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海外·特稿



给丝绸之路经济带建设支几招儿

文 | 泰德·普林斯

我对丝绸之路还是比较熟悉的。上世纪70年代，我在巴基斯坦的伊斯兰堡生活过两年，那里离喜马拉雅山不远。夏天去临近山区避暑的时候，我曾多次到访那些千年丝绸之路上



丝绸之路沿线国家的手工艺人

的遗迹。与之临近的阿富汗也位于古丝绸之路，我经常去喀布尔的大集市购物。那里的商贩都穿着传统的中亚服饰，在一座座遮挡住烈日的帐篷里做生意。他们大多是文盲，但这并不妨碍



▲ 丝绸之路沿线国家的伊斯兰风格建筑



▲ 古代丝绸之路及海上丝绸之路路线图

他们精明地与外国人讨价还价赚大钱。他们身处的文明看起来已经落后于大时代，甚至有些原始，但他们出色的商业头脑以及坚韧的性格不输任何人，这正如他们几百年前的祖先一样。

我住在巴基斯坦的时候，也经常去参观博物馆和旧建筑，去欣赏那些伊斯兰风格的建筑、绘画以及手工艺品，比如手工打造的黄铜制品、手工编织的地毯等。虽然在那里生活的时间不长，但是我觉得自己对于丝绸之路上的国家和人民，以及如今他们为实现经济繁荣所需要的帮助，都有一定的了解。

中国是古丝绸之路上的重要组成部分，由此也和这条道路沿线上的国家形成了密切的关系，这和英国与欧洲其他国家的关系差不多。一句话，当你接近他人的时候，也就成为了他们命运的一部分。如今，这条道路上的很多国家都需要外界帮助其加速工业化建设，帮助它们的人民提高科学文化水平。中国提出的“一带一路”建设愿景中，丝绸之路经济带建设是重要的组成部分，这自然少不了建设道路、港口、机场、城建等基础设施。在21世纪，数字等高科技已日益成为基础设施的一部分，在这种情况下，利用各种新技术满足当地发展的实际需求，将有

助于真正全面推进新丝绸之路的建设，并显著提升其价值。

投资数字文保

我在巴基斯坦买过很多传统的手工艺品并学会了欣赏，那是一些西方国家乃至中国都没有的工艺品，比如拼接的地毯、莫卧儿王朝时期的微缩画等等。

古丝绸之路上的大多数国家都盛行伊斯兰文化，人类历史上产生的很多优秀艺术作品正来自于此。不幸的是，几百年来大大小小的战争毁掉了大量古籍、艺术品和建筑，如今这种情况还在发生。为了保护那些还在的艺术品，中国可以考虑帮助这些国家开展一个“数字丝绸之路”工程，将它们的典籍、艺术品和纪念碑等实现数字化，这类似于谷歌公司开展的图书及博物馆数字化工程。现在的数字化技术已经可以扫描并3D打印巨大的纪念碑，此种做法一方面能够保护无数珍贵的人类文明留下的艺术品，另一方面也能通过艺术纽带密切中国与这些国家的联系。

丝绸之路艺术的数字化能创造出很多新机遇，比如促进旅游业的发展，加强东西方的文化

泰德·普林斯
佩斯领导力研
究院创始人暨
CEO





交流，这有助于增强这些国家的文明自信，也有助于中国与中亚国家的文化交往。与庞大的基础设施建设投入相比，数字化工程所需的投资量不大，但产生的效果却不可小觑。

留住语言文化

我在巴基斯坦生活的时候学过一些乌尔都语，这是巴基斯坦的国语。但大多数巴基斯坦人只说地方语言，有的连一句乌尔都语都不说。实际上，巴基斯坦有几百种语言，很多都不为人知并濒临失传，也有很多已失传多年。这只是一个国家的情形，不难想象，古丝绸之路沿线国家有成千上万种濒临灭绝的古老语言。其中很多是阿拉伯语、波斯语、印度语的古老版本，语言学家还没来得及将其分门别类加以整理研究，会说这些语言的老人们便都已去世了。一种语言消失的时候，建立其上的文化就失去了根基，通过这种语言联系在一起的人们也失去了联系的纽带。

如今录音技术非常发达，不要说先进的专业设备，连手机录音的质量都很好，在这种条件下，为后人保存下更多的语言资料不是难事。我们可以把这些资料保存在云端，还可以利用数字技术来比较分析不同语言的语法结构。我认为，以数字技术来记录和编目丝绸之路沿线国家的古老语言可以成为“一带一路”工程的建设项目之一，这能够增加这一工程的文化深度。当地人看到中国如此尊重他们的文化，必将产生更多的信任与感激之情。

发展数字金融

我在喀布尔的大集市上买艺术品的时候，那些商人接受我签字的支票时从不怀疑其真伪，哪怕这支票是他们从而没去过的国家、从没听说过的银行发行的。他们从事商品交易时使用的金融手段与千百年来的前辈们如出一辙，现



代金融科技还远远没有渗透到那些地方。

自古以来，农业和贸易是丝绸之路沿线国家发展的基础，中国与这些国家发展贸易往来已有几千年的历史。如今互联网技术推动了全球贸易和国际汇兑的大发展，中国在这两个领域都是领头羊之一。我认为，中国在帮助这些国家利用数字技术发展贸易和金融方面还有很大潜力，这种方式可以弥补很多由于当地基础设施或产业发展不足产生的问题。

从理论上说，这些国家所处的地理位置使其有机会发展成为“丝绸之路上的新加坡”。我是在缺乏实业基础的情况下，这些国家可以



手工饰品及制毯技术是丝绸之路沿线国家的文明精华。



通过发展转口贸易来实现经济发展。在结算方式上，我们可以开展一些最大胆的想象，比如是否可以使用比特币(bitcoin)结算？当然，由于缺乏监管，现在比特币的名声不大好。那中国政府与丝绸之路沿线国家间是否能够合作开发一种新的数字货币？我们不妨称之为“丝绸币”(silkcoin)。这种国家间统一的数字货币有助于大幅度降低交易成本，促进出口。

现代经济对数字技术的依赖日益加深，中国拥有很多成熟的数字货币银行技术，输出技术有助于帮助这些国家发展现代贸易金融，也有利于中国与这些国家的贸易金融往来。



上图：拜科努尔航天中心发射场
下图：“太空电梯”概念图

研发新材料

在生产和使用丝绸方面，中国是世界的领导者。如今中国和很多国家都在开发生产蚕丝的新技术、新工艺，寻找利用这种织物材料的新方法。有很多科学家表示，蚕丝的物理结构相当坚韧，可以为研发新材料提供很多参考。对于丝绸之路上那些最早依靠丝绸贸易获得了发展的国家来说，现代丝织技术还能有哪些帮助呢？

哈萨克斯坦是丝绸之路上最大的节点之一，世界上最大的航天发射场——拜科努尔航天中心也坐落于此。拜科努尔航天中心是俄罗斯发射载人航天飞船的唯一基地，也是哈萨克斯坦一些产业的发展基础。利用火箭进入太空的成本很高，所以科学家们一直在研究各种新技术，“太空电梯”是其中一个令人兴奋的想法。太空电梯的主体是一根连接太空站和地球表面的缆绳，宇航员和货物可以通过它从地面到达太空站。这根缆绳必须又轻又坚韧，用什么材料制造合适呢？蚕丝或利用蚕丝原理研发的新材料自然是选项之一。利用蚕丝技术制造的太空电梯也算是一种“丝绸之路”，它一旦成为现实，将对哈萨克斯坦的航天工业产生很大影响。

综上，中国可以利用在材料科学领域取得的进步与之开展合作，共同研究如何让哈萨克斯坦的航天工业基础更好地发挥作用。

可能有人会觉得太空电梯离我们的现实生活太远，很不切实际，但通过研究蚕丝发展的新材料还会有更多实际用途，它对于经济和科技发展的推动作用实实在在的。

历史上的陆上与海上丝绸之路如今具有向太空发展的可能，这正寓意着现代社会发展的多维度特点。在这种情况下，我们必须以最广泛、最灵活的方式来建设新的丝绸之路，这对“一带一路”沿线的所有国家都将大有裨益。■

“The Silk Road Should be Digital and High Tech - and Go Into Space Too!”

**Dr. E. Ted Prince
Founder and CEO
Perth Leadership Institute
www.perthleadership.org**

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I want to tell you a little secret about the Silk Road; I lived on the Silk Road for 2 years in the 1970s. Actually I lived in Islamabad in Pakistan. That’s not far from the Himalayan Mountains which I used to visit in summer to get away from the heat of the plains. It’s not far from the old mountainous territory of Swat, which has been part of the Silk Road for thousands of years which I also visited several times. It’s near to Afghanistan, also part of the Silk Road, which I visited often.

I used to shop in the main bazaar in Kabul. The bazaar merchants were dressed in traditional Central Asian clothes and were often illiterate. They conducted their business from open tents to keep off the sun. But that didn’t stop them entering into tough negotiations with foreigners where they undoubtedly made money. Their culture looked old and even primitive but they were tough, smart and financially savvy business people. Probably just like their ancestors were hundreds and thousands of years ago.

When I lived in Pakistan I also used to visit the museums and old buildings there to see the Islamic architecture, paintings and works of art such as metal work and carpets. I used to get woken up by the sound of the mosques and the imams calling the faithful to prayer. In Ramadan my servants would get irritated because they couldn’t eat during the day, and at night there would be big feasts when they could finally eat.

So I feel that I have some familiarity and sympathy for the Silk Road, its countries and peoples and the kinds of things they need to help them prosper. I only lived there for a short time. But China has been part of the Silk Road for thousands of years. It has one part, Xinjiang, which is an integral part of it. So it’s natural for it to want to play a part in its modern development. It’s kind of just like the UK is part of Europe– when you are located close to other peoples you also become part of their destiny too.

The Silk Road is an important issue for China. It is a way to promote not only its economy but also those of the countries along the route. Many of these economies need help so that they can industrialize faster and thus help the industrial and scientific progress of their peoples.

For China the Silk Road is One Belt, One Road and is seen as being physical infrastructure such as roads, railways, seaports and airports not to mention urban infrastructure. But in the 21st century we all know that infrastructures are increasingly digital and technological, not just physical. So we also need to think of digital and technological elements of the Silk Road so we can achieve its full promise.

Below I am going to suggest some digital and technological projects which would contribute significantly to the value of the Silk Road project. But these projects can be done at only a fraction of the cost of creating the physical infrastructure of the Silk Road projects. This does not mean that the physical side is less important or valuable; just that the digital and technological contributions can also be great and can be achieved at a relatively low cost.

Preserving and Restoring the Silk Road's Art and Culture

I used to buy handicrafts when I was in Pakistan. Of course these were all traditional and handmade. They were unfamiliar for me and I bought many of them. I learned to appreciate the finer aspects of some of this work such as the stitching of the carpets and the fineness of the Mughal miniature paintings. This was art I had never seen in the West or even in China.

The countries along most of the road have Islamic cultures. Some of the most beautiful paintings and art ever produced from humans have come from these cultures. But unfortunately many centuries of war and civil strife have resulted in many of these works of art, books and monuments being destroyed. Unfortunately this is still the case as we have seen with the ISIS destruction of irreplaceable monuments and antiquities in Syria. The remaining works must be preserved now otherwise there is no doubt more will be lost.

I think one way in which China can contribute to the development of the digital Silk Road is to launch a project to digitize all of the books in these countries, their paintings and monuments. This would be like the digitization of paintings carried out by Bill Gates in the US and by the Google project to digitize all Western books. These days it is now possible to scan even huge monuments in 3D and to recreate them using 3D printers. If China were to do this it would preserve artistic works of incalculable artistic and human value and in the process would bind China closer to the artistic and cultural lives and circumstances in these countries.

Digitizing the art of the Silk Road would create new industries and opportunities. It would spur tourism and bring Western scholars to look at these rare collections. It would also help build a sense of pride in the citizens of these countries. So it would have many impacts.

Many of these works digitized in this way would actually also include many Chinese works of art created on and by the Silk Road many centuries ago with the contact between these peoples and countries with Chinese culture. Above all this project would be very inexpensive compared with the much larger cost of physical infrastructure so it should easily be able to be done as part of these Road project.

Preserving and Understanding the Silk Road Languages and Literatures

When I lived in Pakistan I actually studied Urdu, the national language of Pakistan. But although it's the national language, most people in Pakistan speak only their provincial or even their local languages as their primary tongue and sometimes they don't even speak one word of Urdu.

Pakistan actually has hundreds of languages. Many of them are hardly known and some are almost extinct. Others were extinct a long time ago. So although it's one country, it also comprises hundreds or more linguistic regions. So the Silk Road has many thousands of linguistic regions too.

The countries of the Silk Road have numerous languages. Many of these are the ancient versions of Arabic, Persian and Hindi but there are many hundreds, maybe thousands of languages that are unclassified. Many of these are already being lost as older people die and are not replaced by speakers of these languages. As is the case in many other areas of the world, when you lose a language, you lose almost all of the cultural content and context of the people who spoke it.

These days it's pretty easy to record a language and store it for posterity. All you need is a phone, not even a special recording machine. You can store the language on the Web in the Cloud. Once there you can use digital tools to compare and correlate thousands of languages and their linguistic and grammatical structures.

I think a hugely important part of the Silk Road project is to digitally record and catalogue all these languages so that we can keep them for posterity and for later scholars to come along to study them in more detail. I think this will add depth and respect to the China Silk Road project by showing their peoples the respect that China has for their languages and cultures. Yet again this work is going to be deeply appreciated by the peoples of the Silk Road.

Silk Road Fintech

I used to buy carpets and "antiques" in the Kabul bazaar from merchants who would accept paper checks from any country without ever checking if you were a real person or a fake. They used many of the same money-changing and trading methods as their ancestors did thousands of years earlier. I could write a check in front of them on a bank they had never heard of in country far away that they had never visited and they would unquestioningly accept the check for whatever I bought from them, no matter how expensive. Even when I lived there the merchants were using fintech, just pre-Internet fintech. Think what they could do with modern fintech!

The countries of the Silk Road had two things going for them. The first is that they were and are mainly agrarian economies. The second – which we tend to forget – is that they were then and are even now, traders. Of course, that's why China is engaged with them since it has traded with all of them for thousands of years. Sometimes nothing changes. The Silk Road countries are still traders now.

So of course, one of the things that would help them enormously is support of their trading. These days trading globally is promoted digitally on the Internet. That includes both trading activities themselves and especially money-changing and international banking.

China is a global leader in both of these activities. I think that there is a huge potential in helping the Silk Road countries to become better traders using digital technologies. In this way they can overcome their shortages of physical infrastructure and their lack of domestic industries.

In essence the Silk Road countries can become the Silk Road equivalents of Singapore – that is, they can become entrepot economies; economies that mainly depend on trade rather than production for their economic growth, just as Singapore and Hong Kong have done throughout their recent histories.

One of these areas might be to help these countries use bitcoins. The Bitcoin economy has gotten a bad reputation because it has been used extensively by criminals and other shady characters. But how about inventing something we can call the Silkcoin – that is, a digital currency just for the Silk Road countries, backed by their governments and the government of China? Such a currency would significantly reduce

the cost of trading and of trading in different currencies. Perhaps this could become a major export for them?

Modern economies are increasingly dependent on digital technology for all of the functions of banking and money. If China could help these countries in this way based on its already impressive fintech technologies, this would be an appropriate way to help countries that for all of the history of the Silk Road, were primarily trading countries rather than countries that produced things themselves. In so doing China would be helping to support the domestic traders and entrepreneurs in these countries.

Silk Technology

China is the world's leader in the production and use of silk. It understands the technology and the process to use it for fabrics and other purposes. Like many other countries it has scientists who are conducting research into how to improve it, both in terms of its sheer strength and in terms of its industrial uses. Many scientists predict that the strongest materials of the future will be either made of silk, or something like silk, or with a structure that takes its inspiration from the structure of silk, even if it's not silk at all. But how would that impact the countries of the Silk Road from a technological perspective?

Kazakhstan is one of the biggest countries traversed by the Silk Road. You might be aware that it is home to the Baikonur Cosmodrome, the largest spaceport in the world. So space rockets and getting people into space is a key part of Kazakhstan's industrial base now. In the future we can be sure that humans will colonize space and so launches of humans into space will become even more important both to the world generally and to Kazakhstan.

But rockets are expensive and scientists are still trying to figure out how to get humans into space much more cheaply. One of the most exciting ideas is that of the space elevator. That is an elevator that goes into space on a long rope attached to something in orbit that takes the elevator into space. But to do that you need an immensely strong cable. Where will that come from?

Silk is one of the strongest fibers known to man. I've already discussed above the research that is being conducted to make silk immensely stronger. If we could take silk to this next step it could become an important part of the colonization of space. If and when someone makes an immensely strong cable it's going to be competition for space launches and especially to this key part of Kazakhstan's industrial base.

So I think that in looking at the economy of the Silk Road, the potential for new materials to spur the space industry in Kazakhstan is a potentially important issue, especially to the Kazakh people. Entrepreneurs should see this as a potential opportunity for materials and space scientists. I am sure scientists in Kazakhstan would welcome a partnership with space and materials scientist in China to help them address this vital industrial issue.

And if we can put a space elevator in Kazakhstan, why not in the other countries of the Silk Road? A network of space elevators along the Silk Road would be a huge spur to their economies. If China is already going to help provide roads, railways, airports and ports then it would also be logical to provide spaceports. After all, once humans start colonizing space, having a spaceport will be just as normal as having a railway station or an airport; if you want to be a part of the global economy spaceports will be important too.

Now you might object that silk will never get as strong as that. But that's not the point. It doesn't matter if the space cable is based on silk or some other material, everyone will need it for their space elevators and the structure of silk gives us some great ideas on how ultra-strong materials and cables might be constructed.

The Silk Road to Space

We have always thought of a road as being something that is flat and on the ground. But the concept of the Silk Road also encompasses an ocean Silk Road.

I think that the concept of the Silk Road must also encompass space. The countries of the Silk Road, like all countries will at some point have economies which will also depend on space activities in the future. So space elevators or other ways to get to space will also be important for the countries of the Silk Road.

I think the Silk Road concept must also include roads into space too. We must think in the most broad and agile manner in developing the concept of the Silk Road. That's good for all the countries on the road, China included.

Dr. E. Ted Prince, the Founder and CEO of the Perth Leadership Institute, located in Florida in the US has also been CEO of several other companies, both public and private. He is the author of two books: "The Three Financial Styles of Very Successful Leaders" (McGraw-Hill, 2005) and "Business Personality and Leadership Success", Amazon Kindle 2011 as well as numerous other publications in this area. He is a frequent speaker at industry conferences. He works with large corporations globally on leadership development programs and coaches senior executives and teams in the area of financial leadership. He has held the position of Visiting Professor at the University of Florida in the US in its Graduate Business School and is currently a Visiting Professor at the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics in China.