

Conference Summary

International Trade and Health [ITH] Conference 2018

“Belt and Road Initiative: Opportunities and Challenges for Health”

15–16 November 2018

Anantara Riverside Bangkok Resort, Bangkok, Thailand



Prepared by

International Trade and Health Programme (ITH)
International Health Policy Program
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Contents

Background and rationale	1
Conference programme	9
Conference opening	13
Session Summary	29
Session 1 : The Belt and Road Initiative and Its Implications Beyond Trade	31
Session 2: The Belt and Road Initiative and Trade and Investment	34
Session 3 : The Belt and Road Initiative – Opportunities and Challenges to Global Health	37
Session 4 : The Belt and Road Initiative – Opportunity or Threat to UHC	40
Session 5 : The Belt and Road Initiative and Public Health Emergencies/Health Security	42
Session 6 : The BRI and Health Innovation and Research Collaboration	44
Conclusion and the way forwards	47
Conference closing	53
Annex	57
2018 International Trade and Health Conference Organizing Subcommittee	59
ITH Conference Supporting Team	60
Conference Rapporteurs	60

Background and Rationale



Background

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a long term strategy announced by Xi Jinping, the President of China, to boost the region's economic development. The BRI aims to enhance trade, infrastructure and connectivity through building networks of railways, highways, bridges, airports, ports, oils and gas pipelines and fibre optics. The concept originated from China's ancient Silk Road that was once used to facilitate trade and cultural exchanges. The BRI aims to link China to Asia and Europe consisting of two important strategies: (1) the Silk Road Economic Belt – the land route connecting China with Central Asia, Eastern and Western Europe; and (2) the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road – the sea route connecting China to South East Asia, Africa and Central Asia.

The BRI involves over 60 countries and provides an opportunity for the global north to connect with the global south through an economic security platform. China has planned \$1 trillion investment, including the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to provide loans to the BRI countries including ASEAN countries.

The BRI is emerging as one of China's major vehicle for its increasing role in international engagement, with an important health dimension. Within it includes important health dimensions, for instance; international collaboration in several health issues, emergency response and medical assistance, science and technological advancement.

In August 2017 China organized the first biennial Belt and Road High Level Meeting on Health Cooperation towards Healthy Silk Road where more than 30 health ministers and leaders of multilateral agencies signed the Beijing Communiqué. The Communiqué highlighted the joint commitment to protect public health and strengthen people-to-people exchanges among BRI countries.

However, there have been a number of concerns related to the potential impacts of the BRI on health such as spread of infectious diseases due to increased people mobility; the geological, socio-economic and health impacts of large infrastructure projects; transboundary movement of hazardous materials; and regulation of occupational health and environmental standards.

BRI is therefore an initiative that expands beyond trade and investment. The opportunities and challenges faced prevail beyond its mere trading system. Hence, there is the crucial need to understand these positive and negative implications, mainly to maximize for greater opportunities while mitigating its negative impacts for the benefits of the society at large.

The International Trade and Health Conference 2018 will bring experts and participants from various groups to discuss the BRI in detail and its implication on health and health systems locally, regionally and globally. The conference will provide state of the art of the Belt and Road Initiative and policy recommendations as well as promote collaboration among participating agencies and will foster further research on BRI and health innovation.

Objectives of the conference are

1. To exchange knowledge and understanding on the Belt and Road Initiative and its impacts beyond trade in Thailand as well as regionally and globally
2. To discuss and identify potential research topics and collaboration among concerned agencies
3. To develop evidence-based policy recommendations on the Belt and Road Initiative and health

The conference consists of six sessions with the following key points:

Session 1: The Belt and Road Initiative and its Implications Beyond Trade

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is often considered a political instrument for China to leverage power through trade and politics, though the full impact – both positive and negative – is much broader.

The BRI's investments are not just limited to transportation network developments or infrastructure-based developments for foundation services, but also cover sociocultural features, including collaborative governance, the transfer of technology and the acceleration of the connectivity of China to Europe, Asia and Africa. The BRI is also seen as an important tool for China's maritime security.

Unfortunately, a number of developing countries that are part of the initiative are currently caught up in debt-trap diplomacy, where excessive debts for infrastructure investments are made and the debtor lacks the capacity to honour its debt obligations. This results in complete economical dependency to China, hence, a tremendous loss of autonomy for political leverage.

Other significant impacts that derive from BRI include migration, terrorism, and a potential negative impact on health and the environment.

Session 2: The BRI and Trade and Investment

Several projects under the BRI have been scrutinized for lack of transparency and inadequate stakeholder engagements. However, it is also argued that the BRI is a transparent initiative between China and countries along the BRI routes with aims to distribute equally benefits to all parties involved.

The BRI is not the only current economic expansion initiative in the region. There are also several infrastructure investment initiatives in

parts of the Indo-Pacific in development.

If Thailand were to take part in the BRI careful considerations need to be made concerning the potential positive and negative benefits to various existing development projects, utilizing existing leverage with both the US and China in order to negotiate the most favorable terms.

Session 3: The BRI – Opportunities and Challenges to Global Health

Chinese foreign aid to developing countries continues to increase on a yearly basis. The majority of this aid goes to health infrastructure development projects – namely donations of medical equipment, training for the health workforce, and construction of health facilities. Yet a criticism remains, especially that the BRI's health development plan lacks concrete objectives and a sufficient holistic approach to health. There is the need for a clear vision for the collaboration between Thailand and China. Thailand could, though, use the BRI as an opportunity to strengthen bilateral collaboration in areas that Thailand lacks in expertise, like health technology and cost-efficient healthcare.

Session 4: The Belt and Road Initiative – An Opportunity or Threat to UHC

The BRI's various health investment schemes, from infrastructure development projects to capacity building support for healthcare professionals, allow countries who partake in the initiative to strengthen their health care systems, subsequently contributing to increased access to health services in those countries.

As China fosters a significant pharmaceutical (including vaccines) and medical instrument manufacturing capability, all countries along BRI routes stand to benefit from increased coverage and access. Additionally, countries that aim to achieve universal health coverage can learn from the successes of China's own UHC. In order to achieve this, investments in public health infrastructures and capacity building activities for health personnel are key.

Session 5: The BRI and Public Health Emergencies/ health security

Effects of the BRI will certainly include a significant increase in population mobility and the migration of people, animals and insects including those that may be disease-carrying, and as such an increased risk of the rapid transmission of infectious diseases and potentially major epidemics. Thus, it is necessary to ensure that public health emergency response safeguards are in place as part of mitigation planning under the BRI strategy and policy. This provision should include strengthening disease surveillance systems, sharing of surveillance data, and capacity building at a national level through multi-sectoral actions that emphasize public health emergency preparedness including necessary intervention response plans.

At present China plays an important role in providing foreign aid in the form of collaboration to BRI countries to develop their public health emergency response systems in these very areas. All relevant countries can use this opportunity to collaborate with China to strengthen their own public health services in the manner outlined here.

Session 6: The BRI and Health Innovation and Research Collaboration

The Chinese Government provides opportunities for both the public and private sector to conduct medical research that produces concrete outcomes, for instance with public-private sector collaboration on vaccine production. China is highly interested in collaborating with Thailand to create robotics to promote and support health innovations and initiatives for collaborations in the development of Traditional Chinese Medicine between Thailand and China. By identifying common goals between relevant agencies, it is felt that consistent funding for health research and development can be secured.

Dates: 15-16 November 2018

Venue: Chaophraya Ballroom, Anantara Riverside Bangkok Resort,
Charoennakorn Road, Bangkok

Participants

Approximately 150 persons (by invitation) including

1. Thai Government officials from relevant agencies
2. Academic researchers
3. University students
4. Civil society representatives
5. Representatives from the private sector (*except the tobacco and alcoholic beverage industries*)
6. International experts
7. Representatives from funding agencies of the ITH Programme
8. Media
9. Participants from China and ASEAN countries
10. Embassy of BRI countries in Bangkok and embassy of other countries

Expected outcomes

1. Knowledge generation and sharing
2. Professional exchanges leading to joint research and collaboration
3. Policy recommendations for policy makers related to BRI and health
4. Expanded network and collaboration on international trade and health

Co-hosts

1. International Trade and Health Programme (ITH)
2. National Commission on International Trade and Health Studies (NCITHS)
3. ITH Funders (MOPH, ThaiHealth Promotion Foundation, WHO, NHCO, NHSO, HSRI)

Language_ Thai and English (with simultaneous interpretation)

Conference Programme



Day 1: Thursday 15 November 2018	
08.00-09.00	Registration
09.00-09.45	Conference Opening
	<p>Opening Remarks by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr Liviu Vedrasco, WHO Thailand Country Office - Mrs Sirina Pavarolavidya, Chair of National Commission on International Trade and Health Studies (NCITHS) <p>Keynote Speech “Thailand and the Belt and Road – Dos and Don’ts” By Dr Somkiat Tangkitvanich President of Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI)</p>
09.45-11.00	<p><u>Session 1</u> Belt and Road Initiative and Its Implications Beyond Trade</p> <p>Speakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Prof Prapat Thepchatree</i> Director, Centre for ASEAN Studies, Thammasat University - <i>Assoc Prof Sompong Sirisoponsilp</i> Deputy Dean, School of Agricultural Resources, Chulalongkorn University - <i>Assistant Prof Pramual Sutecharuwat</i> Department of Industrial Engineering, Chulalongkorn University <p>Moderator: <i>Pol. Maj. Suriwan Thaiprayoon</i>, Global Health Division, MOPH</p> <p>Session Coordinator: International Trade and Health (ITH) Programme</p>
11.00-11.15	Coffee break
11.15-12.30	<p><u>Session 2</u> Belt and Road Initiative and Trade and investment</p> <p>Lead Speaker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Dr Piti Srisangnam</i>, Director, Centre for International Economics, Faculty of Economics, Chulalongkorn University

Day 1: Thursday 15 November 2018

Panelists:

- **Professor Prabir De,**
Director, ASEAN-India Center, Research and Information System for
Developing Countries
- **Dr Li Renliang,**
School of Social and Environmental Development, NIDA

Moderator: Ms Kannikar Kijtiwatchakul, FTA Watch

Session Coordinator: International Trade and Health (ITH) Programme

12.30-13.30 Lunch

13.30-14.45 **Session 3**
**Belt and Road Initiative – Opportunities and Challenges to
Global Health**

Speaker

- **Assistant Prof Tang Kun,**
Department of Global Health, Peking University, China

Panelist:

- **Prof Kenji Shibuya,**
Professor and Chair, Department of Global Health Policy, Graduate School of
Medicine, The University of Tokyo, Japan
- **Dr Manisha Shridhar,**
Regional Advisor, WHO/SEARO
- **Mrs Benjaporn Fattier,**
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thailand

Moderator: Dr Liviu Vedrasco,
Programme Officer, WHO Thailand Country Office

Session Coordinator: Dr Manisha Shridhar, Regional Advisor, WHO/SEARO

14.45-15.00 Coffee break

Day 1: Thursday 15 November 2018

15.00- 16.15 **Session 4**
Belt and Road Initiative – Opportunity or Threat to the UHC

Speaker:

- ***Dr Sarah Louise Barber,***
Director, WHO Kobe Center, Japan

Panelists:

- ***Ms. Fan Xiaodan,***
China National Health Development Research Center
- ***Dr Sutayut Osornprasop,***
Senior Human Development Specialist, World Bank
- ***Dr Bounpheng Philavong,***
Ministry of Health, Lao PDR

Moderator: ***Dr Azusa Sato,*** Health Specialist, Southeast Asia Department,
Asian Development Bank

Session Coordinator: Pol. Maj. Suriwan Thaiprayoon, Global Health Division,
Ministry of Public Health

Day 2: Friday 16 November 2018

08.00-09.00 **Registration**

09.00-10.15 **Session 5**
**Belt and Road Initiative and Public Health Emergencies
/ Health Security**

Speaker:

- ***Dr Roderico Ofrin,***
Regional Emergency Director, WHOSEARO

Panelists:

- ***Dr Dennis Carroll,***
Director Emerging Threats Program, U.S. Agency for International
Development (USAID)

Day 2: Friday 16 November 2018

- **Ms Riko Kimoto**,
Project Manager, Sustainable Development & Public Health, Asia-
Europe Foundation (ASEF)

Moderator: Dr Kumnuan Ungchusak,
Consultant to Department of Disease Control, MOPH

Session Coordinator: Dr Nakorn Premisri, Director of Bureau of
Epidemiology, Department of Disease Control, MOPH

10.15-10.30 Coffee break

10.30 - 11.45 **Session 6**
BRI and Health Innovation and Research Collaboration

Speaker

Dr Nares Damrongchai,
CEO, Thailand Center of Excellence for Life Sciences (Public
Organization)

Panelists:

- **Mr. Vitoon Vonghangool**,
President, BioNet-Asia Co., Ltd. Thailand
- **Dr Yada Mukdapitak**,
Deputy Secretary General, National Science Technology and
Innovation Policy Office, Thailand
- **Prof. Dr. Lin Wang**,
Institute of Biomedical and Health Engineering, Shenzhen Institutes
of Advanced Technology, Chinese Academy of Sciences

Moderator: Dr Chutima Akaleephan,
International Trade and Health Programme, IHPP

Session Coordinator: Mrs Premruedee Lertsakvimarn, Senior Manager,
International Cooperation, Thailand Center of Excellence for Life
Sciences (Public Organization)

Day 2: Friday 16 November 2018

11.45-12.15	Recommendations from the conference By Dr Cha-aim Pachanee , Programme Manager, International Trade and Health Programme, International Health Policy Program (IHPP), Ministry of Public Health
12.15-12.45	Conclusion and the way forward By Dr Suwit Wibulpolprasert , Chair of the ITH Conference Organising Subcommittee
12.45-12.50	Closing By Mrs Sirina Pavarolavidya , Chair of National Commission on International Trade and Health Studies (NCITHS)
12.50-14.00	Lunch

Conference Opening





Remarks by

Dr. Liviu Vedrasco

WHO Thailand Country Office

Good morning, so wonderful to see you all here today

Dr. Sirina Pavarolarvidya, Dr. Somkiat,
Dr. Suwit, Dr. Cha-aim, Dr. Suriwan, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,
colleagues and friends.

It is my great privilege to welcome you here today on behalf of WHO on International Trade and Health Conference 2018. It is wonderful to see, today, such a diverse audience on both national and international experts that they are so eager to show knowledge and discuss their practical implications of international trade initiative; for the health system in Thailand, for the health for Thai people, as well as regionally and globally.

Trade policy and practices are expanding at the very fast pace, particularly, in Asia. We live in an increasingly interdependent world. Thailand and the region, currently, are under several very complex trading negotiations. The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-pacific Partnership, known as CPTPP; aims to establish the third largest free trade area in the world, just after NAFTA and EU. Thailand has, recently, announced its interest to potentially joining this agreement and if negotiations are successful, the implications will surely expand beyond trade.

The linkages between trade and public health are more and more evident with emerging areas of concern. The term globalization of

public health has emerged expressing the transnational and globalized nature of public health threats including, but definitely not limited to, the spread of communicable diseases. Free movement of people could facilitate the spread of infection diseases while large infrastructure projects could affect the environment, not always in a bad way, and socioeconomic fabric of nations. Assertive materials could be transported across the borders; impacting the health of population living there. International trade can also impact health indirectly, for health-related loss and policy development, For this reason that Thailand International Trade and Health Programme prove this conference and other activities try to generate up-to-date evidences, to primarily inform the policy makers in Thailand to appropriately safeguard the health of everyone living in Thailand. New international initiatives continue at an increasing pace. And the Belt and Road Initiative is a humongous such initiative by the China government. When I said humongous, I can just give you some numbers that is 12 times the financial size of the US Marshall plan to help Europe after the Second World War.

The BRI represents an enormous investment with potential for generating tremendous and sustained economic development.

Far from being only a vehicle to increase China's role in global economy, the BRI comprises many health dimensions: some explored and some not yet explored including programs on emerging response, medical assistance, science and technological advancement and collaboration. In August 2017, during the first biennial BRI high level meeting on health cooperation, over 30 health ministers joined together with our leaders include our Director-General, Dr. Tedros, and they signed jointly the Beijing Communiqué which we will have a chance to discuss in greater details during the deliberation today and tomorrow. The document represents the blueprint of a joint commitment to protect public health and strengthen people to people exchanges among their over 60 countries that are part of the BRI initiative.

However, with all these potential positive externality, there are also potential threats to public health and corresponding mitigation strategies have not been fully explored and analyzed. And we very much hope this conference will contribute to this.

Just to remind everyone, this week is the WHO World Antibiotic Awareness Week, and AMR is the major challenge for public health in the current globalized environment. Antimicrobials are susceptible to absurd lesson due to inappropriate use. And, of course, BRI health initiative, the so-called the Health Silk Road, could contribute to addressing AMR in the countries, part of the initiative.

This year International Trade and Health Conference has a crucial role of gathering experts of various disciplines. Many of you are doctors - some of you are economists – some of you are lawyers, and together we can share knowledge and experience, and we have an ambitious objective to develop evidence-base policy recommendations to prevent potential negative health implications and why not amplify the positive externality to health from this initiative.

I wish you a very fruitful deliberations for over the next couple of days and very the presence day in the land of smile.

Thank you.



Opening Remarks by

Dr. Sirina Chokwattana
Pavarolarvidya
Chair of the National Commission
on International Trade and Health
Studies

Dr. Liviu Vedrasco, Representative of the World Health Organization
Thailand Office,

Dr. Suwit Wibulpolprasert, Chairman of the Organizing Sub-committee,

Dr Somkiat, President of Thailand Development Research Institute,

Dr Siriwat, Advisor of the National Health Commission Office,

Speakers, and Distinguished Guests

I am truly honoured to be here, once again today, at the 5th International Trade and Health Conference. The National Commission on Trade and Health Studies, or in short NCITHS, together with the International Health Policy Programme or ITH, the main organizer, along with relevant agencies, has put together this conference in order to create a platform for the sharing and exchange of information, knowledge and experience for panelists, experts, and other participants. It also presents an opportunity for all to network with those working in the sector of trade and health.

The topic of this year's conference, 'The Belt and Road Initiative, Opportunities and Challenges to Health' is a very current one – a topic of discussion that many countries across different sectors are concerned with. Many countries are competing to be the economic leader. This will

certainly affect Asia. It is also inevitable as the countries along the BRI face both positive and negative impacts from the initiative.

We are honored to have many Thai and international experts from various fields to join us here today. We look forward to hearing their experiences, and engage in various discussions related to the topic of the BRI policy and its implications on health.

I believe that the two days of this conference will be filled with constructive discussions and creative exchanges to feed into recommendations for action for the relevant agencies concerned. This, I believe, also, will contribute to the benefit of the society and the nation as a whole.

Thanks Dr. Somkiat Tangkitvanich from the Thailand Development Research Institute to give us the keynote address today.

I now declare this conference open.



Keynote Address



Summary of the Keynote Speech

“Thailand and the Belt and Road – Dos and Don’ts”

By **Dr Somkiat Tangkitvanich**

President of Thailand Development
Research Institute (TDRI)



The Belt and Road initiative was conceptualized and announced in the year 2013 by President Xi Jinping, to be a project that will connect China, Europe, Central Asia, and Africa via six economic corridors, covering 65 countries. China needs to find alternative routes for transport of good as currently around 90 percent of goods are transported through the China sea and 80 percent of import oil pass the Strait of Malacca which is very congested and controlled by the US.

The BRI involves huge investment in infrastructures to connect land and sea routes. The funding are mobilized from China Development Bank, Silk Road Fund and Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank)AIIB(.

There are 2 main motivations to initiate the Belt and Road project.

1. Political motivation: China would like to increase its access to the sea and has constructed 6 economic corridors to go to the sea. China also has planned to build ports along the strategic locations to increase capacity in transporting of goods, reduce time required and increase security.

2. Economic motivation: This is to increase export of goods and materials such as iron, cement which will stimulate economic growth

Since 2013 China has implemented the BRI projects in several countries. Most of the projects are on transport, energy and electrical power. Those projects however post both positive and negative impacts on health directly and indirectly, for instances, increase access to health services, transmission of diseases, or decrease of budget share for the health system as the higher portion of the budget is used to the BRI projects. Recently, there have been evidence that a number of the BRI projects have been suspended in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Laos due to environmental and investment concerns.

1. The road project: Pakistan is facing with prolonged financial crisis from building Gwadar Port so the country has negotiated with China to suspend the project and revised the plan and renegotiate. The construction of Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka has been cancelled due to financial crisis.

2. The belt project: Malaysia has cancelled the East Coast Rail Link project due to environmental and financial concerns. Likewise, the high speed rail project in Lao is likely to face a financial crisis.

Thailand has involved in three BRI related projects including the Makong Rapid Blasting, the high-speed rail link connecting Thailand and Lao, and the Kor Kod Kra (*Kra Isthmus*) Project. Only the Thai-Lao High Speed Rail Link Project is continued while the other two are cancelled due to environmental concern.

For the high speed rail project, it is generally not providing good financial rate of return. For the case of Thailand, the Korat rail route would provide 14.9 percent financial rate of return, while the Hua Hin route would provide 9.7 percent.

Therefore Thailand needs to consider project feasibility very rigorously particularly on the cost-benefit analysis and health and environmental impact assessment. Thailand also should not rely too much on one country.

Session Summary



Session 1:

The Belt and Road Initiative and Its Implications Beyond Trade

The BRI is an instrument in international politics which requires thorough analysis in terms of its relation to both geopolitics and geoeconomics.

The BRI is being used as an important tool by China to expand its global power over trade, the economy and politics, and to establish maritime security architecture by connecting China to various countries in Europe, Asia and Africa. Subsequently, the BRI can be seen as a tool for China to gain leverage in trade and international affairs with the United States. It is of note that the boundaries and project initiatives under the BRI have been subjected to various criticisms in regards to transparency and its lack of a clear action and investment plan.

The key priorities of the BRI are to strengthen the connectivity of transportation networks in order to facilitate population and labour mobility, investment funds and consumer bases. The BRI is likely also to influence sociocultural aspects, and affect the livelihood of those residing along the BRI routes.

China has been historically known for using soft power strategies to build rapport with foreign countries. It has been observed that the initiatives of basic infrastructure development may provide a gateway to trade initially, but then investments might expand to military support, and later the infiltration of Chinese culture.

The sociocultural consequences from improved transportation networks are predicted to include rapid transmission of diseases, national security threats, human trafficking, narcotics trafficking, terrorism, crime, destruction of the natural environment, migration, and cultural colonization.

Lessons learnt from Chinese high-speed rail developments show how the *yin-yang* philosophy is put into practice, with emphasis on the

integration for the harmonization of national-level implementation.

The factors of success are as follows:

- The central government has strong political commitment to support project implementation
- Local governments support the policies and are ready to implement them
- A structural development plan for science and technology is put into place
- Development of mechanisms to create effective management are rolled out
- Human resource development plans are created to address needs

Chinese foreign aid provided for infrastructure development projects in developing countries is typically sufficient to help improve basic infrastructures, though if the country still lacks capacity and funding, and effective implementation, there are great challenges and risks of getting involved in debt-trap diplomacy. Those countries given excessive loans beyond their ability to honour the debt obligations will likely face such outcomes. Therefore, developing countries that are joining the initiative with China should bare this in mind as debt-traps often create full economic dependency to the creditor country, and as such, the leverage power of countries battling such unsustainable debts will be significantly reduced.

Thailand's strategic geographical location both in ASEAN and the BRI presents an unprecedented opportunity to collaborate with China. In a position to become a key hub connecting the Southeast Asian region, Thailand can both benefit its own economy and can contribute to the economic landscape of the region.

Thailand's bargaining power is though limited when it comes to trade. In addition to that there remains a lack of a comprehensive human resource development plan that can adjust to growth demands.

Studies of the consequences and impact of joining BRI should be conducted that includes all aspects: trade, investment, health and environmental determinants, and a human resource development plan for the sufficiency economy that embodies sustainability is also crucial.

“BRI is an issue of international politics, therefore, one must consider it both in the geo-economics and geo-politics dimensions”

Prof. Dr. Prapat Thepchatree, Thammasat University



Session 2:

The Belt and Road Initiative and Trade and Investment

The era of a World Order that sees the US as superpower has ended. The world is now entering a phase that is more complex, diverse and connected, and China's expansion is a very clear example of the ending of the old World Order. The US is now facing issues of racial conflict, a scarcity of resources and climate change. Meanwhile, China is trying to create an image of being world leader in various areas, one of which is One Belt One Road or what later has become known, of course, as the Belt and Road Initiative.

China, through this initiative, has been playing the role of the benefactor, providing loans to countries all over the world, many who are now currently facing economic crises as a result of their involvement, namely Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. These countries have failed to secure the economic means to pay back the debt incurred from development projects.

It should be noted that China's BRI is though only one of several initiatives. Other infrastructure development megaprojects in the Indo-Pacific region exist, including *Sagar Mala*, initiated by the Indian government, supporting economic expansion in the South Asian region through infrastructure projects to connect port cities along the Indian Ocean.

It has been estimated that financial loss as a result of the US trade war has been the most severe on Japan and China. Despite the political conflict between the two countries, a new phase of cooperation between China and Japan has been established to ensure the parties don't target the same investments. The region will benefit generally economically no matter who invests. This agreement allows Thailand to gain benefits from the two investing countries, though Thailand does need to have the appropriate strategic preparation in place. Basic infrastructure development objectives are moving towards building

connectivity in the ASEAN community.

However, joining the BRI does not come cheap. Taking part in megaprojects funded by China through this initiative is not free nor the foreign aid supported from China unconditional. Some even go as far as to say that the development support is the new face of colonization. More importantly, projects under the BRI pose the threat of negative consequences on the environment and health.

It is felt that the BRI and its projects should be conducted multilaterally and implemented on a participatory basis with transparency. Revenues from the projects should be equally disseminated to ensure economic equity and so one nation – in this case China – should not be the sole owner of any investment projects.

Furthermore, it has also been suggested that the gap includes lack of clear information of BRI-related project implementation, and a lack of traceable and trustworthy funding sources. Therefore, in order to ensure sustainability of the BRI, a national plan of action should be designed in alignment with international agendas. For example, the development of transportation networks, trains, aircrafts, roads, through monetary loans and revolving fund to promote awareness and to prevent social and cultural crisis.

If Thailand were to join the BRI, public hearings and public participation process must be considered. Also, gain-loss analysis studies should be conducted, with consideration of the impacts on health and the environment in mega development projects such as Map Ta Phut Industrial Estate. Lastly, another recommendation is to strengthen the collaboration with India to increase Thailand's leverage power with Japan and China.

“The most important element of entering an international initiative such as this one is to establish trust among the member countries”

-Dr. Piti Srisangnam, Director, Centre for International Economics,
Chulalongkorn University



Session 3:

The Belt and Road Initiative – Opportunities and Challenges to Global Health

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is perceived as the world's biggest investment project to date. Its total value stands at 9% of China's GDP. This figure includes health development, as China is well aware that health security correlates to economic growth, and that an outbreak of a disease can stunt economic growth. China has, in fact, experience of this threat. During the Ebola outbreaks in Africa, China dispatched a team of medical professionals to support rapid response on the ground.

It is also of note that China's global health policy is divided into two phases: a short-term plan of 1-3 years (2015-2017) and a long-term plan of 3-5 years. The short-term plan emphasizes health support through three different channels: establishing collaboration between central and regional government, bilateral and multilateral collaboration, and government-private sector collaboration. There are three dimensions of development under the long-term plan: health security, health systems, and the health industry. China also prioritizes support for Traditional Chinese Medicine.

At the 2017 Belt and Road high-level meeting health ministers and high-level government officials from more than thirty countries joined together to issue the Beijing Communiqué. The Communiqué focuses on four main platforms of collaboration as follows:

- Silk Road Public Health Network
- Silk Road Policy Research Network
- Silk Road Hospital Alliance and
- Silk Road Health Industry Alliance

These networks and alliances cover eight aspects of health development including; health security, maternal and child health, health policy, hospital management, human resources, traditional

medicine, health systems and the health industry.

After the establishment of the BRI, China has taken a significant role in the development of global health. The world has seen a yearly increase in the total amount of foreign aid provided by China. Despite the fact that the budget allocated for foreign aid in the health sector consists of only 7% of their total budget, multilateral support has more than doubled from 6% to 13%. Furthermore, collaboration with international organizations such as GAVI, WHO, UNAIDS and Global Fund has also increased. However, current development projects tend to be concerned with health infrastructures, for example, the donation of medical instruments, technical support to train healthcare professionals, and building health facilities. Hence, the focus is still more on infrastructure development than of developing a more holistic health system.

The BRI's goal focuses mainly on trade and investment. Health development has only very recently become an issue among the world's decision-makers. As such, there are no clear objectives of how much the BRI will focus on public health emergency response, disease prevention and health promotion, communicable disease control and the control of hazardous chemical substances. However, issues that the BRI has been focusing on such as cataract surgery, or the promotion of Traditional Chinese Medicine, are not yet in alignment with the world's global health agenda. Hence, it is felt that the BRI should improve and focus on key priority health issues, such as new advances in AIDS, TB and Malaria research and development.

One of the biggest challenges facing BRI countries in Southeast Asia is the potential negative threat to the environment and on health, especially if regulations and domestic legal instruments are still not in place and enforcement is not adhered to. Some examples of possible precautionary measures include ensuring safety standards for road construction and the prohibition of dangerous substances on construction sites.

Despite the fact that there is an MOU for health collaboration between Thailand and China, the implementation can still benefit from more clarification. As such, the BRI provides a great opportunity to collaborate in many ways, including the transfer of technology, access to medicine, infectious disease control and so on, which are expected to contribute to the development of other sectors in developing countries as well. Furthermore, the recommendation is for significant investment to be given to health informatics, health technology transfer, investment in the development of human resources, and creating shared value to transition beyond UHC to value-based healthcare.

As China has played a crucial role in the establishment of the coordinating center for research and information sharing with BRI countries, and the monitoring and assessment of impact on the environment and capacity building on global health diplomacy, it is also felt that China should increase multi-sectoral collaboration with a special emphasis on the transparency around contributions to the public for the benefits of all.



Session 4:

The Belt and Road Initiative – Opportunity or Threat to UHC

The BRI poses both an opportunity and a threat to UHC. On the opportunities side, it would potentially increase coverage of access to medical care across different countries. China has already been providing financial and technical support to build health infrastructures and increase the numbers of medical professionals in countries along BRI routes, especially in rural areas with insufficient health providers. The presence of BRI routes will undoubtedly increase access to health care in such countries.

Also, China has manufacturing capacities to create medicines, vaccines and diagnosis equipment. China's affordable pricing will likely contribute to increased access in countries in need through exports of medical equipment and medicines.

However, the BRI poses potential threats to the health system, particularly in regards to the quality of drugs and medical instruments. China had been donating medicines and tools to developing countries, though the goods do not always truly address the actual needs of these recipient countries. Furthermore, the exportation of Chinese medications and tools still lack strong regulations and quality control systems.

China's successful implementation of universal health coverage offers useful lessons for other countries on the path to achieve UHC. One of the major lessons learned is that investments in public health infrastructure alone is not insufficient for the success of UHC. The human workforce and capacity building of personnel must also be developed in parallel to the infrastructure advancements. One of the examples cited is the 100 100 100 project China initiated in Laos. The project contributed to the building of 100 schools, 100 health facilities, and 100 water treatment plants. This project carried out building infrastructure and also capacity building activities.

“How do we convince them (Chinese investors) to be less threat-oriented, and more social-oriented? This is the real challenge for us.”

Dr. Suwit Wibulpolprasert, The Chairman of the Organizing Sub-Committee for the 5th International Trade and Health Conference



Session 5:
**The Belt and Road Initiative and Public Health Emergencies/
Health Security**

The establishment of the BRI has led to the mobility of people as well as a vector of disease. Without effective disease control mechanisms in place, the initiative poses a risk of large-scale epidemic outbreaks. Therefore, national plans regarding the response to public health emergencies with a special focus on sharing and exchange of surveillance data, and strengthening national capacities are needed. Multi-sectoral collaborations during preparation, surveillance and response are also crucial. At the same time, risk communications should be carried out between countries to ensure that those facing these threats are made aware of the situation.

The BRI poses both opportunities and threats to the overall state of health security and therefore BRI countries should be equipped sufficiently for an emergency response to outbreaks or a disaster. Collaboration should be made with other sectors beyond health, as well. National and international multi-sectoral collaboration should be established to ensure preparedness for public health emergencies.

The challenges of public health emergencies are twofold. Firstly, public health emergency is a multi-layered issue with international relations, diplomacy, and regional conflict complexities. Secondly, tools in dealing with public health emergencies have their limitations if not implemented correctly. A large number of tools have been designed for usage domestically and there is a demand to establish a platform between BRI countries to integrate and share their information. The BRI offers one good opportunity for the improvement of health emergency sector.

China is a key player in regards to public health emergencies, providing financial and technical support to other countries during the preparation process, emergency response, and information sharing, and

so each country should see the BRI as an opportunity to increase collaboration in regards to health security with China, and also to create a sustainable mechanism to respond to public health emergencies in an efficient manner.

“Every country needs to take the leadership to come together ...and discuss and identify and shine the light on those benefits that can be improved and risks that can be avoided... so that all countries all regions benefit from this [BRI] opportunity.”

Dr Dennis Carroll
Director, Emerging Threats Program, USAID



Session 6:

The BRI and Health Innovation and Research Collaboration

The BRI can contribute to the strengthening of health innovations and research collaboration across different levels. For bilateral collaboration, the foundation should be established from the basic infrastructure development of a medium size, but not too large. The recommendation is for each country to use their existing infrastructure to increase their internal capacity.

There are collaborations between Thailand and China in regards to Traditional Chinese Medicine, robotics for patient care assistance, and for improving the quality of life among the elderly. At present both Thailand and China are ageing societies, therefore providing health-associated care in the two countries is mainly focused on health innovations promotion. The Chinese government allows both the public and private sectors to conduct medical research projects with tangible outcomes such as vaccines. Unfortunately, Thailand still has not acknowledged the importance of the issue. In order to ensure success, high-level executives of the projects would need to have a good technical and strategical perspective. Thailand can use the BRI as a means to promote development in health innovation and technologies.

With consideration of legalities and ethics, disclosure of personal information especially during clinical trials should be conducted with due diligence. Regulations and laws for the control of diagnostic instruments and robotics should be available. Also there should be consultations between the public and researchers, or companies development innovations especially rules and regulations involving cross-sectoral collaboration between the Thai government and the private sector. The recommendation is for the government to play a supporting role, while universities and private sectors play the role of implementer. The Ministry of Science and Technologies it is hoped can collaborate with Ministry of Public Health to develop a national plan on health

technologies and medical services.

The Royal Thai Government should also provide recommendations and continuous support to the private sector for their health innovation development. This would improve the quality of the research, and help develop research topics on the subject of health science and technologies, and also be in alignment with sustainable development goals, achieving a geographical landmark for medical technology advancement.

Having a common goal will lead to the success of the BRI. Strengthening collaboration without having to duplicate or recreate infrastructure development will likely be a key factor to success. Other success factors include research, geographical landscaping, and human resource development to ensure quality and efficiency, including high-level executives. The government would benefit by acting as a facilitator for research and development projects in the private sector, and it is best that rules, regulations, and financial support for research and development be consistent and continuous to achieve the best outcomes.





Conclusion and Way Forward



Conclusion and Way Forward by

**Dr. Suwit Wibulpolprasert,
Chair of the ITH Conference
Organizing Sub-Committee**



BRI is considered a mega-investment project with 9% of China's GDP. And it is not only China; more than seventy countries in total are also partaking in this initiative. As such, the BRI is considered a mega-infrastructure investment project, which will certainly lead to consequences not just in terms, of course, of infrastructure development, but also of widespread economic growth.

China has learned its lesson from the closed-door policy imposed during the Ming Dynasty, during which the country had positioned itself as the center of the world, leaving only small port cities for external trade. A number of inventions were discovered in China, for example, gunpowder, the compass, paper making and printing, which led to the country being a maritime military target for England and other European countries. The first World War brought territorial invasion from many world powers including Japan, which led to closed-door policy, though later China opened their country to foreign investment.

China had established maritime trade in the Indian Ocean and through the Pacific Ocean on the Mediterranean Sea. The two oceans are vital for sea trades, and Thailand is one of the nation with coastal border on both the Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean.

The past experience proves to China that in times of crisis there lies opportunity. The Chinese letter that signifies crisis 危機 wēijī embeds two characters: one representing danger 危 wēi and the other 機 jī opportunity. Chinese wisdom explains that in crisis there does indeed exist opportunity. Thailand must find also find opportunity that arises from BRI. Migration and trade, are good in that they promote the economy. Economic growth brings a higher quality of education, quality of life, and better health. It could, therefore, be considered that the BRI is for the betterment of life generally.

But at the same time, we have to see the threats that come with these opportunities. The health system is not that concerning, as Thailand has a strong health service provider system from public health's primary care level, Village Health Volunteers, Sub-District Health Promoting Hospital, District Hospitals. Thailand's governmental health providers are quite strong. Statistics show that 80% of outpatients use health service providers that are under the government, while 90% of inpatients prefer the governmental health facilities. The figure proves that we do not have to worry about foreign patients, or Chinese patients traveling to Thailand for medical treatment. Thailand produces more than 3,000 doctors and over 10,000 nurses annually. We have the capacity to provide services to foreigners. That also helps to prevent Thailand's medical brain drains abroad. The attractive and competitive package that Thailand provides is similar to other countries, for instance, the US. Medical professionals who emigrated and practiced in foreign countries will slowly but increasingly return. The effective Universal Health Coverage system that Thailand has also increases the people's access to medical care.

But even without BRI, foreigners enter the country at the estimated number of 30 million persons per year. There are a lot of pros and cons to those visitors regardless of the BRI.

Thailand has initiatives to strengthen its public health emergency response. The health system has been implanted all over the country, and emergency medical team are also available nationwide. There are strong competence in health policy research, and ITH programme is one of the research bodies which conducted systematic research to feed into decision-making process in matters related to international trade and health.

Most importantly, we should not be complacent. We should continue to strengthen and improve ourselves. If we are prepared, and have appropriate response plans for different issues in place, I think we should use the BRI to strengthen the country's capacity.

"Trust" needs to be established. It's not only China who is responsible to create trust, but more than seventy countries of the BRI should also take part in building trust. This is the keyword of this conference today

Conference Closing



Closing Remarks

by

Dr. Sirina Chokwattana
Pavarolarvidya
Director of the National
Commission on International
Trade and Health Studies



Chairman of the Organizing Sub-Committee, Dr. Suwit Wibulpolprasert

Panelists and Distinguished guests

First of all I would like to express my gratitude to everyone here, and to the organizers. The past two days has been very fruitful. I thank Dr. Suwit for allowing me the opportunity to learn more about the history of China, which not everyone had the chance to learn about. Also the strength of the Chinese. I think this is their culture, their DNA. When you realize that, the BRI that is about to begin, will no longer be scary. I think that Dr. Suwit mentions the history of China and crisis with opportunity as the same word. Dr. Suwit discusses of strength, in which we have to admire Thailand, with the Ministry of Public Health as the leader in health, and the existing mechanisms that we are proud of, that should be continued for the benefits of the society and the global community. The key word is 'trust. When Dr. Suwit mentioned, I was thinking what the Thai translation of trust should be. I guess it should come from the term *chūa jāi* (เชื่อใจ). We need to establish that trust between the governmental sector, the private sector, and the people. When we have

built that, we can collaborate together effectively.

If we trust other partnering countries, then we can initiate great things. And lastly Dr. Suwit also mentioned the term 'partnership'. From listening today, I think that we already have the necessary 'trust' established. I understand that all of the organizations and agencies present here at this workshop had created the most wonderful thing, which is trust. We trust one another, and will be ready to support one another in the future. Crisis can be mitigated and managed, transformed into opportunity. That will be possible if we keep our optimism, prepare well, and do our research well in advance.

The BRI will be implemented. And it is not only about politics nor economics. It will cover range of topics from geopolitics, health, society and quality of life. In the future the quality of life of the population will improve, and we will have more opportunities for the exchange and sharing of information. I want to emphasize human resource development. If the capacity Thai citizens are strengthened, great opportunities will come to us, and the global community in the future will be the generation of prosperity. I hope you all can remain optimistic, and think about great opportunities in the future. We will have tools that will be more intelligent than human, but human will still remain more intelligent. Tools will be smarter day by day, as well as human.

I am very happy today. I would like to thank you all again, the organizing committee, Dr.Suwit the chairman who convened this event. Thank you Dr. Cha-aim, thank you Dr. Chutima, thank you the notetakers, and thank you all guest speakers.

I would like to conclude this conference now. Thank you very much.

Annex



**2018 International Trade and Health Conference Organizing
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- | | | |
|-----|--|----------------------------|
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