

*Book Review*

**Şevket Akyıldız<sup>1,\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> SOAS, University of London, United Kingdom, ORCID: 0000-0001-9545-4432.

\* İletişim: [sevket.akyildiz1@gmail.com](mailto:sevket.akyildiz1@gmail.com)

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Peter Frankopan's *New Silk Roads: The Present and Future of the World* is a thought-provoking study of global politics and economic transformation since the 1990s. Frankopan investigates the contemporary concept of the "new Silk Roads" and China's Belt and Road Initiative and what interconnectedness means for the world community. So, what does the term Silk Road mean? The author says: "In fact, the Silk Roads serves as a term that describes the ways in which people, cultures and continents were woven together", and he clarifies how people, ideas, and resources spread, "and explains the contexts and motivations for expeditions across deserts and oceans that helped fashion the rise of empires", (p. 2). Additionally, the book looks at what this means for Western societies and economies and their evolving response to the new opportunities and challenges posed. Frankopan also explores tensions and fears among the governments associated with the new Silk Road. His sources are government documents, international newspapers and scholarly journals (pp. 291-342).

Frankopan's study emphasises the (re-)emergence and growth of the so-called Eastern societies – under the influence of Beijing. The Eurasian and Asian societies – including Turkey, Iran, Russia, the Central Asian republics, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, China, India, Korea, Japan, and others – are organising and establishing greater economic cooperation and closer political relations based upon shared long-term aims. In doing so, the GNP and the material lifestyle of their urban citizens are improving significantly. Conversely, liberal-capitalist Western societies (particularly the United States, Great Britain, and European Union states) are struggling with the economic rise of Asian societies; coincidentally, the Western states face internal problems connected with

globalisation, environmental crises, identity-based politics and populism. Frankopan says, "Since 2015, the world has changed dramatically. Life was becoming more difficult and more challenging for the west, I wrote at the time" (p. 7). He sets this in the context of the political fragmentation among the Western governments, President Trump's isolationism, and the United Kingdom's Brexit policy.

The book contains six chapters (including the "Introduction"). Chapter 2, "The Roads to the East", discusses the growing influence of Asian, Russian, and Arab owned corporations and their elites' money in the Western economy, and the author gives many examples about London. Chapter 3, "The Roads to the Heart of the World", looks at the growing cooperation and interactions between the Asian, Eurasian and Arab Gulf governments around economics and trade. "They are not doing so in isolation from the west, nor even in competition with it" (p. 43); instead, consumer demand in the West generates jobs and opportunities in the East. Chapter 4, "The Roads to Beijing", investigates the role of Xi Jinping's China in shaping economic, political, and international relations through its booming economy, construction firms, loans and grants. The analysis considers three principal motivations: long-term planning and China's domestic needs, national security and geopolitics (p. 99). It includes a debate about Xinjiang's Uyghurs.

Chapter 5, "The Roads to Rivalry", explores the tensions and suspicions between China and the Western powers and their partners (India, South Korea, Japan) about economic and security matters. A concept analysed is "permanent destabilisation" by Trump to create an advantage for Washington (p. 177). Chapter 6, "The Roads to the Future", examines the nuances and complexities of the New Silk Road politics. In particular, the relationship between independent governments facing globalisation, Trump's administration, the move from a bi-polar to a multi-polar world, and a rising China, "raising fears for many of an empire being built by design or by default" notes Frankopan (p. 274). He continues by saying, in the face of this, rather than offer the world an alternative liberal-minded and inclusive model, "U.S. policy does not just push countries into each other's arms – it also strengthens their economic and religious ties" (p. 233).

Frankopan's book makes us think about the future of the world economy and shifts in global power relations. For instance, are we witnessing a new "Chinese empire" based on economic dominance and financial power? Or, are we witnessing a new power partnership heavily influenced by Beijing among the Asian, African and Eurasian governments? In the coming decades, will China replace the United States (and the European Union) as the world's dominant

economic power? Today, are we seeing a coming together of like-minded Eurasian governments and political elites with a shared vision of socio-economic progress and development united by interdependence and cooperation—and Beijing’s loans, grants and construction teams? How will this impact the post-1945 world order and its institutions?

The criticism of “the New Silk Roads” covers topics the author briefly mentions and fails to analyse thoroughly. Firstly, new technology and artificial intelligence (AI) might enable Western countries to reinvigorate their manufacturing industries for domestic consumption and export (p. 263). Secondly, the ecological crisis centred upon climate change – notably water issues, food shortage, and desertification (p. 58) – might be the catalyst for societal changes that reduce the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative and similar regional and international economic partnerships (p 37). Thirdly, the book is a top-down study of political elites and does not account for what the masses want. Might we argue that in a long-term development context, local farming and trading communities and medium-sized towns are more efficient and environmentally sustainable than city life based on the Western-consumption model? (p. 36). After all, Western governments’, assisted by technology, are increasingly able to provide their market town and small-town communities with access to modern education and medicine. Overall, this book is ideal for students, scholars, and general readers who seek to understand the dynamics of the present-day and near-future politics and economies of Asia, Eurasia, the Arab Gulf States and Saudi Arabia, and how economic transformation here will negatively and positively impact citizens’ living in the West.



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