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## **The Belt and Road Initiative and the Project of a Social European Union**

### **A Quest for Intergenerational Media of Understanding**

#### *Abstract*

Marcin J. Schroeder's (2021) President's Theme Statement for the 2021 IS4SI Summit postulates that "productive competition requires common foundations, common rules and mutual understanding". This prerequisite does not only apply to scientific or philosophic inquiries but in increasingly complex ways and modes to long-term socio-economic planning, with widespread and often intransparent and unforeseeable, certainly partially or completely uncontrollable side-impacts. Two of the globally most important projects for the next decades are China's Belt and Road Initiative and the project of a social European Union. Both require sophisticated means of coordination across established state societies and their particular legal regulations, functional realms of economic financing and labor planning, security measures, police, military, and anti-terrorist professionals. The size and longevity of the "initiatives" or "projects" surpass the longevity of politicians, economic, military, police or cultural leaders, even in life-time positions. Any "balance" between the competing interests can hardly rely on conscious and intergenerationally reliable understanding and agreement. Yet, which kinds of digital media can support that these long-term transnational projects function according to the pre-conceived and continuously adapted goals, in competition and coordination with each other, allowing for mutual understanding for ever more citizens? And can their partially antagonistic rationales be "tamed" or steered in asymmetrically interdependent modes of peaceful co-developments? Will coalitions across these global projects emerge due to professional affinities of functional realms or generational presuppositions?

Two major types of future social order probably emerge: a planning one, directed by highly limited authoritarian political or techno-economic agencies and a democratically selective one, arising from the competing social forces. The Chinese initiative can be seen as a large, diverse set of expansionary plans. "Social Europe" emphasises the welfare and statutory side of the European project more than its economic and trade dimension, namely the democratic state as distinct from the private sector as the most legitimate and sustainable provider of, e.g., education or health.

For China and Chinese principles abroad, some fundamentals appear to be clear: Ever more professionally produced, widely marketed and intensely used digital networks accelerate behaviour observations, evaluations, standardizations, identity-formations, and sanctioning. Intelligent personal assistants (IPAs) observe and standardize private behaviour in terms of multimodal data of faces, gestures, body movements, conduct, social distances, opinions, goods, services, goals, means of transportation etc. "The construction of digital Belt and Road is conducive to the use of big data to transform and upgrade traditional industries, accelerate the cultivation of new forms of industry and new economic models." (Liang and Zhang, 2019, 46) Large-scale digital social and asocial networks rely on and enhance surveillance and profit. The strategies implemented in the Belt and Road Initiative "should pursue innovation-driven development, intensify cooperation in frontier areas such as artificial intelligence, nanotechnology and quantum computing, and promote big data, cloud computing and smart cities, so as to turn them into a digital Silk Road of the 21st century" (Office 2019). A digital Europe, in contrast, "embodies ... strong political institutions, democratic governance, sovereignty of communities and people, diversity of European cultures, equality and justice" (Vision 2019, 10-11).

Such stock-takings rely partially on those biased observations of (standards of) human conduct which have already been codified and documented and can be quantified with current computer capacities, as organized by multinational corporations and state surveillance agencies. This procedure excludes, however, those developmental risks and opportunities for which no data were recorded so far. These infrastructures of surveillance and coordination are computed according to distinct functional, generational and politically prejudiced priorities. Digital humanism, however, can highlight potentially democratizing and inclusive developmental patterns for which traditionally only rudimentary and often hegemonic data and algorithms exist.

### *References*

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