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Participation in The Dialogue with the World: Eurasia 2025

By MIFUNE Emi

On February 28, I participated as one of the panelists in "The Dialogue with the World: Eurasia 2025," an international symposium co-organized by the Japan Forum on International Relations, The Global Forum of Japan, and the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS). I would like to thank once again Mr. Takahata of JFIR and all staff related to the event. At the symposium I made a presentation on "what is happening in Eurasia?". For those who are interested in the specifics of how China has been conducting their diplomacy, please read my books, "Chugoku Gaikou Senryaku (Chinese Diplomatic Strategy)" (Kodansha Sensho Metier, 2016.), and "Bei-Chu-Ro Power Shift to Nihon (US, China, Russia's Power Shift and Japan)" (Keiso Shobo, 2017.). In these books, I have articulated the Chinese diplomacy from the perspective of neither a "panda hugger" (pro-China), nor a "dragon slayer" (anti-China).

To answer the question "what is happening in Eurasia?," the simply put conclusion is that China is restructuring the international order by utilizing "One Belt One Road" (OBOR), aiming to achieve Pax Sinica. Many mass media in Japan love to introduce this OBOR as an economic initiative. The economic aspect, however, is just a part of the OBOR. Mr. Xi Jinping of China has iterated that OBOR goes from "the country-to-country community of common destiny" to "the regional community of common destiny," and even further to "the community of common destiny for mankind," uniting the development of China and the countries on the route. OBOR is an initiative to form a China-led international order, in another words "the community of common destiny for mankind," therefore it pursuits the world order of Pax Sinica.

What China is promoting through OBOR are, first of all, to build "Five Cooperation Priorities" which are (1) policy coordination, (2) facilities connectivity, (3) unimpeded trade, (4) financial integrity, and (5) people-to-people bond. OBOR is an initiative of building

China-led global governance through forming of the connectivity that comes with the joint construction of the economic corridor. By expanding and developing the connectivity through OBOR, China aims to form the “community of shared interests” and the “community of shared responsibility,” then it aims to transform the world’s political and economic order to China-led global governance by forming what China calls “the community of common destiny for mankind,” or Pax Sinica. China has iterated “to adhere to the principles of One Belt One Road –discuss, build, and share together.” By emphasizing the word “together,” China calls to “construct a new type of international relations that sets cooperation/win-win in the core” not by alliance, but by partnership. With OBOR, China calls on to the countries along the OBOR to mutually respect each other’s sovereignty, dignity, territorial integrity, and the development style as well as the social system, emphasizes the need to respect each other’s core interest and serious concern, to build the mutually beneficial security mechanism. Consequently, OBOR has the aspect that demands to the neighboring countries to recognize the “space claimed by the expanding China” as “China’s territory,” undermining the Western universal norms such as human rights, liberty, and the rule of law.

Subsequently, I’d like to give four major things what China is doing through OBOR. First, connecting OBOR with other country’s or region’s platforms. China is not newly establishing OBOR from the scratch. What China calls as OBOR is an initiative that is connecting strategically the already existing regional cooperation platforms. China is trying to connect OBOR with various regional platforms of the neighboring countries, such as Kazakhstan’s “Bright Path,” Eurasian Economic Union proposed by Russia, Master Plan of ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC), Turkey’s “Middle Corridor,” Mongolia’s “Road to Development,” United Kingdom’s “Northern Powerhouse,” European Union’s “Juncker Plan,” “16 + 1 Cooperation” by Central & Eastern Europe and China, and Poland’s “Amber Road.”

Second, the development of China’s new colonialism in Indian Ocean, namely the Port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka, for example. China is expanding its interests in the Indian Ocean, including some dramatic behaviors as if trying to clean the “Qing Dynasty’s history of shame.” As Professor Hirotaka Watanabe of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, one of the panelist at “Eurasia 2025,” exactly pointed out that China, a land power, is trying to rise as a sea power. In addition to the land and sea power attempts, it is worrisome that China is also trying to make “Space Information Corridor” through OBOR. China aims to build the network of early warning system in the field of “maritime disaster prevention and risk

management" through OBOR mechanism, and the "Space Information Corridor" stands on the integrated information network of three systems: (1) earth observation satellite "Yaogan" (remote sensing), (2) communication satellite, and (3) navigation satellite "BeiDou." So China is trying to be a cyber power and space power in the respective areas.

Third, China is trying to develop a favorable international environment for "Made in China 2025" through OBOR. "Made in China 2025" is a three-step development plan announced by Chinese government in May, 2015. China aims to join "the world's manufacturing powerhouse" in the "first step" by 2025, aims to raise its manufacturing industry to the mid-level among the world's manufacturing powerhouse in the "second step" by 2035, then in the "third step" it aims to be the top of the manufacturing powerhouse by 2045. In the fields experiencing the difficulty to see rapid innovation, China is absorbing the technology by acquiring foreign companies. Meanwhile, China is acquiring mineral resources and markets in the developing countries through OBOR. "Friendship Chains" stated in OBOR is not only an economic means but also a political one. "The State Council's Notice on Announcing 'Made in China 2025'" insists that it will "integratedly allocate the military/civilian technological resources, jointly capture the military and civilian technologies, support the effective utilization of military and civilian technologies, and promote the diversion in the basic research." We should be cautious that "Made in China 2025" which promotes military-and-civilian technological usages, and OBOR are inter-connected.

Fourth, by forming the OBOR partnerships, China is making its policy to be heard easier in the international community, or using it as a mean to deter the policy or behavior of the international community that China does not favor. For example, a defense plan against merger & acquisition, minding China, drafted for European companies, was opposed by Central and Eastern European countries. Italy, France and Germany, kept appealing to the European Commission, regarding the acquisitions by Chinese companies, to tighten the regulation for the cases of strategic companies, and ones financially sponsored by government or official organization, to give the European Union the authority to block such investments. Though such attempt was blocked by the Central and Eastern European countries which are strengthening "16 + 1" framework. In response to the move, German Foreign Minister Mr. Gabriel and some others expressed their concern that China would divide the EU's China policy by controlling the Central and Eastern European countries. Also, to give an example of Greece, a country deepening its relation with China in recent years, EU had to give up its collective statement at the United Nations

Human Rights Council last year regarding the human rights concern in China, because it was supposed to be unanimously agreed by all 28 EU member countries to be submitted as “EU statement” but Greece opposed it.

There will be no problem with China becoming more influential if it is a peaceful rise. It's a pleasure if a friendly neighbor emerges peacefully. But the problems are, how the “expanding China” would use its increasing influence, and how it would affect Japan. As China is busy developing the “Polar Silk Road,” it would increase its presence in Nansei Islands, as well as at Tsugaru and Soya Channels. The security environment for Japan will likely be tougher. Japan should not consider China's Japan diplomacy or OBOR as part of “friendship chains” like it's done in Central Asia and Europe. Neither should it regard China's diplomacy in Eurasia from an European perspective, where China is not as much of a direct security threat. So Japan should consider how to deal with OBOR, only after assessing where Japan is positioned in China's policies aiming to realize Pax Sinica. Since late last year, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress has been discussing “Heroes and Martyrs Protection Law” to uplift “the spirit of heroic martyrs and patriotism,” and it will become the new law during this year's NPC. This law prohibits the criticism on the Chinese Communists' “anti-Japanese partisan” that fought against Japanese military during the Sino-Japan War. Making September 30, 2014 the Martyrs' Day, China has done some events to honor martyrs. The list of “anti-Japanese martyrs and heroes” was published as a part of such events, though some pointed out that it included some people who did not exist. How “history overwriter China” is seeing Japan, how it's acting in the Nansei Islands area and around Japan –we should consider Japan's diplomacy in Eurasia after assessing China's mid- and long-term goals calmly. What is happening in Eurasia? We should not regard OBOR of China that aims to realize Pax Sinica only from the viewpoint of business opportunity.

(This is the English translation of an article written by MIFUNE Emi, Professor at Komazawa University, which originally appeared on the e-forum “Hyakka-Seiho (Hundred Flowers in Full Bloom)” of JFIR on March 13, 2018.)