conduct cyber-attacks on critical information networks and essential network systems, which could place cyberspace security at risk. BRI, targeting more than 60 countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa, global terrorism is involved. Preventing and reacting to cyber terrorism is an essential aspect of regional cooperation between the BRI nations.

First of all, cyber terrorism's primary influence is to reinforce militant groups and disrupt global peace and stability—a peaceful and stable strategic and environmental protection principle for BRI's smooth operation. According to the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2019, reported by The Institute for Economics and Peace (2019), the top ten nations in GTI is almost every area of the BRI. Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Syria, Pakistan are ranking top 5, and other BRI zones are also among the top 20, which indicates that the main challenges to stability and strategic obstacles confronting BRI are extremism.

The majority extremist radical group in the Islamic State, however, is by far the most likely to use the terrorist network. Their followers are distributed primarily throughout the BRI region. Twitter has at least 46,000 registered Muslim state followers from September 2014 to December based on a survey by the Brookings Institution. Not only are the leaders of the Islamic States, although directly related to the Islamic States, they are also involved in distributing and disseminating propaganda messages, and in hiring the Islamic States. The most prominent applications are drawn from the regional details in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, United States, and Syria (Bunzel, 2016). It indicates that the convergence of the network has given more room for extremism, which implies that BRI collaboration is of profound and enduring importance.

The direct impact of extremism is a challenge to BRI's interconnection collaboration. While a terrorist organization undertook no massive network attacks on the critical communication system, it is understandable that the extremist powers will not abandon this opportunity and do all they can to achieve a similar network attack. The robust safety of sensitive IT and significant networks often requires enormous resources and human assistance in regions and countries where the monitoring and security of violence are insufficient. The direct physical disruption to the critical communication system is, therefore, also a significant concern. China, which faces

terrorist threats as well as perpetrators of transnational network violence, will play a leading part in fostering BRI collaboration in cyber-terrorism.

4.4.3. Security of data and privacy is at risk

Once BRI is digitized, data security and confidentiality are challenged in relevant countries. With digitization, network security, in particular when it comes to cross-border cooperation, faces complex and severe situations. The BRI countries are currently struggling to maintain the connection between traditional sovereignty values, but also because there are no data security issues, particularly transnational data transmission, the challenge for maintaining data security is also complicated.

In addition to providing access to the flow of information, the network infrastructure also provides information systems and networks for normal operations by emerging companies. Energy, petroleum, oil and gas, and other industries are essential and unmanaged in most countries. The devastating effects are impossible to recuperate if the mechanism is abused.

When new technology innovations spread through countries and regions of BRI, digital networking, big data, IoT, smart city building have become more and more successful, nevertheless, the dominant force in cloud computing is primarily from other nations, and public protection has been deeply concerned with the broader implementation of e-Government. In 2013, the Prism event revealed various participating Internet companies, including Microsoft, Google, and Apple, generated a worldwide uproar over cloud application and information security.

Eventually, the issue of data theft, anonymity, network abuse, stealing market information, and tracking data from other countries as well as compromising the health of other countries and other primary data service issues has taken place. The partnership between the two guarantees and is a pillar for DSR to play an essential role in fostering smooth growth. It provides a good compromise between open data access and ensuring data security.

5. Findings

It can be seen that China introduced the DSR, the BRI digital networking for three critical reasons by adopting a liberal lens. First, the economic transition of China from a production-based economy to a service-based economy as in line with the new normal mode illustrates the need for China to develop alternate trade routes for goods and services in connection with its Western lagging provinces and neighboring China's wealthy coastal provinces. Also, when more and more medium and small merchants are connected to global trading via digital networks, the DSR can support them with a smart cross-border logistics system. Second and strictly related to the first reason, China seeks to strengthen regional integration by increasing the supply and value chains of South East Asian countries through infrastructure developments. The DSR will provide the BRI nations with advanced IT infrastructures, including broadband, e-commerce hubs, and smart cities. The updated IT infrastructure will switch the conventional businesses into digital industries and ramp up new development markets—both generating growth and employment in fields away from polluting industries. Third, China seeks to provide the international system additional funding sources in order to boost global multilateralism and political stability by encouraging investments in infrastructure. Adding new technologies, the DSR will help make the new infrastructure the most competitive and efficient assets possible. Through the liberalist perspective, the smooth existence of the BRI in the world stage enables it to strengthen the prosperity of China.

Also, in the lens of Netpolitik, the growth of the internet has changed conventional global politics. The technical strength, non-governmental positions, interdependency, and international rules are the most apparent claims of different scholars. It is assumed that BRI goes digital as a way of improving technical power, raising the involvement of non-governmental organizations, creating a pleasant atmosphere for collaboration. The DSR will then broaden global trade through transnational e-commerce and boost the network quality of the country. Thus, China is the biggest

beneficiary. It, as the world market, has the full production infrastructure, the manufacturing costs, and the price of different products are marketable. With this benefit, the Alibaba group has placed BRI countries on the e-business platforms. It can be seen in Russia, Asia, Arab and other countries, Chinese products are typical. Thus, the Silk Road would extend the reach of Chinese goods further through e-commerce in China, Arabia, and other nations. Equally important, China is continuously tapping new markets and technologies, allowing China to dominate rivals in terms of size. Also, China can take advantage of smaller economies and have the power to influence and manipulate their national policies.

Moreover, there are also risks that China cannot ignore. In some ways, the digitization of BRI will amplify the current BRI problem, such as political, ideology, data, and privacy hazards. It will also introduce some new problems to be tackled as cybersecurity threats. In response to these risks, China is first and foremost specialized in using big data technology to monitor and analyze the public opinion network in order to counter the jeopardizes. Data about the threats posed by the respective national governments should be gathered in large numbers from the internet, local newspapers, and journals as well as empirical and unbiased studies. It has been regularly providing early warning reports to related companies and Chinese residents in the local area until adverse political events arise to support specific companies to mitigate losses.

6. Conclusion

There are three factors behind the emergence of the DSR and some of China's proposed initiatives, including (1) economic transition, (2) strengthening regional integration, and (3) offering financial sources to boost global multilateralism and political stability. The governments and people of BRI countries will provide additional support once they acknowledge their role in commercial promotion. With the enhanced level of economic growth, the BRI nations will also have more resources to realize the successful development, which is an important BRI goal. Also, it smooths out construction and outstanding accomplishments can also allow governments and people to participate actively in BRI construction, and can then stimulate economic development by building infrastructure and enhancing interoperability. Similarly, China is attempting to develop a new cost-effective alternative and to challenge the existing order. For BRI countries, several options could allow them to be mutually beneficial to China.

Moreover, the growth of the internet would give developing countries the ability to reform international rules. Through BRI's digital assistance, China has the strength and the demand to govern in the BRI area. The development of international regulation during the period of the legalization of the international community represents not only the power of a great nation but also its diplomatic capacity. China is developing international rules in the BRI area, on the one side. In order to ensure the smooth implementation of BRI, the creation and enforcement of relevant international rules are essential. China emphasizes its position in current frameworks for bilateral and multilateral cooperation; uses not only the maritime route but also uses the international land road; emphasizes the construction of infrastructure. BRI focuses on building infrastructure, enhancing links, improving business and trading conditions, and supporting economic development.

Concerning cybersecurity risks, it can be seen that cyberspace development is inevitable. In turn, tensions between cultures, ideologies of philosophy, cyber terrorism, and cybercrime would be exacerbated, and personal security and privacy threatened. Consequently, new challenges will begin to emerge with the advancement of internet technology.

This study did, however, not use particular data as one of the limitations to calculate risks and returns. Nevertheless, everybody understands that the pace of internet growth is not at all hindered by current and future threats. To deal with this, China should exploit the existing structure for multilateral cooperation and enhance bilateral mechanisms for cooperation, to develop inter-regional partners and collaboration mechanisms. Inter-regional alliances and

coordination structures actively support the establishment of cyberspace governance in the region. It can compensate in particular for China's lack of research and development ability.

Moreover, the EU is a vital collaborator in developing cross-regional coordination frameworks. Europe is the Western end of the BRI, and also many countries of Central and Eastern Europe are significant. Sino-EU relations expanded to new heights following the financial crisis in 2008. Compared to China's new Silk Road, the EU had a global policy and a digital single market strategy. Although China and the EU are seeking to collaborate, it is not enough from the study point of view. The study suggests that there will be plenty of room for Sino-EU cooperation on the internet by pushing policy forward.

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