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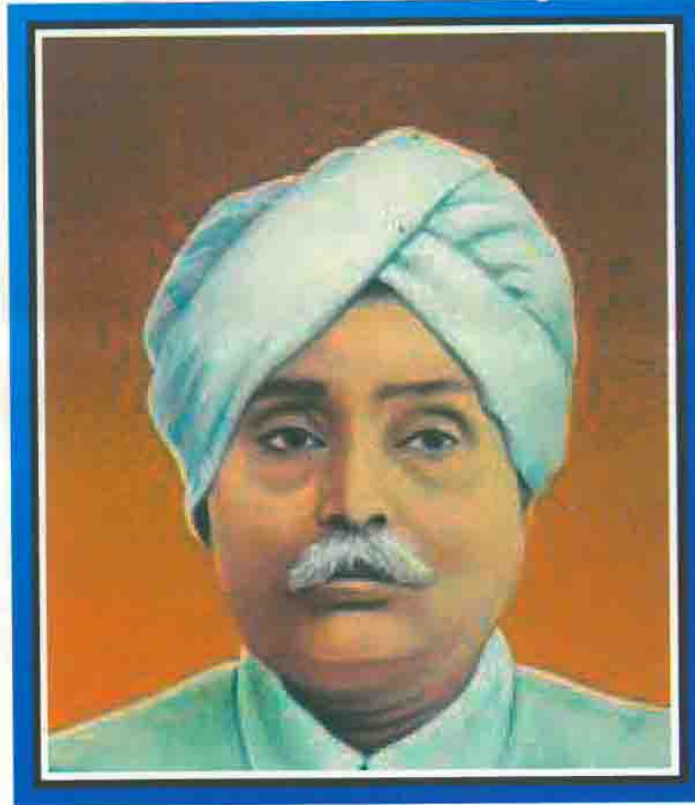
# The Indian Journal of Political Science



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जितात्मनो महाभागा येषां न स्तः प्रियाप्रिये।

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## ENERGISING THE NEW SILK ROAD: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Anju Lis Kurian  
C. Vinodan

*The term 'One Belt, One Road' (OBOR) applies to the establishment of the 'Silk Road Economic Belt' and 'Maritime Silk Road' by the Chinese Leadership in 2013. This initiative encompasses areas that generate 55 percent of the world's GNP, 70 percent of the global population and 75 percent of known energy reserves. The main objective of the paper is to analyse the OBOR from the perspective of energy security and the utilization of the initiative for ensuring energy security for the country. Just like any other net importer of energy sources, China's energy policies are also mainly driven to achieve the supply security, to satisfy the energy thirst of the masses, and to secure energy at reasonable prices. The energy dimension of OBOR is well suited to address the issues related to energy supply, demand as well as price and thereby becomes one of the key drivers of its foreign policy.*

### Introduction

By the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century China became the world's second largest economy bypassing United Kingdom in 2005, Germany in 2006 and Japan in 2010 and still moving on to a high growth path. The sky-scraping economic growth earned the country to be the world's largest energy consumer in the year 2009. Growth in domestic consumption along with deficient domestic output of fossil fuels posed energy security as an urgent challenge for China. The intense efforts of China to enhance domestic production of fossil fuels especially oil and natural gas has failed to catch up with consumption growth due to resource shortages. So the Chinese government initiated the policy of exploring overseas resources and markets in various locations of the world to guarantee its energy security to cope-up with its development needs<sup>1</sup>. In this scenario the initiation of New Silk Route gave great impetus to the energy security aspirations of the country.

The original Silk Road came into existence more than two thousand years back as part of the westward expansion of China's Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD). It was a sprawling network of exchange which connected South and Central Asia with the Middle East and in due course extended over four thousand miles to Europe. From the 16<sup>th</sup> Century onwards Asian commerce with Europe had largely shifted to maritime trade routes owing to the cheapness and fastness<sup>2</sup>. The Silk Road was a

major factor in the advancement of the civilizations of China, India, Persia, Rome, Central Asia, Africa, Europe, and Arabia by means of political, economic and cultural interactions among the civilizations and cultures of these countries and regions. The Silk Road symbolizes a historical example of political, economic and cultural assimilation due to inter-regional trades and cultural communications. The revivification of the Great Silk Road was first call forth by the former European Commission (EC) when the Central Asian countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – became independent nations in the year 1991. The intension of EC's Silk Road was to connect Europe with Central Asia through the International Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA). Later the United States initiated the 'Silk Road Strategy Act' in 1999 that was updated with the 'Silk Road Strategy Act of 2006', to secure long-term US interests in Central Asia, South Caucasus, Afghanistan and to advance regional security as well as cooperation. The UN planned to revitalize the Silk Road as a trans-Asian highway and conceived as a transcontinental railway linking Russia and China with Europe passing through Kazakhstan, the Eurasian Land Bridge is sometimes referred as the 'New Silk Road'<sup>3</sup>.

In 2012, Professor Wang Jisi, a prominent Chinese scholar was the first to speak about the need for China to invigorate three Silk Roads; to Southeast Asia, to South Asia and to Central Asia. One year later, China's President Xi Jinping, in a September

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