**新冠疫情为中国重启“健康丝绸之路”提供新契机**

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正文：

俄罗斯卡内基莫斯科中心于2020年6月11日发布题为《健康丝绸之路——后新冠疫情时代中国如何在南亚稳固“一带一路”倡议的地位》的文章中称，中国外交部长王毅承认新冠肺炎疫情减缓了中国政府 “一带一路”倡议的进程，但明确表示其影响只是暂时的，“一带一路”倡议有望在疫情后变得更加强大。

自2015年起，中国政府一直想重塑公共卫生治理，而“健康丝绸之路”则让中国有机会在全球范围内实现这一倡议，增强“一带一路”倡议的现实意义，同时在国际舆论中掌握话语权。

由于疫情影响，许多“一带一路”沿线国家都面临着沉重的债务负担，资金紧缩意味着中国政府需要削减“一带一路”倡议的开支，而卫生医疗投资将会成为一种成本效益更高的合作方式。

《人民日报》社评指出，在“健康丝绸之路”倡议中，中国主要有三个目标，其中一个直接的全球目标是，中国希望在疫情中占据话语权，并树立全球卫生领导者的形象。目前全球对卫生的高度关注给了中国重塑全球公共卫生机制的机会，让中国有机会向全世界展示其全球医疗危机应对能力。同时，中国也希望“健康丝绸之路”能够发掘新的市场机会，通过提供基础设施建设、能力建设、疾病识别和防控等方面的帮助，让“一带一路”沿线国家成为中国医疗体系和科学技术的孵化器。

目前，新冠肺炎疫情对南亚国家造成了重创，这意味着虽然该地区国家仍然想要开展新的基础设施建设项目，但却无法承担更多的贷款以支持这些项目。事实上，许多国家已经纷纷向中国要求债务免除。

这一危机同时也暴露了南亚国家公共卫生应对能力的欠缺，根据“世界发展指标”，南亚国家在大多数基础医疗指标中表现欠佳。这意味着接下来南亚国家在基础设施建设方面将会着重投资医院和实验室建设，弥补卫生体系中的重大缺漏。因此在疫情后，“健康丝绸之路”将会成为“一带一路倡议”在南亚的重要组成部分。

虽然中国的战略竞争对手正在努力彰显其公共卫生影响力，但南亚国家仍然需要依靠中国来发展其医疗领域。中国的“健康丝绸之路”成功与否，取决于其能否在南亚快速展开，以及南亚国家能否应对中国与日俱增的魄力。

原文链接：<https://carnegieindia.org/2020/06/11/health-silk-road-how-china-plans-to-make-bri-essential-in-covid-hit-south-asia-pub-82054>

原文：

Health Silk Road — How China plans to make BRI essential in Covid-hit South Asia

China’s foreign minister Wang Yi finally admitted late last month that the Covid-19 pandemic has severely slowed down Beijing’s flagship foreign policy project, the Belt and Road Initiative. He, however, asserted that the impact was temporary, and the BRI will be back, stronger than ever.

Yi’s comment follows some creative policymaking from China as the pandemic spread across the world. This involved dusting off and relaunching the Health Silk Road (HSR), a little-remembered component of the BRI. Beijing has wanted to shape public health governance since 2015, and the HSR allowed it an opportunity to launch the initiative globally. This helps China keep the BRI relevant, as well as gain control of a global narrative that has so far blamed them for obfuscation and misinformation.

This is not to suggest that healthcare will become the sole focus of the BRI. However, given that BRI partners are already asking for debt relief, it is unlikely that they will be keen to borrow heavily for mega infrastructure projects anytime soon. Shrinking capital will require Beijing to trim BRI projects, and healthcare investment may be more cost-effective in reaching partner countries.

What’s in it for China?

As China ramps up the Health Silk Road to do more, at a time of changing geopolitical and geoeconomic realities, a commentary in the People’s Daily offers insights into three major objectives driving Beijing.

The focus on health allows China an opportunity to reorganise global public health mechanisms in a way that fits Beijing’s worldview. The World Health Organization (WHO) enthusiastically endorsed the HSR as early as 2017. But the current pandemic has allowed China the first opportunity to work directly with countries handling a medical emergency at a global scale and demonstrate that it can carry the burden by itself. In essence, this takes China closer to offering an alternative to the WHO, tied to the Health Silk Road — one that swaps the WHO’s multilateral model with one that operates on a hub-and-spoke model and has China at the centre.

China hopes that HSR will allow it to find newer markets. BRI partner countries will be the new incubators for China’s healthcare systems and technology. The country’s National Health Commission has had an exhaustive plan on the HSR ready since 2017. This includes offers of infrastructure development, capacity building, and identification, prevention, and control of diseases. Chinese contact-tracing apps bundled with e-medicine apps, tools for quarantine, and statistics for authorities could become ubiquitous in BRI member states.

Beijing can also share advances in gene-based research in biomedical technology or synthetic biology and collaborate on telemedicine. These will need real-time communication, which opens opportunities for Chinese companies offering 5G services.

The Way ahead for South Asia

The coronavirus pandemic has already taken a huge toll on South Asia, pushing it towards its worst economic performance in 40 years. This would mean that while countries in the region may still want to undertake new infrastructure projects, their appetite for taking on fresh loans to finance them will be far lower. In fact, China is already facing requests for debt relief. In South Asia, the Maldives and Pakistan have sought to restructure their debt to China while Bangladesh has requested China to consider deferring payments.

The current crisis has also exposed shortcomings in South Asia’s public healthcare capacities. According to the World Development Indicators, South Asian countries perform poorly in most essential healthcare parameters. Pakistan only has 0.1 health workers, 0.6 nurses, and 1 physician per 1,000 citizens, while Bangladesh spends a scant 2.3 per cent of its GDP on healthcare.

These startling deficiencies suggest that when these countries talk about infrastructure next, they will mean hospitals and laboratories along with ports and highways. As they seek to fill crucial gaps in their struggling healthcare systems, the Health Silk Road will become an integral component of the BRI in South Asia, at least in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic.

Conclusion

China’s strategic competitors, including India, are trying to contest its public health outreach. However, as of now, countries in South Asia do not have an alternative to China when it comes to building their healthcare sector. In essence, the success of China’s Health Silk Road will depend on how quickly it can roll it out in the subcontinent and how countries in South Asia deal with China’s increasing assertiveness.

The article was co-authored with Rahul Bhatia and Suchet Vir Singh for The Print, on June 11, 2020.