

# ***Analysing the Role of the Belt and Road Initiative in Promoting Peace and Stability in the Middle East***

## ***- A Moral Realism Perspective***

**Wanying Jin<sup>1,a,\*</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>The University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia*

*a. 200235@yzpc.edu.cn*

*\*corresponding author*

**Abstract:** Against the backdrop of major changes in the international political and economic order and the further escalation of tensions in the Middle East, this study focuses on the foreign strategy of China (the "Belt and Road" initiative) and then analyzes how BRI cooperation effectively promotes Durable peace and stability in the Middle East based on moral realism analysis. At present, the global security situation is intricate and complicated, and global and regional security issues continuously increase. As an important part of the global security system, the Middle East has endless security and development issues, especially the new round of Palestinian-Israeli conflict has further increased the security risks in the Middle East. BRI is China's solution as a rising power to strengthen world peace, cooperation and common development. Abiding to the "golden rules" of consultation, contribution and shared benefits, BRI has opened up a new cooperation path for the Middle East that truly adheres to peace, prosperity, civilization, green, openness and innovative development, thereby promoting the achievement of peace, stability and security development in the Middle East. This article adopts a model that combines theory and practice, starting from moral realism, to analyze the Chinese government's understanding of the world and the policies it has adopted in the Middle East; and taking the BRI as a construction path, to explore possible paths for peaceful and stable development in the Middle East.

**Keywords:** BRI, Middle East, moral realism.

## **1. Introduction**

Currently, the global security situation is characterized by accelerating turbulence, and regional security risks have also increased significantly. Taking the Middle East as an example, it is in the process of a historical transition in which dual changes in the world and within the region are simultaneously intertwined and superimposed. The regional security situation has seen many new changes and is also facing unprecedented new challenges. In particular, the new round of Palestinian-Israeli conflict has increased security risks in the Middle East and called for urgent requirements for the reshaping of regional and even global security order. On March 10, 2023, Saudi Arabia and Iran reached the Beijing Agreement under the China's promotion and announced that they agreed to restore diplomatic relations [1]. Saudi Iranian reconciliation is of great significance to achieving

regional security and peace and is also China's successful practice in resolving regional hot spots. More importantly, China, as a trustworthy partner of Middle Eastern countries, the BRI promoted by China is gaining recognition from more and more Middle Eastern countries. Many Middle Eastern countries have aligned their national development plans with the "BRI" and hope to work with China to facilitate peace, stability, and secure development in the Middle East [2]. At present, academic circles have paid great attention to the impact of "BRI" in the Middle East. In the face of the complex contradictions and disputes in the Middle East, China has actively played the image of a responsible major country. However, is China-Middle Eastern countries cooperation in BRI effective in promoting and maintaining peace and stability in the Middle East? What is its practical path? What is the direction of future cooperation? This article attempts to systematically study and discuss these issues from the perspective of moral realism theory, aiming to provide a reference for dealing with this challenge.

## 2. Literature Review

This part attempts to classify and sort out the concept of moral realism and the purpose and effect of China's "Belt and Road" strategy in the Middle East on the basis of sorting out relevant high-level literature and materials at home and abroad and make a more comprehensive review based on relevant official documents and scholars' research results.

### 2.1. Basic Content of Moral Realism Theory

Chinese scholar Yan Xuetong created the moral realism theory by drawing on the moral concept between countries in the pre-Qin era and integrating the reasonable core of Western realism in international relations. The core issue studied by the moral realism theory is that how the rising power successfully replaced the dominant power, namely, the rule of the shift of world power center [3]. Moral realism still takes the principle of strength as its basic theoretical premise and believes that a state's strength position in the international structure determines its national core interests.

In the view of moral realism, a state's foreign strategy orientation is not only determined by its strength, but also by its political leaders. Gorbachev's rise to power caused the Soviet Union to split from a union of states into 15 independent countries, thus ending the two-tier structure that had lasted for more than half a century and transforming the world structure into a situation where the United States was the only superpower; in contrast, China, since President Xi Jinping came to power, has put forward to a range of vigorous foreign policies, and the image of a self-confident, self-reliant, world-minded, open and inclusive great power has gradually emerged [3].

Moral realism also emphasizes the impact of the strategic preferences of political leadership types with different moral levels on the changes in the power comparison of major powers and the transformation of the international pattern. It believes that "sticking to moral" is a significant condition for the rising power to maintain its status and the international order. At the same time, it also believes that moral principles can not only enhance or weaken the legitimacy of a country's power, but also play a role in enhancing or reducing a state's comprehensive strength to a certain extent. At the opening ceremony of the third BRI International Cooperation Summit Forum, Chinese President Xi Jinping made it clear that China is eager to deepen the partnership with all parties involved the BRI, push joint construction of BRI into a new high-quality development, and make unremitting efforts to enter modernization at an early date [4]. Xi Jinping's statement not only fully reflects the correct strategic choices and outstanding political leadership of China's political leaders in the face of a changing, complex and turbulent world situation, but also further enhances its international reputation as a rising country.

## 2.2. China's BRI Strategy in the Middle East

Since the BRI was proposed, 22 states from the Middle East have been important participants in the BRI, and the BRI has also provided a larger stage and broader prospects for China's relations with the Middle East. At the second China-Arab States Summit, President Xi stressed that China hopes to work with the Arab side to carry forward the China-Arab friendship, build "five major cooperation patterns", and accelerate the achievement of a China-Arab community with a shared future, once again clarifying Middle East's key position in the BRI construction [5]. At the Arab League headquarters, President Xi comprehensively and systematically clarified China's policy in the Middle East during the new era, advocating political dialogue to promote peace, construction to promote stability, stability to promote development, and mutually beneficial collaboration to promote win-win situation, bringing new thinking and suitable opportunities for the Middle Eastern states to achieve peace, stability and development, and planning a blueprint for future development [6].

## 3. Economic Strategy

As the largest trading partner of the Middle East, China is not only the largest importer of oil in the Middle East, but also the largest source of imported goods for these countries. In other words, the Middle East is extremely dependent on China economically. Data shows that China-Arab trade volume increased from US\$36.7 billion in 2004 to US\$398 billion in 2023, and the stock of two-way direct investment between China and Arab countries exceeded US\$30 billion [7]. China concluded from its own experience and historical lessons that economic development can promote regional stability. Promoting regional stability, development and security through economic cooperation is the approach with the least negative effects, the most stable effect and the most far-reaching impact. Xi Jinping, at the Arab League headquarters, stated that the root of the turmoil in the Middle East is blamed on backward development, and the way out ultimately depends on development [6]. This is the new judgment of Chinese leaders on the main contradictions of the Middle East issue in the new era, and it is also the core logic of China's strategy for the Middle East. China's BRI cooperation with the Middle East closely combines the government and enterprises, forming a Middle East economic policy with distinct Chinese characteristics. In addition, the BRI strategy does not completely prioritize economic interests, but will consider multiple factors, always adhere to the balance of righteousness and interests, and achieve win-win results. At the first China-Arab States Summit, Xi Jinping called on China and Arab countries to forge a friendly spirit of mutual assistance, equality and mutual benefit, inclusiveness and mutual learning [8].

## 4. Political Strategy

For a long time, in addition to the deep-rooted regional contradictions and conflicts, the Middle East has been deeply interfered with by dominant powers outside the region, and the security situation has become highly complex and uncertain. To strengthen BRI cooperation in the Middle East, China has always insisted non-alignment, all-round balanced diplomacy, non-intervention in internal affairs of states, and non-export of ideology. Xi Jinping, In Cairo in 2016, gave a speech that China does not seek agents in the Middle East, but persuades and promotes talks; does not establish spheres of influence, but promotes everyone to join the BRI circle of friends; does not aim to bridge the gap, but weaves a mutually beneficial and win-win partnership network [5]. In addition, in its foreign exchanges in the Middle East, China has always maintained normal relations with all Middle Eastern countries and sought balance among various contradictions. Xi Jinping said at the first China-Arab States Summit that Both sides should jointly adhere to the principle of non-interference in internal affairs. China urges the international community to respect the status of the Middle Eastern people as masters [8]. China insists on non-interference in domestic affairs of Middle Eastern states and hopes

to play a vanguard and exemplary role. Recently, when attending the UN Future Summit, Foreign Minister Wang Yi reiterated that international affairs should be handled through consultation among all countries, resisting the jungle law of the strong bullying the weak, and opposing hegemonic practices such as unilateral sanctions [9]. This purpose once again demonstrates China's principle of non-interference.

## 5. Analysis

The paper involves theoretical and practical research on moral realism and BRI. Through the literature research method, it interprets Professor Yan Xuetong's moral realism and the official documents of the BRI, deeply explores its construction path, and then adopts the inductive analysis method to analysis its motivation and influence on China's BRI strategy in the Middle East.

### 5.1. The Analytical Framework of Moral Realism Theory

Moral realism theory is one of the most distinctive and influential Chinese international relations theories in recent years. The innovation of this theory lies in the concept of "morality" rather than realism theory. The central idea of moral realism is very simple, namely, the country's core interests, and subjective political leadership determines the choice of a country's foreign strategy. The core interests and political leadership are in turn influenced by the country's comprehensive strength and moral principles (Figure 1)

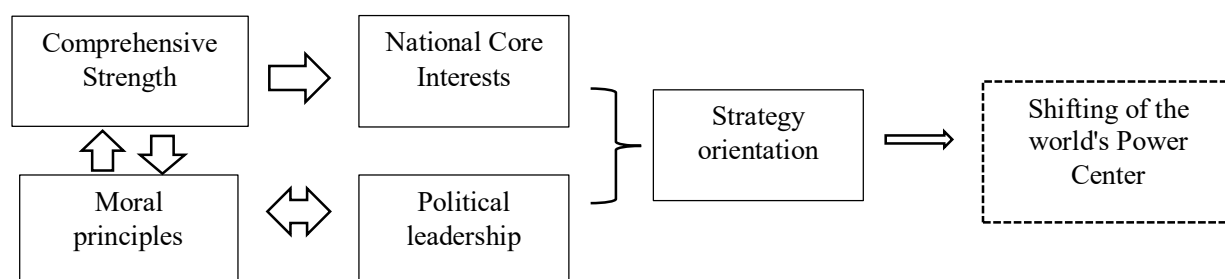


Figure 1: Schematic diagram of the core logic of moral realism [3]

Moral realism uses political leadership as the core independent variable to explore the internal logic of the shift of the world power center and puts forward the view that political leadership determines the transition of the global power center. This not only helps to explain how the rising power replaces the current world's dominant power, but also provides an effective perspective for observing and explaining the moral level of the rising country in promoting the BRI foreign strategy at the international level.

### 5.2. China's Political Leadership Behind BRI

According to the moral realism theory, current political leadership in China thinks about responsibility from a global perspective, which can be classified as "proactive and enterprising". In terms of the global level, China's political leaders' advocates building a new form of international relations and puts forward new ideas and proposes such as constructing a community with a shared future for mankind and jointly developing BRI. At the opening ceremony of the 60th anniversary of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Xi Jinping emphasized that China is expecting to work with all participants to promote the world towards a peaceful, secure, prosperous and progressive future with the future of mankind and the well-being of the people in mind [10]. Former Ecuadorian President Guillermo Lasso commented that President Xi Jinping's concept of

building a community with a shared future for mankind has pointed the way for the world to explore a path of development of freedom and peace [11]. Reports and comments from international media not only confirm that China's political leadership has accelerated the shift of the world power center from the west to the east, but also prove that the good morality of China's political leadership has won international trust and support.

### 5.3. Strategic Achievements of China in Promoting BRI Cooperation in the Middle East

According to the moral realism theory, a state's foreign strategy lies in changes in the political leadership type and national comprehensive strength. The open, inclusive, mutually beneficial and interconnected BRI proposed by China is an important platform for China-Arab collaboration. China has signed official BRI documents with 22 Arab countries and the Arab League in the past 10 years [12]. It only reflects that Middle Eastern countries are collectively implementing the "Look East" strategic layout, but also shows that China, as a rising power, with trustful strategic reputation is gaining recognition from Middle Eastern countries. Since 2021, China has successively put forward global development initiatives, global security initiatives, and global civilization initiatives, further sublimating and expanding the underlying logic of BRI's consultation, construction and sharing, and providing a Chinese solution that keeps pace with the times to help solve the development, security and governance dilemmas in the Middle East, and winning positive feedback from regional countries. At the International Symposium on the 10th Anniversary of China-Middle East BRI Cooperation, Associate Researcher Jin Liangxiang of the Shanghai Institute for International Studies believes that China now not only has a large number of strategic economic activities and projects in the Middle East but has also become a new conflict mediator in the Middle East [13]. In response to the new round of order changes triggered by the Gaza War and Saudi Iranian reconciliation, Ebtesam Al-Ketbi, founder and chairman of the UAE Policy Center and professor at the United Arab Emirates University, hopes that China will provide constructive political intervention while bringing more economic projects to the Middle East [13].

## 6. Conclusion

In summary, moral realism not only introduces morality into realism theory in a complementary way to the Western classical realism tradition, but also explores a new moral perspective from ancient Chinese thought. On the one hand, the international community increasingly believes that China is a rising power, which requires China to take responsibility and be a responsible power. From the perspective of moral realism, China, as a rising country, always adheres to justice, trust and morality in the anarchic international system. Its excellent moral principles have made the Middle East recognize China's international leadership and strongly respond to China's promotion of BRI. On the other hand, BRI, as an international public product, is China's foreign strategy based on its own moral level. The continuous advancement of China's BRI cooperation with the Middle East further confirms that China is increasingly deepening its partnership with Middle Eastern countries and continuously promoting the Middle East peace process.

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