

A large COSCO container ship is docked at a port. The ship's hull is white with the word "COSCO" in large blue letters. It is loaded with numerous colorful shipping containers (red, green, blue, white) stacked high. Several large orange gantry cranes are positioned behind the ship, and two smaller red tugboats are visible in the water in the foreground.

THE GLOBAL SPREAD OF CHINESE PORT CITIES

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0. INTRODUCTION

The typical definition of a port is 'as a place where the mode of transportation changes from land to water-borne systems'.¹ Historically, water has been the barrier that separates nations, and from which invading fleets might appear: yet it is also the medium that facilitates the trading of goods. Ports are thus important places for both economic and cultural interchange. Ports all over the world have expanded in response to the needs and desires, and as such they reflect the international relationships that under a condition of globalisation have now spread everywhere. All countries today have hence been influenced and shaped by ports and by the economic and political systems that they feed.

This thesis investigates the historical background of port cities in China, tracing this through the unsettling phase of European colonialism in the 19th century and then up to the recent establishment of overseas port facilities in countries such as Greece and Sri Lanka. The aim of this essay is to investigate how the buildings and spaces of Chinese port cities first came into being and how they have been influenced by the other nations, so as to examine how each of these ports relates to its adjacent city. As a case study, particular emphasis will be placed on the new facilities being built by a major Chinese shipping company, COSCO, in the ancient Greek port of Piraeus, which for millennia has served Athens and its region.

¹ B. S. Hoyle and David Pinder, *Cityport industrialization and regional development: spatial analysis and planning strategies* (Pergamon Press, 1981), 12.

In order to examine how the architecture of the Chinese port cities has changed, both primary and secondary sources have been used for the research for this thesis. The essay will also touch upon the darker side of port cities, which includes the smuggling of drugs and people, tax evasion, criminal networks, and it will discuss the technological and cultural exchanges that ports bring to different cities and countries.

With this aim in mind, the thesis is split into 3 parts. The first part is dedicated to ancient Chinese ports and gives a general outline of the historical significance of trading on the China seas and main rivers. It thus includes the ancient long-distance trade routes, known romantically as the 'Silk Road', but now more usually termed the Silk Routes as there were many directions of trading by land and sea. Hence the Silk Routes formed a collection of historically important trade routes between China, West Asia, the Middle East and the Mediterranean, connecting 'East' with 'West'. Written sources of information on the Silk Road are relatively scarce, and those dealing with Chinese ports during various dynasties are even rarer. Therefore, the information for this thesis has been gathered from disparate sources such as maps, scholarly essays and historical photographs.

The second part of the thesis deals with the impact of European and US colonialism. 'Unequal' treaty is the term given by the Chinese to a series of treaties signed with Western powers during the 19th and early-20th centuries by the Qing Dynasty after military attacks threats by foreign powers such as Britain. This section of the thesis explores the cultural negotiation and exchange in the first five 'Treaty Ports' established in 1842: Shanghai, Guangzhou/Canton, Mingzhou/Ningbo, Fuzhou/Fuchow and Xiamen/Amoy. Also important here are Hong Kong and Macau, which in today's China are designated as Special Administrative Regions, but which were previously ruled by Britain and Portugal respectively.

The final part of the thesis shows that while China was taken advantage of by Western imperialist nations in the 19th and early-20th centuries, today the roles have switched to the extent that China is now taking advantage of developing nations and also wealthier European countries in what is called by some the '21st Century Maritime Silk Road'. It will therefore examine 'The Belt and Road Initiative', which is a major investment plan by the Chinese government that already links together 71 countries in Europe, Asia, Middle East, Latin America and Africa.

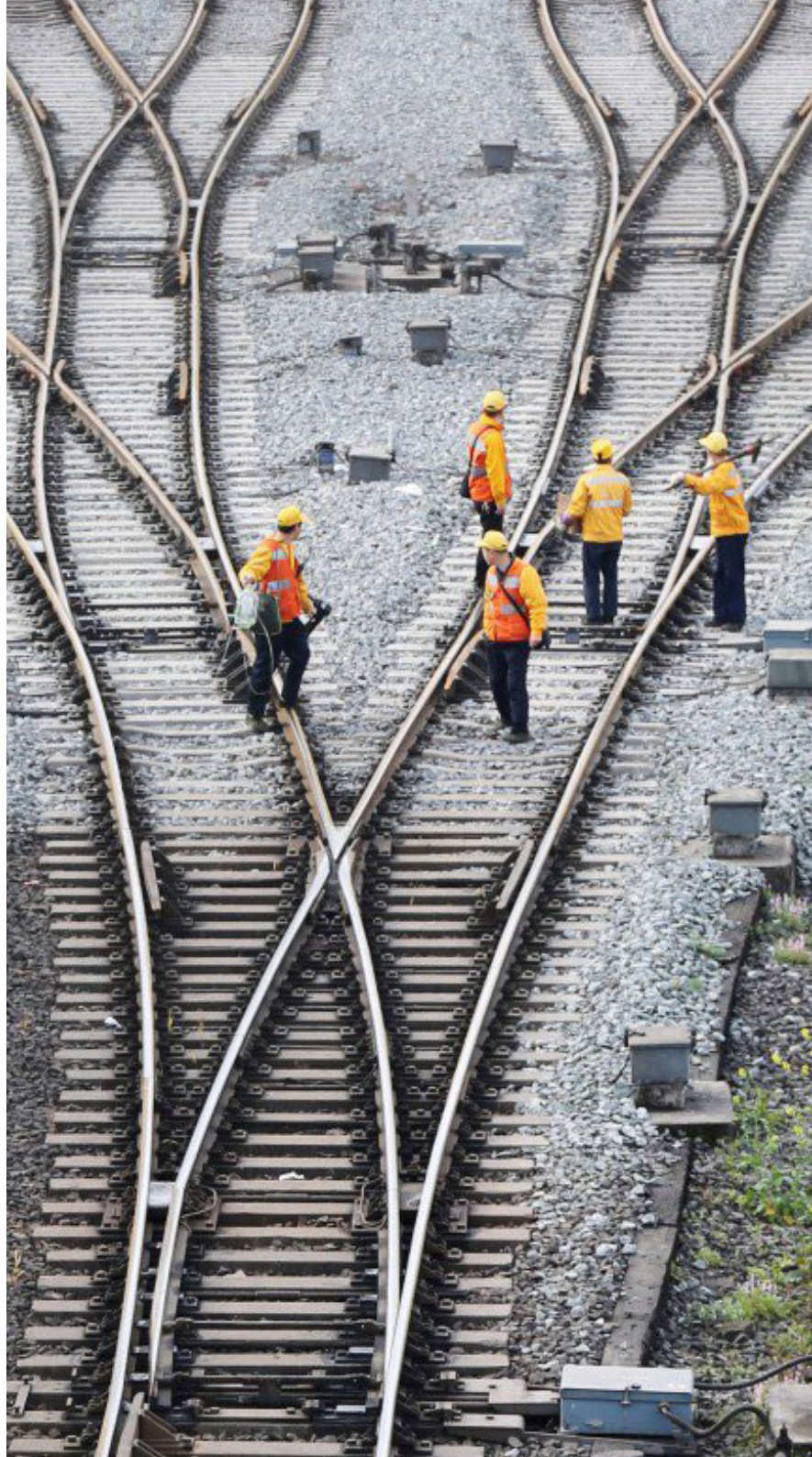
As a result of this strategy, two connected companies – COSCO Shipping Ports (which operates the trading) and China Merchants Port Holdings (which runs the port facilities) – have now invested in cargo terminals in more than 40 ports around the Indian Ocean, Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic rim. More than half of African countries today owe money to China for infrastructural development in their country. Many observers claim that these generous loans from the Chinese government should be seen as a 'debt trap', meaning that China is gradually economically colonising those countries that find themselves unable to pay back their debt.

INTRODUCTION

Whatever the ulterior motive, it is remarkable the level of overseas investments in ports by China, far more than any other country around the world. Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka and the aforementioned Piraeus Port in Greece are prime examples of this situation, with the latter being studied here in most detail since through fieldwork research I have been able to build up first-hand experience of what the port is like after it was acquired by COSCO in 2016.

The concluding section discusses more broadly what is happening now as a consequence of this transplantation of Chinese ports, assessing the success of these in terms of contemporary global trade but also how they are conceptually related back to traditional Chinese ports. The ultimate aim of the thesis is to draw attention to this significant investment in new port buildings and shipping infrastructure, which to date has been overlooked by those writing about architectural and urban development.

[Fig. 1] Workers inspect tracks at the Dazhou railway station in Sichuan province, part of a Belt and Road Initiative freight rail route.





1. ANCIENT CHINESE PORTS



The seas have long been considered by human societies as a barrier, a threat and also a contact zone. They have enabled various peoples around the globe to establish and maintain trading and cultural relationships. During the period of the ancient Silk Routes, the seas were thus crucial for both commercial and military purposes. In the case of the land known today as China, it is surrounded by four major trading seas: Lake Qinghai, East China Sea, Lake Baikal and the South China Sea.

THE SILK ROUTES

The Silk Routes were a historically important trading network between China, West Asia, the Middle East and the Mediterranean, established as a result of commercial and cultural interactions. The Silk Routes were initially formed during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) with the ancient Chinese capital city of Chang'an (长安, now Xi'an) as the eastern terminus and Byzantium/Constantinople, Antioch and Damascus as the most westerly end-points. It was a German traveller and geographer, Baron Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen who coined the term 'Silk Road' in 1877 in recognition of the lucrative ancient trade in that material, and yet it also encompassed of course the exchange of many other goods, ideas, beliefs and people. Other key traded items from China included porcelain pottery, spices and tea.

At the Chinese end of the Silk Routes, the importance of each of the coastal and river port cities altered over time. The key sea trading networks had in fact started long before the Silk Routes are believed to have started in c.130 BCE, and they remained in use until trade eventually collapsed once the Ottoman leader Mehmed II conquered Constantinople in 1453 CE, renaming it as Istanbul. During the earliest period, the usual name for silk was 'Ser', and came directly from the Chinese word, *Ser*. Silk was then extremely fashionable, with ancient Roman emperors wishing to dress themselves entirely in 'Seric cloth'². For over a thousand years, China kept secret the process of raising silkworms and producing silk, meaning that demand for the material continued to stimulate trade between foreign and Chinese merchants.

Purple dye (Tyrian purple) was also highly fashionable as the colour was so hard to produce, and hence it too was extensively exported along the Silk Routes. This dye was extracted from a small gland inside a specific shellfish that only became red on exposure to the sun. The colour depended on the length of exposure, changing from blue-ish violet to violet to reddish violet and finally to black-ish violet. The most prized variant was always the reddish purple since it was widely regarded as the 'colour of blood, the sun and fire'³.



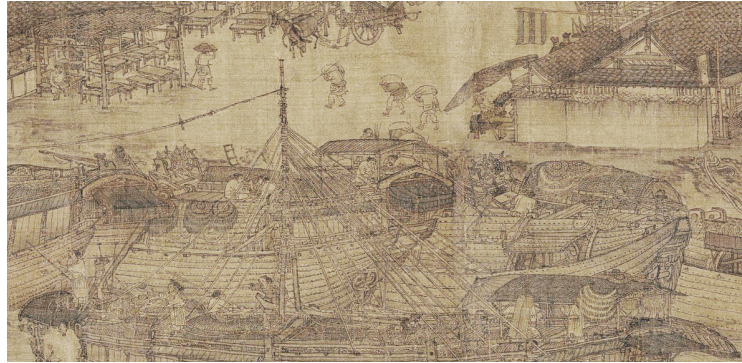
[Fig. 3] The silk shroud of Charlemagne made with gold and Tyrian purple.

² L. Boulbois, *The Silk Road* (Simpson Shand: London, 1966), 42.

³ L. Boulbois, *The Silk Road*, 43.

[Fig. 2] Map of Silk Routes

ANCIENT CHINESE PORTS



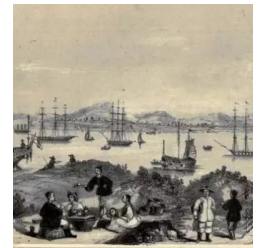
[Fig. 4-6] 'Along the River During the Qingming Festival' (清明上河圖), also known by its Chinese name as the Qingming Shanghe Tu, is a painting by Zhang Zeduan during the Song Dynasty. It captures the daily life of people, which includes the maritime trade.

IMPORTS AND EXPORTS IN DIFFERENT ZONES

The Silk Routes spanned the entire Eurasian region, in which the environments and climates can be described as ‘a series of ecological zones’⁴. The major sub-regions involved are as follows: Intermountain Desert and Oasis Belt; Trans-Eurasian Steppe Belt; China; the Mediterranean; Middle East; South Asia; Northeast Asia; Northern Europe; Mainland Southeast Asia; Island Southeast Asia; the Boreal Forest; and Arctic. Each region therefore contributed to the Silk Routes in their own different ways.

For example, the areas within the Arctic Circle such as Siberia were poorly suited for agriculture or raising livestock. Here the main contribution to the Silk Routes was ‘minks, ermine, sable fox, beaver, and other mammals that produce dense, rich fur’⁵. The so-called ‘Fur Road’ even drove Russian hunters eastwards, towards the Pacific Ocean. Meanwhile, Central Eurasia influenced and indeed controlled the economics and politics of the Silk Routes – for although the nations and cities were united in trade, mighty empires rose and fell, like those of Genghis Khan or Timur, by being able to dominate the others. Each of these empires required revenue to pay for ‘diverting much of the productive herding population into military duty’⁶. This revenue came from loot obtained from conquest, placing taxes on traded goods, or by extracting tribute from cities they had invaded.

To acquire the silk from China, merchants would transport the goods partly by land and partly by sea. Camels were used as the main beasts of burden for land travel, but such routes tended to be dangerous since they included ‘courses over rivers and mountains and through thick bush swarming with wild beasts and warlike tribes’⁷. Silk was especially profitable for trading, and thus from the end of the first century CE it was noticeable that the majority of imported ‘Seric silk’ was being transported by sea, shipped primarily to Arabic nations along with ‘furs, pepper, cinnamon, perfumes, metals, dyes and medical products’⁸.



[Fig. 7] Guangzhou Port during the Tang Dynasty

⁴ James A. Millward, *The Silk Road: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP USA, 2013), 13.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁷ L. Boulbois, *The Silk Road*, 55.

⁸ Ibid.

ANCIENT CHINESE PORTS



[Fig. 8] Painting of Guangzhou Port in the 17th century by a Dutch painter, New Hoff.



[Fig. 9-10] Paintings of African slaves in China during Tang Dynasty.

CHINESE SEA PORTS

As the trade through the Silk Routes grew and became gradually integrated into a quasi-global structure, and also started to incorporate other kinds of produce such as pottery and tea, a range of important sea ports were founded along China's coastal strip, of which the most famous were Guangzhou, Quanzhou, Ningbo, Mingzhou, Fuzhou and Hangzhou.

Guangzhou/Canton

Located in the Pearl River Delta on the southern Chinese coastline, Guangzhou (广州/Khan-fu/Canton) was considered to be the main starting point for the South China Sea Route. It is also conveniently situated at the intersection of the most important rivers in Southern China: Dongjiang, Xijiang and Beijiang. Jewish and Muslim and other foreign merchants flocked to the city because it specialised in the most precious goods of the Silk Routes, even if the most of the trade was for far humbler produce. For the foreign traders who set themselves up in Guangzhou, they soon found that trade was regulated by strict customs. A duty of 30 percent was collected on all kinds of merchandise in the port. Due to trade from the Persian Gulf, Red Sea and East Africa, as early as the Han Dynasty there were plentiful Western merchants selling ivory, incense, copper ingots, turtle shells and rhinoceros horns: in the other direction went Chinese raw silk, silk cloths with floral designs, gold, silver and fine quality pearls.

“Many big ships came from Borneo, Persia, Qunlun with spices, peals and jade piled up mountain high”⁹. – Buddhist monk, Jian Zhen.

During the Tang Dynasty (581–907 CE), a vast sea route stretching for about 14,000 km from Guangzhou was at its peak. Indeed, the tradition of African people coming over to China began under Tang rule. At the time, these Africans were termed ‘Kunlun slaves’ or ‘Black 厮’, and were relatively numerous in Guangzhou. Owning such ‘exotic’ slaves symbolised the level of one’s social class in China, and thus during the later Yuan Dynasty, Arab merchants were selling many African slaves to Chinese elite families.

⁹ Hays, J. (2019). “SILK ROAD DURING THE TANG DYNASTY (A.D. 618 - 907)” *Facts and Details*, <http://factsanddetails.com/china/cat2/sub90/entry-5441.html#chapter-11>, November 2016.



[Fig. 11] Map of Quanzhou's Ancient Walls during the Tang Dynasty

This map of Quanzhou shows the layout of the city and where the 7 city gates were located:

1. East Gate, Renfeng Gate, built in the Song Dynasty (after 1210 CE)
(东门, 仁凤门)
2. Ximen, built in the Tang Dynasty (904 CE)
(西门)
3. Dejimen, Nanfumen, Jianjian, built in the Southern Song Dynasty (1133 CE)
(南门: 德济门, 南熏门)
4. North Gate, Chaotianmen, built during the Tang Dynasty
(北门)
5. Tumen, Tonghuai Gate, Yingchunmen
(涂门)
6. New Gate
(新门)
7. Shuimen, Xinnan Gate, Tongjin Gate, which was connected to the water.
(水门, 新南门, 通津门)

Quanzhou/Chinchew/Zayton

From the later Song Dynasty through to the Yuan Dynasty, Quanzhou (泉州/Chinchew/Zayton) came to replace Guangzhou as the starting point for the Maritime Silk Road, and thus did so over a period of 400 years. The celebrated Italian medieval explorer, Marco Polo, described this port as 'one of the biggest harbours in the world, with ships of all sizes and provenances docking and setting sail, and a vibrant market in which merchants from across many regions.'¹⁰

The city of Quanzhou was surrounded by impressive inner and outer stone-built protective walls. Yet again, most of the foreign merchants were Arab and Persian. Throughout the period of the 'Five Dynasties', Chinese custom officers collected taxes from these overseas merchants at Mabanlankou, which lay just outside Quanzhou. Indeed, foreign businessmen were not permitted at all to live inside the city.

Quanzhou also became famous for its distinctive oyster-shell houses. The grey and white shells worked beautifully well set against the grey and red bricks that characterised the city. Most of the innovative architectural designs were built by Chinese traders that had returned home from Southeast Asia, and indeed most of the materials used in Quanzhou were imported from those same countries.



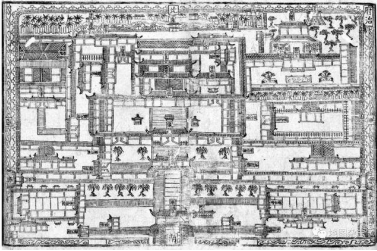
[Fig. 12] Traditional Oyster-shell Houses in Quanzhou

¹⁰ UNESCO team, "Quanzhou", *UNESCO*, 1991, <https://ru.unesco.org/silkroad/node/8474>.



[Fig. 13] Location map of Ningbo in relation to Shanghai

1. Shanghai
2. Ningbo



[Fig. 14] The earliest existing regional maps of Ningbo from Tang Dynasty



[Fig. 15] Map of Yellow River and Yangtze River

- A. Yellow River
- B. Yangtze River

Mingzhou/Ningbo

Mingzhou (明州/Ningbo 宁波) was established in 738 CE, during the Tang dynasty, as the third and most northerly of the three major seaports for foreign trade, alongside Guangzhou and Quanzhou. Mingzhou's port was able to open up a new Silk Route over to the Korean Peninsula, Japan and to other places in the South Seas generally. In also having the Yong River flowing through the city, Ningbo became one of the largest and most significant ports in China.

RIVER/LAND PORTS

There were also a number of important river and land ports that were vital for the Silk Routes. The two great rivers running through China from west to east are the Yellow River to the north and the Yangtze River to the south. Of the two, the Yellow River was the main source for Chinese civilisations ever since ancient times and therefore it became known as the 'Mother River' of the Chinese people. Many of the busiest ports of the Silk Route were situated along the Yellow River. These include Dongying, Ji'nan, Kaifeng, Zhengzhou, Sanmenzia, and Chang'an/X'ian.

The Yangtze River however is the longest river in Asia and so also provided many other prosperous ancient Chinese river ports including Nanjing, Wuhan, Chongqing, Chengdu, and Lijiang. The Grand Canal (京杭大运河) is the longest and oldest canal in the world, built between 584–610 CE in order to link the Yellow River and the Yangtze River together. The canal starts at Beijing and passes through different important river port cities including Shandong, Hangzhou and Zhejiang.



[Fig. 16] Map of Chan'an from Tang Dynasty showing the West and East Markets

Chang'an/X'ian

The most significant ancient Chinese capital, Chang'an (長安; now Xi'an), constituted the seat of power from the Zhou Dynasty through to the Tang Dynasty, and was also the eastern destination and main land port for the various Silk Routes. It could also technically be classed as a river port since it lay on a tributary off the Yellow River.

Chang'an was shaped as an irregular rectangle and was broken down into nine districts. It was built in four phases starting from around 200–195 BCE, when the fine royal palaces were erected. From 195–180 BCE the outer city walls were built and then from 141–87 BC the inner city walls were added on. The city was subdivided into 160 walled wards, each containing about 50–100 families. Chang'an during the Tang Dynasty also featured two large marketplaces where all the trade happened: an East Market that was for local Chinese people, and also the West Market (Xi) where most of the foreign merchants traded. Silk, leather, clothing and fodder were thus primarily sold in the latter. Officials would beat a gong 300 times in the morning and evening to announce the opening and closing times of these markets. People in the different wards were not allowed to leave after the night-time curfew.

Chang'an was destroyed around 24 BCE, then subsequently revived as the modern city of X'ian. Even when destroyed, the lucrative Silk Routes continued with later Chinese dynasties and their various seats of power, thereby maintaining the historical credentials of what can claim to be the longest-lived ports anywhere in the world. This pattern of Chinese trade was however to be brutally interrupted by the arrival of the gunships of European imperialist nations in the 19th century, and by those of the USA. This story will hence form the subject for the next chapter.



2. COLONIAL PORTS IN CHINA

COMMERCIAL MAP OF CHINA

showing
Treaty ports, Ports of Foreign Control,
Railways, Telegraphs, Waterways, etc.

1899

JUNGARIA.

EAST TURKESTAN.

CHINESE
TIBET.

DEPENDING

MONGOLIA

EMPIRE

MANCHURIA.

JAPAN

YELLOW SEA.

EAST CHINA.

BRITISH INDIA

SIAM

SIAM

SOUTH CHINA-SEA.

PHILIPPINE IS

MANNA

- Key.
- Treaty ports.
 - Ports of Foreign Control.
 - Railways, in Operation.
 - " in construction or projected.
 - Telegraphs.
 - Cable.
 - Canal.
 - Rivers, navigable.

Even by the 18th century, it was becoming clear that Chinese people did not want any of the Western produce being offered in trading exchange for goods such as silk, porcelain and tea. Indeed, Chinese merchants only accepted silver as payment for these exports. Thus, due to the growing demand for Chinese goods in the Western world, the British East India Company embarked upon a scheme to produce opium in India and smuggle it into China illegally so as to rectify the financial imbalance between European imports and Chinese exports. By the early-19th century, therefore, British merchants had become the major opium growers in the world, and were looking to move into ports like Mingzhou/Ningbo. This trade however only increased the numbers of opium addicts in China, greatly worrying Chinese officials, especially after the British East India Company began to propose that it ought to be allowed to legalise and tax its opium exports to China.

Emperor Daoguang understandably rejected this proposal, leading to the outbreak of the First Opium War in 1839. It was hence a war fought between the Britain and Qing Dynasty over 'diplomatic relations, trade, and the administration of justice in China'.¹¹ Britain won due to its superior military strength, and so the Qing Dynasty was forced on 29th August 1842 to sign the Treaty of Nanking, which ended the First Opium War, after a large British naval fleet had sailed in to threaten that city.

As a consequence of this and the later 'unequal treaties', China was forced to accept Western goods 'by overwhelming military force'¹², even if its citizens had no use for those products. Previously, foreigners had only been allowed to trade in Guangzhou/Canton, but after the Treaty of Nanking, that port city and the other four so-called 'Treaty Ports' – i.e. Shanghai, Mingzhou/Ningbo, Fuzhou/Fuchow and Xiamen/Amoy – were created. These five 'Treaty Ports' were soon being utilised by foreigners to set up new homes, carry out trading activities, and set up factories. British merchants were particularly ruthless, readily backed by imperial troops. As was noted in the Treaty of Nanking: 'Should the Emperor be pleased to grant additional privileges or immunities to any other foreign countries, the same would automatically be extended to and enjoyed by British subjects'.¹³



[Fig. 17] Bilingual pages in the Treaty of Nanking.



[Fig. 18] The Signing and Sealing of the Treaty of Nanking in the State Cabin of H. M. S. Cornwallis, 29th August, 1842, Painted by Capt. John Plat.

¹¹ S. Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong* (I.B. Tauris, 2007), 29.

¹² C. Hein, *Port Cities: Dynamic landscapes and global networks* (TJ International Ltd, 2011), 116.

¹³ R. Nield, *China's Foreign Places: The Foreign Presence in China in the Treaty Port Era 1840-1943*, (Hong Kong University Press, 2015), 2.

[Fig. 19] 1899 Commercial map of China showing Treaty Ports.



[Fig. 20] Drawing of the thirteen factories – including the flags of Denmark, Spain, The United States, Sweden, Britain and the Netherlands.



[Fig. 21] Canton Fire

THE 'TREATY PORTS'

Nearly all of the 'Treaty Ports' were attached to existing towns and cities. As mentioned, Guangzhou/Canton was already the major hub for Western trade. Foreign merchants were permitted to store and trade their goods in the 'Thirteen Factories' neighbourhood, which was located just outside the city walls, along the Pearl River. After the Treaty of Nanking, Canton duly became the most important centre for Chinese trade in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Evidence suggests that there were around 500–700 foreign merchants living full-time in Guangzhou/Canton during the 'Treaty Port' era. During the Second Opium War of 1856–60, also known as the Arrow War, the 'Thirteen Factories' district was burned down. However, this only gave the overseas traders an opportunity to build the 'American Concession', another foreigners-only neighbourhood, on a more elaborate scale on the same site.

Historically, the buildings in Guangzhou had been built very close to each other. However, from the 18th century, new buildings began to adopt Western-style Neoclassical facades while also containing rooms inside that retained a traditional feel. Such interiors were 'still definitely Chinese spaces adapted to Western purposes'¹⁴. The streets of Guangzhou/Canton were built as a regular grid on an irregularly shaped island, and were lined with rows of banyan trees that gave the city a suburban atmosphere that was not emulated so much in the other 'Treaty Ports'.

Xiamen/Amoy has a direct access to the sea and hence became a noted 'Treaty Port', although it was never a main administrative centre. Its Chinese population in the 19th century was between 100,000 and 500,000 citizens, whereas Westerners only totally around 600 or so. Fuzhou/Fuchow and Mingzhou/Ningbo likewise had relatively small Western populations. The settlement patterns of foreigners in these three ports were also similar in that the location of their housing depended on the topographies of each city, rather than any kind of 'formal community planning'¹⁵. Fuzhou/Fuchow is the walled capital city of Fujian Province, sitting in the estuary of the Minjiang River, and a key node in the West Coast economic region. It was a major shipping point for tea. Ningbo is located on the northeast coast of Zhejiang Province, where two branches of the Yung River meet. Portuguese merchants had begun trading with Mingzhou/Ningbo in 1522, and hence after the Opium Wars, the Portuguese became the main foreign population in the city, mostly residing along the eastern branch of the Yung River.



[Fig. 22] Photograph of Amoy in 19th century.

¹⁴ C. Hein, *Port Cities: Dynamic landscapes and global networks*, 118.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.



[Fig. 23] Map of the foreign concessions in Shanghai in 1884.

Blue: British Concession, Faded Red: French Concession, Faded Orange: American Concession, Faded Yellow: Chinese part of the city.



[Fig. 24] Nanking Road, Shanghai, within the International Settlement in 1912.



[Fig. 25] The Bund, 1928.

As the most northerly of the original five 'Treaty Ports', Shanghai is situated near the mouth of the Huangpu River, a tributary of the Yangtze. It was the only one of the initial 'Treaty Ports' that was built from scratch from a small fishing village, and as such proved to be the most successful. One reason behind this success was that the civil disturbance and negative feeling generated elsewhere in China by the British presence caused many educated Westerners to move away from Chinese strongholds such as Guangzhou/Canton to the safer new settlement in Shanghai. This high proportion of wealthy and ambitious Western merchants thereby gave Shanghai the tools and skills that it needed to develop into 'China's greatest commercial city'.

The zone for foreign settlement in Shanghai was located in three different areas along the west bank of the Huangpu River: the 'British Concession', the 'French Concession' and the 'American or International Concession'. Importantly however it was made clear in the Treaty of Nanking that this land in Shanghai was only being leased to the British and other overseas governments, and thus foreigners still needed to pay ground rent to the Qing Dynasty for the privilege of using it. Therefore a mixed-mode of colonial settlement and development was used for Shanghai, just like the other 'Treaty Ports' established throughout the remainder of the 19th century.



[Fig. 26] Hong Kong container port

THE COLONIAL PORTS

A noticeably different arrangement, however, was applied in the case of the two full-blown colonial cities in 19th-century China: Hong Kong and Macau. Unlike the 'Treaty Ports', they were not under Chinese jurisdiction, but instead were ruled directly by Britain and Portugal respectively.

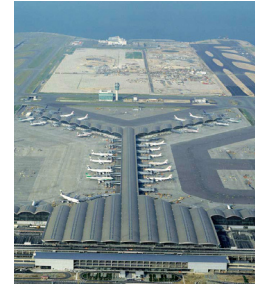
Hong Kong

Hong Kong is located in South China, at the mouth of the Pearl River Delta, and was governed as a British colony from 1842 to 1997. Hong Kong soon discovered that it could readily attract British merchants and bankers, as well as ambitious Chinese businessmen and appreciable numbers of hard-working local immigrants. It proved an economic success story that was aided by numerous heavy engineering and infrastructural projects. In possessing port channels that are on average more than 10 metres deep, it allowed large ships to easily enter Hong Kong's port terminals and loading areas: today these channels also provide plentiful and safe parking spaces for huge container ships. A steady increase in the migrant population and the rapid expansion of the city's manufacturing sector soon led to land shortages in Hong Kong, triggering numerous landfill projects on the main island and in Kowloon. Additional land was added in 1898 when the New Territories were conceded to Britain on a 99-year lease, enabling further expansion of port facilities and associated communication links ever since – including for example a new airport at Chek Lap Kok in 1998, designed by Foster + Partners.

The economic strength of colonial Hong Kong, contrasted with continuing resentment within mainland China about the humiliating terms of the 1842 Treaty of Nanking, meant that Britain's post-war withdrawal from its former imperial territories was eventually bound to affect the status of this port city. With the lapsing of the legal lease for the New Territories in 1997, the British government was required to hand Hong Kong back to China. To acknowledge its complex and unique colonial history, plus also the many economic and cultural links between Britain and Hong Kong, the city was designated as a Special Administrative Region by the Beijing government. Many internal tensions persist today, not least because of a differing view about the value and role of democratic government between Hong Kong citizens and mainland China.



[Fig. 27] British influenced buildings in Hong Kong, 1900.



[Fig. 28] Chek Lap Kok Airport, designed by Foster + Partners.

Macau

Macau was the other colonial city in China, sitting close to Hong Kong albeit on the opposite western side of the Pearl River Delta. Its story, however, is rather different. Portugal first rented Macau as a trading port from the Ming Dynasty in 1557, after which it became one of the most prosperous merchant cities in the Far East. It was not until 1887 that the Sino-Portuguese Treaty of Peking was signed between the Kingdom of Portugal and the Qing Dynasty, valid initially for 40 years, but with the implication of perpetual rights of occupation. This legal treaty however went the same way as other post-colonial transactions when Macau was handed back to mainland China in 1999, and also made a Special Administration Region.

Macau has thus for a long time been an important port that connects Asia, Europe and Latin America together. It also relied on the advantages of a large natural harbour, but due to natural factors, serious silting of its harbour accumulated over time that made it increasingly inconvenient for maritime transport. With the outbreak of the First Opium War and the formation of the 'Treaty Port's, plus also the obvious success of Hong Kong, Macau was eclipsed as a trading port. Instead it developed a reputation for building casinos and becoming the gambling capital of the Far East, albeit as a result being plagued, as in other such cities, by organised crime syndicates.

Although Macau was transferred back to China in 1999, many buildings in the city are still constructed by the Portuguese. Therefore many buildings there today still express references to Portuguese or other Southern Europe styles. Macau is a thoroughly multinational city and one of the world's most densely populated areas. It operates as 'an international free port' with a low tax rate, which means that foreign merchants are still able to trade freely in the market at competitive rates, thus increasing Macau's GDP.



[Fig. 29 and 30] Macau's town square, 'Senado Square'. Macau's picturesque Portuguese-style architecture.



[Fig. 31] The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge, the world's longest sea bridge linking Hong Kong with Macau and the mainland Chinese city of Zhuhai. Opened in 2018.



3. REVERSE COLONIAL PORTS



[Fig 32] A cargo ship navigating near Hambantota, Sri Lanka, in May 2018.

In the mid-1980s, with China's Maoist Communist regime in terminal decline, Premier Deng Xiaoping embarked upon what he called the 'Open Door' policy to usher in a mixed economy of state-controlled capitalism. The results have been dramatic, with China now widely acknowledged as the world's second largest economy. Yet this economic surge has not been purely homegrown. China's desires to go global were most clearly declared in 2001 by the former President Jiang Zemin, who had stated that 'in order to open wider to the outside world, we should encourage enterprises to expand their investment abroad'¹⁶.

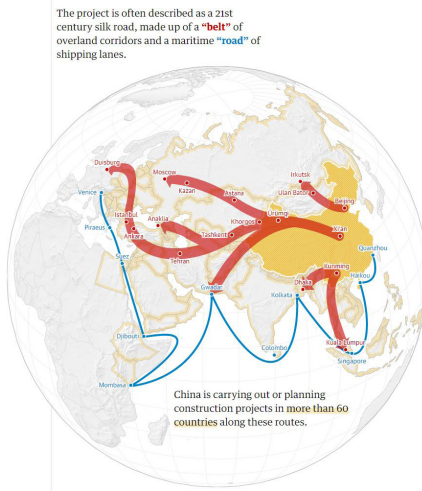
Growth within the Chinese economy has been mainly due to an ability to transform the country's main industries, ranging from low-return industries like agriculture through to high-return industries such as digital services and manufacturing. All however rely upon extensive transportation of exported goods, with the Chinese government soon realising that the most effective way to do this is still by ship. What this means is that today, seven of the world's largest ports, in terms of cargo volume, are located in China.

'THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE'

Industrial expansion in China has also greatly accelerated that country's demand for natural resources, whether it is minerals from Western Australia or else oil and minerals from Africa. In order to secure these fundamental raw materials, China started to invest heavily in African infrastructure from 2007, with this policy later being absorbed into an even larger plan called 'The Belt and Road Initiative'. Also known as the '21st Century Maritime Silk Road', this strategy was officially announced by the Chinese President Xi Jinping in October 2013. He claimed that the initiative was to be a 'peaceful development' involving infrastructural investment and development aid in so far 71 countries but with an astonishing overall intention of linking with 152 countries. Thus it is also the case that 'The Belt and Road initiative is often equally seen as a colonial-role reversal on top of the economic factors that obviously underpin it.

¹⁶ K. Brown, *The Rise of the Dragon: Inward and outward investment in China in the reform period 1978-2007* (Polity Press, 2008), 145.

According to the Overseas Development Institute, ‘almost 40% of sub-Saharan African countries are in danger of slipping into a major debt crisis’¹⁷, with this problem being triggered directly by Chinese economic expansion. China is currently Africa’s largest and most important trading partner. China has been targeting infrastructural projects on the continent – such as roads, railways and ports – and so many African countries have accepted multi-million dollars loan from China. The list now includes Angola, Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana and many others. Many economists and financial institutions are describing this as a financial ‘debt trap’ by which China is pursuing a ‘new colonialism’. Indeed, one of the major problems noted of China’s activities as an African investor is that ‘Chinese companies are not localised’¹⁸. Chinese companies thus tend to bring in Chinese workers rather than giving work to the locals, with evidence of racism in how any African employees are treated. It confirms a pattern of anti-African racism in China that has continued ever since the Tang Dynasty.



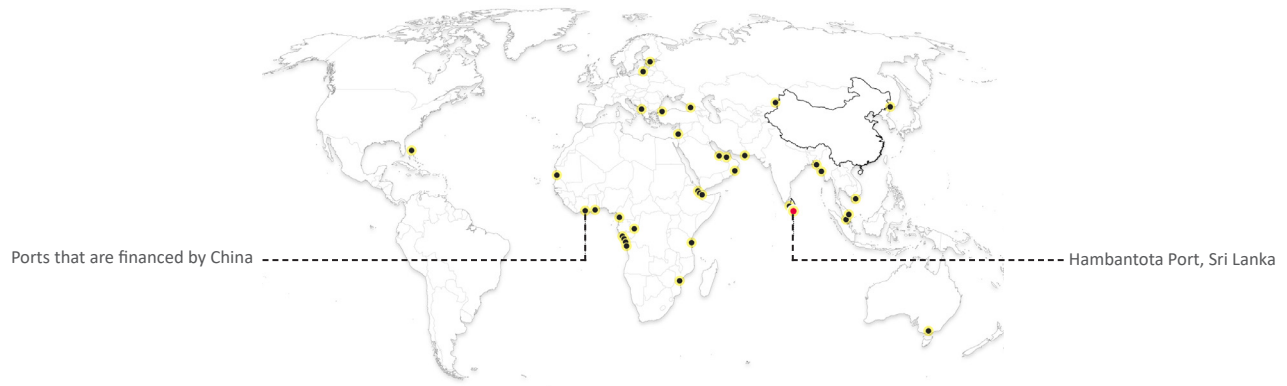
[Fig. 33] Diagram showing the ‘belt’ of overland corridors and a maritime ‘road’ of shipping lanes.



[Fig. 34] China-Europe container train at Suzhou West Railway Station in Suzhou.

¹⁷ Reality Check Team. “Is China burdening Africa with debt?”, *BBC NEWS*, November 5, 2018. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-45916060>.

¹⁸ K. Brown, *The Rise of the Dragon: Inward and outward investment in China in the reform period 1978-2007*, 158.



[Fig. 35] Map showing 35 countries that China has helped financed. Some of the ports were however only partially financed by China.

It is clearly a double-edged sword. Although the debt that African nations now owe to China is extremely high, and allows China to take over the running of different infrastructures there, these roads and railways would never have existed without Chinese funds. Hence Chinese economic aid is helping to improve the chances of many developing nations situated along its new trade route, which in time could help many in Africa and elsewhere to escape poverty.

However, given that China is funding these projects, it means that they also have the authority to control the architectural and urban designs. Indeed, most of the buildings planned and built in developing countries as part of this initiative were ‘designed in China, engineered in China and built with Chinese materials by Chinese construction workers’¹⁹. Therefore it would seem that China is transforming Africa’s skylines by trying to make their commercial building style the new standard.

In regard to the subject of this thesis, this mixture of Chinese financial and cultural influence is also greatly affecting the development of sea ports around the world, involving thus far around 40 or so port cities in developing countries or else in Europe. Hence it is useful now to look at two representative examples of Chinese ports investments, once from each case, and namely Hambantota Port in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and also Piraeus Port in Greece.

¹⁹ Nate Berg, “Chinese buildings: coming to your city?”, *CNN Style*, June 1, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/chinese-buildings-abroad/index.html>.



[Fig. 36] China Harbour employees heading to work in Colombo.



[Fig. 37] Chinese workers in their dormitory in Colombo.



[Fig. 38] An expressway extension to Hambantota Port.

Hambantota Port, Sri Lanka

In recent years, China has made very generous loans to Sri Lanka, with the latter's debt to the former rising to US \$8 billion in 2018. And this is having a major impact on Sri Lanka, not least in terms of the rapid development of Hambantota Port within its capital city, Colombo. Although feasibility studies showed that this port could not be profitable, and many other countries hence refused to loan money to Sri Lanka, the former President Mahinda Rajapaksa decided to take on more loans from China in order to construct the port.

Apparently the location of Hambantota Port was part of these loan negotiations. It is clear that the location is in China's favour since it can claim that the port is located in 'a sparsely populated area on Sri Lanka's southeastern coast that is still largely overrun by jungle'²⁰. However, it also happens to be located in the country's major city, plus it sits on an advantageous spot between the Malacca Straits and the Suez Canal, and thus on the main shipping route from Asia to Europe. It is therefore in a prime position in relation to 'The Belt and Road Initiative'.

A *New York Times* article on 25th June 2018 could not have expressed the situation any more bluntly: 'China's debt trap camouflaged as harmless loans'²¹. For in December 2017, China managed to sign up Hambantota Port on a 99 years lease, with China taking a 70 per cent stake in the profits. Chinese officials also demanded 15,000 acres of land around the port area in order to build a new industrial zone and also for military use.

²⁰ Maria Abi-Habib. "How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough Up a Port", *The New York Times*, June 25, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/25/world/asia/china-sri-lanka-port.html>.

²¹ Ibid.



[Fig. 39] The Port of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Thus on top of constructing Hambantota Port, China is also engaged upon a massive design project for 'Port City Colombo' located adjacent to the port and near to the city's main business district. 'Port City Colombo' will contain Chinese-designed luxury apartments and other shopping centres and hotels filled with high-end luxury brands. Today, the first large concrete apartment complex, the Astoria, has been built and is already dramatically changing Colombo's skyline as part of the 'Port City Colombo' scheme. All of the design decisions, renderings, engineering choices and construction methods are being made by Chinese companies with very little understanding of the local context and environment. The Sri Lankan government's urban development authority has raised this as an issue, given that it is the country's law that the design and construction of every building must be approved and then carried out by local chartered architects. Yet so far there has been no response from any of the Chinese companies in charge of 'Port City Colombo' to these worries, a situation that is causing much resentment in Sri Lanka. 'While these projects may offer a boost to the local economy, they don't fit into their urban surroundings', according to Dr Janaka Wijesundara, an architecture professor at the University of Moratuwa in southern Colombo.²²

It is also a scenario that is not only happening to Colombo, since many Chinese-funded projects are either planned or under construction in other developing nations as a consequence of 'The Belt and Road Initiative'. Multi-trillion-dollars' worth of investment projects, including railways, power plants, sea ports, land ports and commercial buildings, are thus now proceeding in dozens of countries around the world, yet with little oversight or checks. It is a problem that adds to the feeling that China is secretly reversing the hitherto colonial roles and thus using its new-found economic strength to take advantage of poorer developing nations. Furthermore, this is not just an issue for developing countries, as an examination of the case of Piraeus Port in Greece also shows.



[Fig. 40] Render of the Astoria in Sri Lanka landscape



[Fig. 41] Render of the 'Port City Colombo' masterplan

²² Nate Berg., "Chinese buildings: coming to your city?", *CNN Style*, June 1, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/chinese-buildings-abroad/index.html>.



The new Port City Colombo will comprise five main urban precincts or districts: International Island, Island Living, Central Park Living, Financial District and The Marina. Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), in collaboration with landscape architects Grant Associates, has been appointed as the urban designer for the Financial District and Marina District of the Port City Colombo, Sri Lanka. These are the renders of the urban design proposal by SOM.



[Fig. 42] Render of The Marina.

[Fig. 43] Render of the 'Mesh Room'.



[Fig. 44 and 45] Renders of the retail and public spaces.



[Fig. 46] Map of Athen.

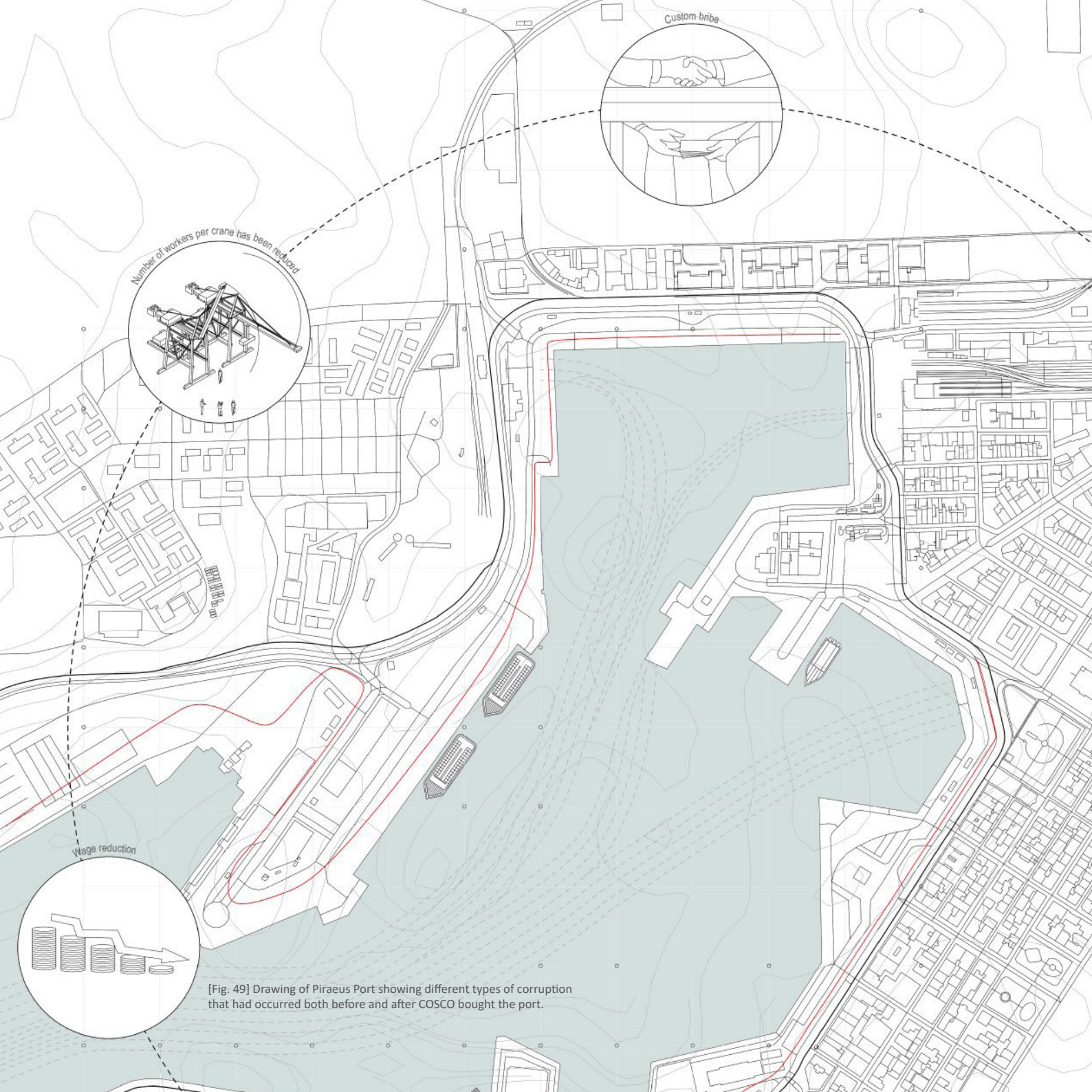


[Fig. 47] Map of Piraeus Port.

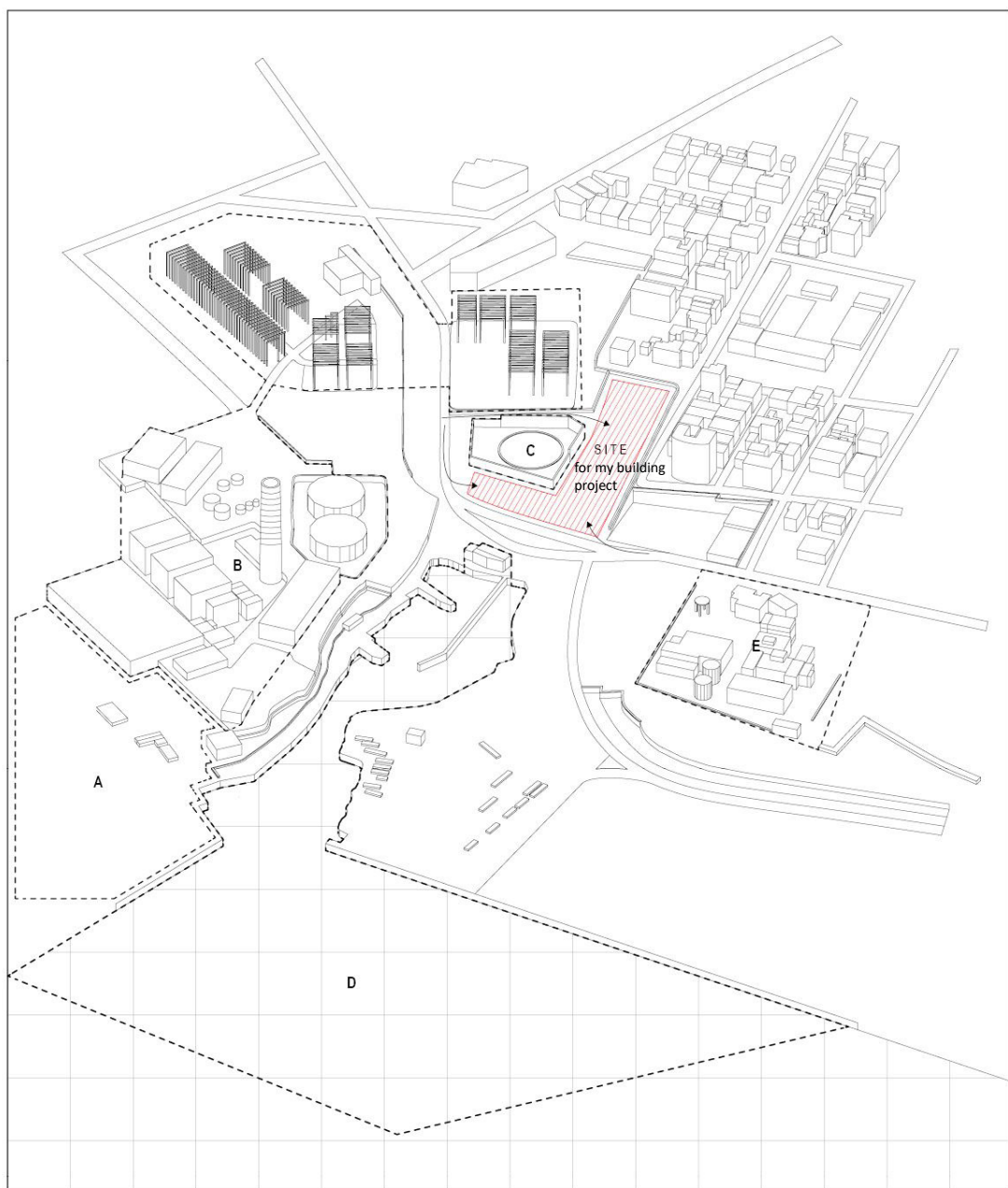


[Fig. 48] Location map of cargo port and passenger port.

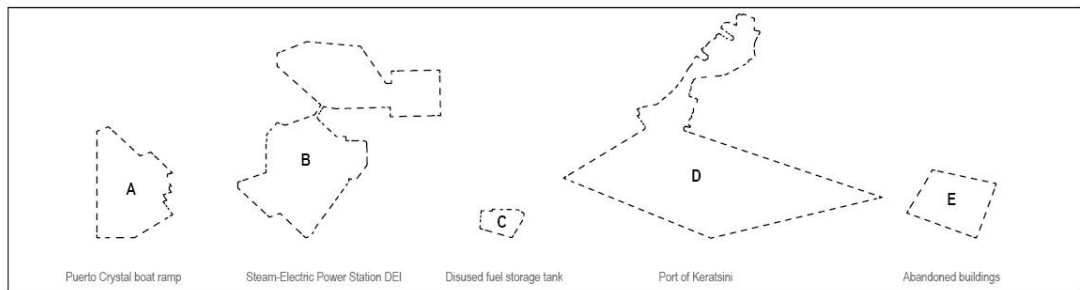
1. Cargo Port
2. Passenger Port



[Fig. 49] Drawing of Piraeus Port showing different types of corruption that had occurred both before and after COSCO bought the port.



[Fig. 50] Analysing different areas around the cargo side of Piraeus Port.



Piraeus Port, Greece

[Fig. 51] 'Fakelaki' is the term referring to the bribery of public servants and private companies by Greek citizens



[Fig. 52] Greek dock workers protest against privatising Piraeus port

Cheating, bribery and tax evasion have been creating major problems of corruption in Greece for many decades now. Rampant corruption occurs at all scales, from individuals to large companies. In the ten years before the global financial crash in 2008, there were also instances where the Greek government overspent its budget due to factors such as inflated public salaries.

Because of the ensuing Greek financial crisis and the European Union bailout scheme, the Greek government was forced to sell off national assets including Piraeus Port. In 2016 COSCO, a major Chinese shipping company, was hence able to buy 51% of Piraeus Port for a sum of US \$410 million and to take over the running of that authority. Although Greece was not officially part of 'The Belt and Road Initiative' countries, the Piraeus location made it the 'dragon's head' for China's new trading route in Europe. Having spent altogether a total of US \$611m on Piraeus Port, including the original purchase by COSCO and some debt inherited from the purchase, it would have taken 30 years for COSCO to regain its money. Therefore, a different course of actions needed to be taken to be able to make profits from this investment, which included in particular a massive increase in cargo volume and efficiency.

Unsurprisingly, ever since the privatisation of Piraeus Port, the local Greek workers feel like they are under threat. According to *The Nation*, the salary of port workers has been reduced 'from €1500 per month to €600 per month'²³. Only a few skilled dockworkers have been hired as full-time employees, leaving the rest of the workers with even fewer social benefits and with no retirement benefits. According to these workers, health and safety conditions in the port have become worse because unskilled workers are now being given tasks to do on complicated machines.

By privatising the port, COSCO is now able to determine its own port fee. There are thus suspicions that large amounts of value-added tax and import duty are being evaded at Piraeus Port, creating major damage to Greece's national tax base. The unpaid VAT alone has been estimated to be in the region of 'tens of millions of euros'²⁴. The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) confirmed that criminal groups are now devaluing many of imported goods, usually garments and footwear, to reduce or avoid import duties.

²³ Alexander Saeedy, "How Greece's Busiest Port Reveals the Perils of Privatization", *The Nation*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/how-greeces-busiest-port-reveals-the-perils-of-privatization/>.

²⁴ Angus Berwick, Renee Maltezou, "EU suspects tax fraud at China's new gateway to Europe.", *Reuters U.K.*, April 20, 2018, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-china-beltandroad-piraeus-exclusive/eu-suspects-tax-fraud-at-chinas-new-gateway-to-europe-idUKKBN1HR2LL>.

But again there is another side to the story. Without the financial support from China, Greece would simply have not been able to modernise Piraeus port to its current level, to the extent that it has now become one of the world's largest ports. Ever since COSCO arrived, competition between workers has also forced local Greek dockers to improve their efficiency and work harder.

Hence there are pros and cons for having COSCO involved in the Piraeus Port Authority. Now, for example, its cargo volume is three times the size that it was before privatisation, and the problem of excessively inflated salaries has reduced. In this sense at least, COSCO's involvement in Piraeus Port has helped to improve Greece's infrastructure, economy and management practices.

I visited Piraeus Port in October 2018 and recorded my experience through photographs and notes. Despite its acquisition by COSCO, Piraeus Port strangely shows absolutely no signs of this Chinese takeover. There are no Chinese ideograms or symbols to be seen by the visitor. Instead there are plentiful signs proclaiming the 'Piraeus Port Authority S.A.', an entity now managed by the Chinese company, yet without inside knowledge then it is impossible to know what this means.

At street level, the passenger port at Piraeus is full of locals and tourists as it is the main departure point from Athens to surrounding Greek islands. Numerous Greek ferry companies such as Blue Star Ferries, Minoan Lines and Nova Ferries have their departures from the port every 10–20 minutes, everyday, making Piraeus an extremely busy port indeed. In general, the passenger port is very well designed, in that there are clearly designated areas to board the ferries, or for cycle paths, walkways and waiting area.



[Fig. 53] Passengers boarding the ferries in Piraeus Port.



[Fig. 54] Passengers waiting at the waiting area, where 'Piraeus Port Authority S.A.' signs are located.



[Fig. 55] Greek ferries arriving and departing the port.



[Fig. 56 and 57] Photographs of the Piraeus Port looking out from the ferrie.



[Fig. 58 and 59] Photographs of the COSCO's new cargo port, taken from the Propontidos Road.





[Fig. 60] Photograph of the COSCO's new cargo port, taken from the Propontidos Road.

Given however that visitors are not allowed into COSCO's new cargo port, I was only able to view it remotely. By walking up Propontidos Road, I could see large working cranes and stacked containers in the terminals. Many container ships from different international companies such as MSC, EKO Bunkering and GCSCO were arriving and departing from the port. From this activity it was evident that Piraeus Port has indeed grown rapidly since being acquired by COSCO.

However, my fieldwork observations also surprised me in terms of the number of rundown buildings that surround this largest Greek seaport. There are many abandoned buildings and factories next to both the passenger and cargo terminals. Some of them were even undergoing demolition, since I later found out was because they are part of the COSCO's ambitious masterplan for the future development of Piraeus Port.

Indeed on 7th November 2018 the Piraeus Port Authority presented their vision at a scientific symposium titled 'Piraeus: The port and town'. At this event it was revealed that the basic mandatory infrastructural Investment is likely to cost around € 294 million, with further investment expected to add on a further total of € 318 million. This is a massive investment in what was otherwise a decaying port. Hence although local Greek workers are concerned that the privatisation of Piraeus Port is a threat to their livelihoods, given the drop in their wages and social benefits, the other side of the coin is that the engagement of COSCO is attracting a far larger cargo volume than ever before.



[Fig. 61] Photographs of abandoned buildings around Piraeus Port.

Piraeus Port Development



[Fig. 52] The map here shows the location of both mandatory and additional investments. The aim of the development is to improve the transportation and circulation of the port, attract more cargo ships, increase the speed of the cargo service, and also attract larger number of tourists.

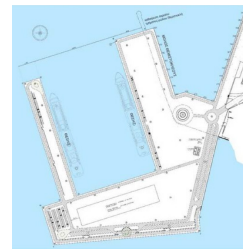
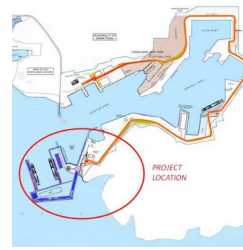
Red: Mandatory Investment
Yellow: Additional Investment

Examples of the Piraeus Port final design:

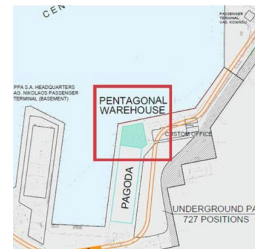
- 1) In zone P.1-07, which is adjacent to the existing cruise facilities, the area will be transformed into a large-scale infrastructure to respond to growing needs and to contribute to tourist development. (Fig. 44)
- 2) In zone P.1-02, the area currently exhibits extensive failures such as cracks in floor and handrails and also problems in terms of loading and unloading, so therefore there will be a refurbishment of this container terminal. (Fig. 45)
- 3) Converting the pentagonal warehouse into a new cruise passenger terminal. (Fig. 46)

Development of the surrounding areas:

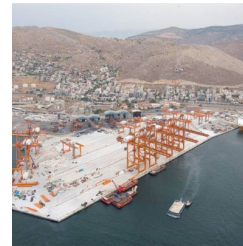
- 1) Conversion of the 'Pagodas' building, previously used as an exhibition centre, into a 5-star hotel with 300 rooms and a conference centre, at a cost of € 60 million. (Fig. 47)
- 2) Conversion of two large old warehouses into a 4-star with 150 rooms and a 5-star hotel with 200 rooms, costing € 48 million in total.
- 3) A 5-star hotel is also to be built in the Porto Leone area.



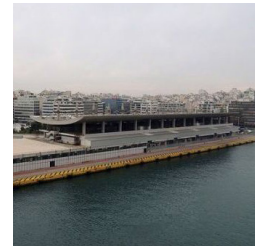
[Fig. 63] Large-scale infrastructure extension plan.



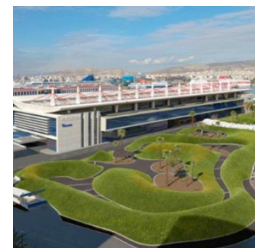
[Fig. 64] Disused pentagonal warehouse location plan.



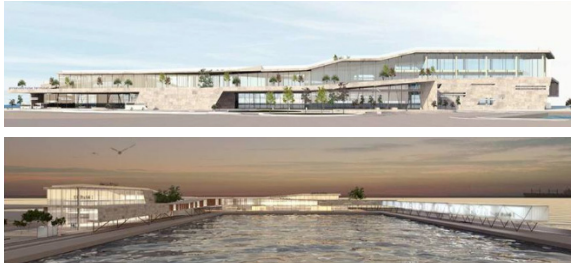
[Fig. 65] Container terminal refurbishment plan.



[Fig. 66] Pagodas building



[Fig. 67] Render of the Pagodas building development proposal.



[Fig. 68] Option A of the Piraeus Port cruise facilities extension.



[Fig. 69] Option B of the Piraeus Port cruise facilities extension.



[Fig. 70] Rendered image of the Piraeus Port masterplan.

This expansion of the infrastructure of Piraeus Port therefore aims to accommodate a higher number of cruise ships and to upgrade the existing freight services. However, unlike 'Port City Colombo' where all of the design and construction work is being carried out by Chinese companies, the companies appointed on the Piraeus Port project are either from Greece or other European countries.

Specialists involved in the Piraeus Port development

Consulting Engineers – DomosFeron
 Specialist Consultant for the Masterplan – Dr Mountzouris
 Consultant – CONSAAT
 Port Specialist – GEOTOPO
 Geographical technician – Dr Fortiades & Partners
 Topographical engineers – D. Androulaki & Partners
 Architects – KION Architects
 Architects – People Group
 Monument Studies – B. Bitsiou Architects

Yet on balance it has to be pointed out that the development of Piraeus Port may not actually be beneficial to the local community. Even if the new expansion can accommodate larger number of cargo ships, COSCO is still in a position to control its own port fees, and thus, for this reason, it is likely that the Greek government will never achieve its predicted profits. It has been confirmed that the new 'world class' four-star and five-star hotels being built on a nearby site – which was once home to African/Middle Eastern migrants and refugees – will in fact be managed by international companies including Accor, Hilton Worldwide and Marriott International. Therefore the lion's share of the profits will go to these multinational companies rather than to local citizens. Given that the new hotels will be located so close to the port, it is also likely that most tourists will depart from their strictly controlled Athens tour from this very point. It is hence unlikely that large sums of money will flow into Piraeus or the surrounding district, just like the profits from increased freight shipping will also be heading abroad.

[Fig. 71] Photograph of COSCO containers at Piraeus Port.





4. CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

Back in the ancient Han Dynasty, at around 130 BCE, the old Silk Routes was created and then as a result linked the East and the West together. Prior to the 19th century Opium Wars, this exchange between the East and the West along the Silk Routes offered what were generally mutual benefits. The great inventions from China introduced to Western countries included silk clothes, compasses, paper and gunpowder. In return, China was introduced to a wide range of products from the West, including rare animals, furs and spices. More recent history in the 19th century however showed that China was taken advantage of by European colonialists, even if still leading to further exchanges in knowledge, technology, goods and people.

As a result of the damaging Opium Wars, China was forced to open up its ports and pay large amount of war reparations to Britain and other European powers. Many in China believed that these 'unequal treaties' have irrevocably scarred the country, which is why today the colonial roles seem to be in the process of being switched. China's economical revival is such that the country is now taking advantage of developing nations by envisaging a 'revival of a legendary trade route'²⁵. This involves lending funds to other nations to construct new infrastructural facilities such as ports, railways and airports.

Many questions have been raised about whether 'The Belt and Road Initiative' is really about creating 'debt traps' by offering funds and opportunities to nations in need of infrastructure but which can never hope to repay the debt. Generally therefore there is an assumption that the Chinese government is laying traps by offering generous sums of money to developing countries that already have a debt burden, in the expectation that the latter will be forced to hand over control to China. This can be seen clearly in the case of the Chinese-financed sea ports such as in Sri Lanka and Greece, where Hambantota Port is now on a 99-year lease and 51 percent of Piraeus Port has been sold to China.

²⁵ Richard T. Griffiths, *Revitalising the Silk Road*, (HIPE Publications, 2017), 19.

CONCLUSION

An equivalent situation to Sri Lanka is just about to happen to Djibouti. In 2018, Djibouti signed a partnership project to build the Doraleh Multipurpose Port along with China Merchants Port Holdings. CM Port is the same Chinese state-owned company that is now in control of Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port. The signed agreement involves Djibouti taking on a sum of debt that is 'worth around 88 percent of the country's overall GDP'²⁶. Hence it is clear that Djibouti has taken on a loan that is far larger than what it can pay back, and so is now at a high risk of losing ownership of its only major port to China.

Kenya is currently facing exactly the same 'financial debt trap' and seems likely to lose its China-financed Mombasa Port. This was caused by accepting a multi-billion-dollar loan from China to build a railway service, the Mombasa-Nairobi standard gauge railway. Due to lack of management skills, according to *The Standard Media*, Kenya lost a total of 10 billion Kenyan shillings in the first year of this railway's operation, and as a consequence it appears that China will soon be taking over Kenya's largest port as part of the debt payback package.



[Fig. 72] Djibouti's Doraleh container terminal.



[Fig. 73] A ship docks at Mombasa Port.



[Fig. 74] A Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) Cargo train loaded with exclusive Maersk containers leaving Mombasa Port.

²⁶ Berg, N., "Chinese buildings: coming to your city?", *CNN Style*, June 1, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/chinese-buildings-abroad/index.html>.

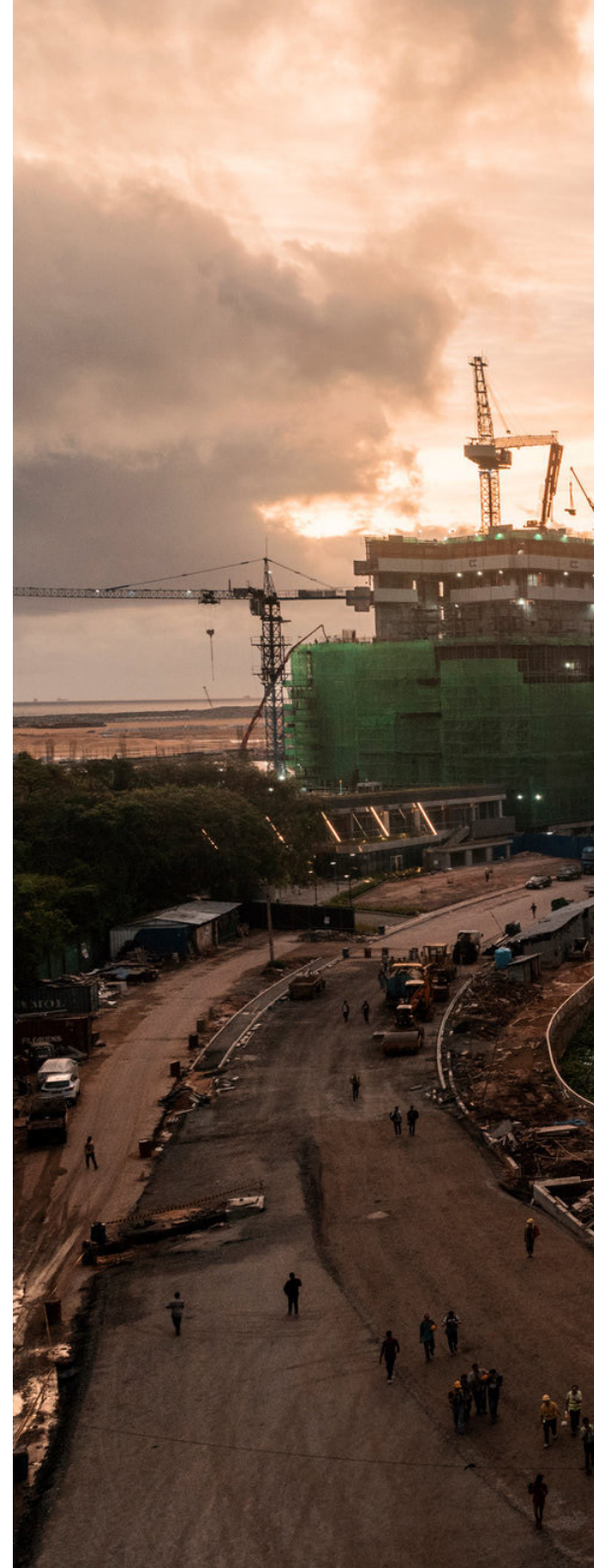
CONCLUSION

Perhaps even more ominously, the spread of China's commercial activities around the world's ports is also linked to Chinese military expansion. In 2017, China established its first overseas military base in Djibouti, once again revealing why some are interpreting China's strategy as a new variant of colonialism. In a Guardian article titled 'What is China's Belt and Road Initiative?' the author, Jonathan Hillman, who is the director of the 'Reconnecting Asia' project at the Center of Strategic and International Studies, wrote of any Chinese-financed new port: 'If it can carry goods, it can carry troops'²⁷.

There is also an argument that China is now consciously trying to change the African skyline. The published designs for the 'Port City Colombo' masterplan indicate tall glazed skyscrapers comparable to those in Singapore or Dubai, and similar buildings are now gradually invading African cities. By taking over the infrastructure in African countries that are incapable of paying back the debt or even the interest, China is economically colonising a range of developing countries.

According to past experience, once a port has been taken over by China, local workers will be forced to work under Chinese management practices. This usually leads to an increase in unemployment among managers and labourers because Chinese companies tend to bring in their own managerial and operational teams. Often the workers' social provisions and retirement benefits will also be drastically reduced after the port has been acquired by China.

²⁷ Lily Kuo and Niko Kommenda, "What is China's Belt and Road Initiative?", *The Guardian*, July 30, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/ng-interactive/2018/jul/30/what-china-belt-road-initiative-silk-road-explainer>.





[Fig. 75] Colombo's changing skyline

In 2016 the *Los Angeles Times* stated that the total of Chinese loans to Africa since 2000 is US \$124 billion. Today, more than 50 percent of African countries owe money to China and most of the borrowed money was used to improve to the country's infrastructure, notably its ports. Yet despite a Chinese version of globalisation that seems set on transforming the skyline of cities in Africa and elsewhere, these port development projects are definitely boosting the local economies concerned. Without the massive Chinese loans, it would not have been possible for African and Southeast Asian countries to acquire such advanced and large-scale infrastructural technology. Hence some would argue that China's expansion into Africa is merely providing the technologies and products that this impoverished continent needs. Andrea Giouicin, a professor from Milan, argues that 'the debt trap is created not because of the money from China, [but] mainly because some countries did not do a good assessment'²⁸. In other words, it is the responsibility of these developing countries to manage their own infrastructural development.

Yet this is a far too benign assessment, and is also perhaps a smokescreen for the more worrying aspects of China's move into buying and building ports abroad in locations like Colombo and Piraeus. It was the aim of this thesis to portray how today's trade routes as set up under 'The Belt and Road Initiative' link back to the ancient trade routes between China and Europe during the era of the Silk Routes. It is clear that both in the past and the present, the architecture of Chinese port cities has been influenced by the empowered nation, and indeed that such ports were at the heart of the economic and cultural interchange. This then is perhaps a more balanced explanation for the expansion of Chinese ports today, whether they are in Piraeus or another city.

²⁸ Kristin Huang, "Why China buying up ports is worrying Europe", *South China Morning Post*, September 23, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/2165341/why-china-buying-ports-worrying-europe>.



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