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**No. 274**

**The Revival of the Silk Roads (Land Connectivity) in Asia**

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Singapore**

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## ABSTRACT

This paper argues that contrary to popular belief, in the bygone era, there was not one but two Silk Roads in Asia – the Northern and the less well-known South-western Silk Road (SSR). The SSR connected South/Central Asia with southern China and present day Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). After enjoying a rich history of around 1,600 years, the Silk Roads went into disrepair. Now, for various economic, security, and political reasons, land connectivity is once again making a comeback in Asia. These include the (i) “Go West” and the recent “New Silk Roads” policies of China; (ii) “Look East” policies of South Asia; (iii) opening of Myanmar, a node between South Asia and East Asia; and (iv) growing importance of supply-chain trade. The focus has, however, been mainly on reviving the Northern Silk Road with relatively few actions being initiated to revive the SSR. Mirroring the on-going efforts in the Greater Mekong Sub-region and the Central Asian region, this paper proposes four economic corridors for Pan-Asian connectivity that is to connect South/Central Asia with southern China and ASEAN. The paper argues that the revival of land connectivity in Asia is making Maritime Asia of the past, more continental-based. One implication is that regional institutions focusing solely on Maritime Asia, such as the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), may be losing some of their relevance *vis-à-vis* say the more continental-based China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The other is that the influence of the West in Asia’s security may be declining relative to that of China, India, and Russia.

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# **The Revival of the Silk Roads (Land Connectivity) in Asia**

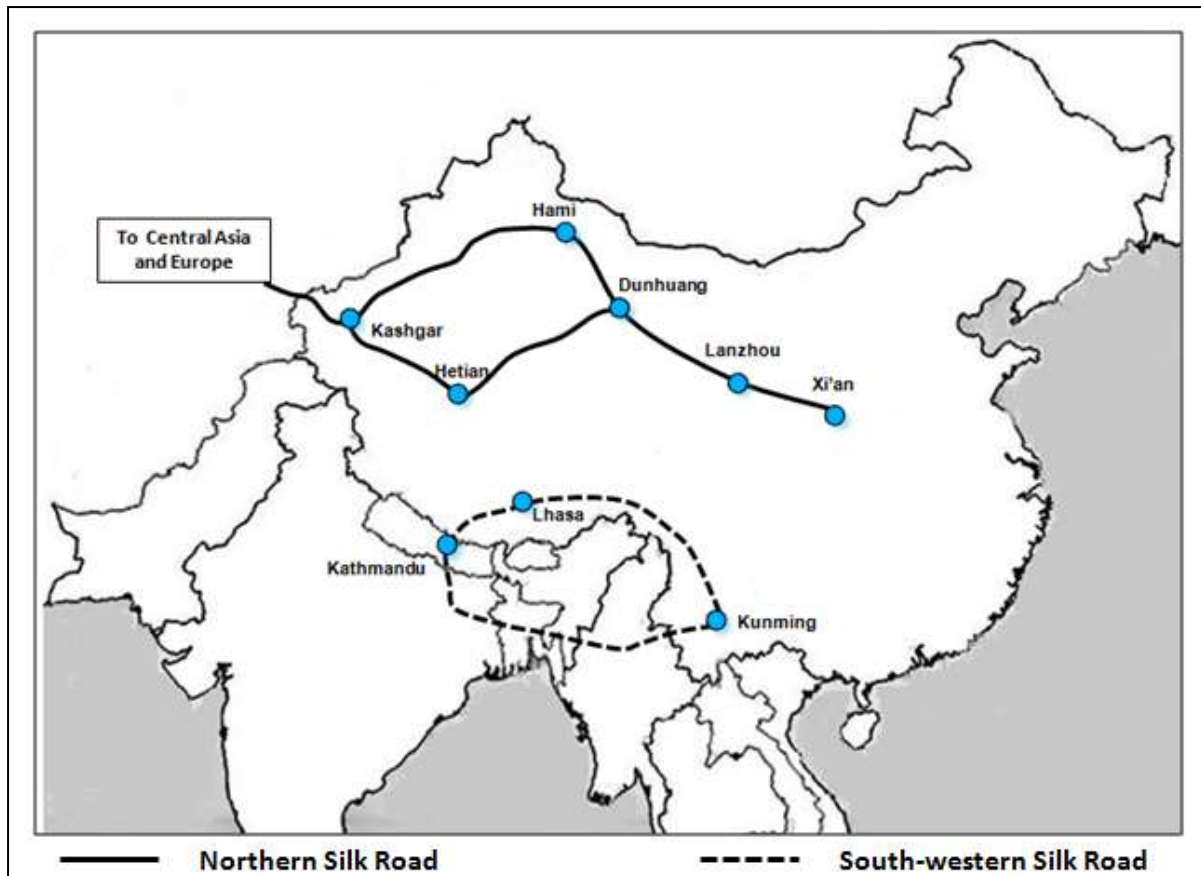
## **I. Introduction**

The Silk Roads refers to the historical network of land-based trading routes that connected Asia with the Middle East, North Africa, the Mediterranean, and Europe. Although traffic on the Silk Roads comprised little more than camel caravans trudging through wind-swept deserts and frigid mountain passes, at that time there was no alternative form of connectivity between Asia and Europe. Vasco de Gama sailed around the Cape of Good Hope and landed in Calicut in the Malabar Coast of India in 1498. The Dutch, the Spanish, the French, and the British followed suit only later. The Silk Roads began to be used roughly one century before the birth of Christ. After enjoying a rich history of about 1,600 years, trade on the Silk Roads started to decline after the collapse of the Mongol Empire in the fourteenth century. Eventually the invention of steam engine and steamships during the Industrial Revolution led to a sharp decline in shipping costs and the Silk Roads lost out further to the Southern Ocean Corridor connecting Europe and Asia.

The situation is now starting to change. Section II of this paper briefly reviews the history of the Silk Roads and highlights the reasons for its decline. It also argues that there were actually two Silk Roads in Asia – the Northern Silk Road and the less well-known South-western Silk Road (SSR) which connected South/Central Asia with southern China and present-day ASEAN. Section III highlights the various factors – economic, security and political – that have led to the revival of land connectivity in Asia and the actions that are presently being taken to revive the Silk Roads. Section IV finds that while efforts to promote the Northern Silk Road, which are driven mainly by the “Go West” and the “New Silk Roads” policies in China, is on track, more actions are required to revive the SSR or connectivity between South Asia/Central Asia, southern China, and ASEAN. It proposes four economic corridors to complement the on-going bilateral/trilateral projects, efforts to promote ASEAN-India connectivity, and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor. These corridors would enhance Pan-Asian connectivity and present a win-win situation for all countries. Section V presents the findings of a perception survey of Asian opinion leaders that was undertaken to test some of the findings of the paper, while Section VI presents the summary and policy implications.

## **II. History of the Silk Roads and the Reasons for their Decline**

There were actually two major Silk Roads. The Northern Silk Road began from the present day Xi'an in China. Further west, in Dunhuang, it branched into two routes which converged in Kashgar, before continuing on to the Mediterranean and Europe (Figure 1).



Source: Authors

**Figure 1: The Northern and South-western Silk Roads**

There was also the less well-known SSR which began in the Yunnan province of China. The SSR had four sections: the Sichuan-Yunnan-Burma-India Road which began in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan, and then proceeded to Kunming and Dali in Yunnan province before entering Burma and India, the Yunnan-Vietnam Road, the Yunnan-Laos-Thailand-Cambodia Road and the Yunnan-Tibet Road (Yang 2009). Singhal (1969) and Frank (1998) have, in addition, alluded to trade over two overland routes through Nepal and Tibet to China. The SSR was, therefore, circular road connecting South Asia/Central Asia with southern China and present day ASEAN. It began from Yunnan, passed through Myanmar, India, Nepal, and Tibet and looped back to Yunnan.

The Silk Roads witnessed their zenith during the Mongol Empire around the middle of the thirteenth century when political stability allowed more trade in the region. There were significant complementarities in trade: Merchandise that did not seem valuable to Mongols and the Chinese (e.g. silk, lacquer ware, porcelain) was often seen as valuable by the west and the Mongols in turn received large amounts of luxurious goods from Europe; dates, saffron, and pistachio nuts from Persia, and; jade, almonds, indigo, and frankincense from Central Asia. India supplied paper, sandalwood, and cotton to the west. It was during this time that Marco Polo travelled the Silk Road to China.

Trade on the Silk Roads started to decline after the fourteenth century for a number of reasons. First, after the collapse of the Mongol Empire, Genghis Khan's descendants converted to different religions and waged wars against each other disrupting trade on the Silk Roads. Second, the isolationist foreign policies of the Ming and the subsequent Qing dynasties also did not help. Third, the sharp lowering of shipping costs which began with the invention of the steam engine during the Industrial Revolution also led to increase in Europe's maritime trade with Asia on the so-called Southern Ocean corridor (Baldwin 2006). This corridor began in the Mediterranean, continued past South Asia, through the Straits of Malacca, and up the East Asian coast to Korea and Japan.

### **III. Reasons for the Revival of the Silk Roads and Actions Being Taken**

Although sea transport is expected to be the dominant form of connectivity in the foreseeable future, the case for reviving land connectivity has increased for a number of economic, security, and political reasons.

The first reason is the implementation of the Western Development Strategy or the so-called "Go West" policy in China. As is well-known China's economic reforms which began in 1979 focused on the eastern coastal region of the country. In particular, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) were established in four major coastal cities to attract foreign direct investment with liberal incentives. This policy proved to be a huge success and made the country the fastest growing country in the world for a long period of time. Such a development strategy, however, led to the widening of economic disparity between the coastal region and the rest of the country specially the inner western part of the country. The "Go West" policy was implemented in 2000 partly to address this economic disparity. The two key components of the policy were to (i) build basic infrastructure such as transport system, power generation, gas and oil pipelines, telecommunication system, and environmental conservation and (ii) to attract private sector investment including FDI in the western region (Phanisham, 2006 and Ziran, 2002).

More recently, China has come out with the "New Silk Roads" policies to enhance connectivity with neighbouring countries. These policies have a number of components.<sup>1</sup> First, in 2013, Xi Jinping, the President of China, made a call for a "New Silk Road" economic belt with Central Asia (MFA 2013). Under this policy, energy and transport infrastructure projects are to be developed in cooperation with neighbouring countries. Second, a Maritime Silk Road is also to be developed focusing on the littorals of Southeast Asia. Third, several "bridgeheads" for sub-regional connectivity such as the Yunnan province for Greater Mekong Sub-region and India (since 2009), and the Xinjiang province for cooperation with Central Asia (since 2006), have been identified.

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<sup>1</sup> Actually the New Silk Road concept is not a new idea. It was considered in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union but kept in a "low profile" after the Tiananmen Square crackdown ( Szczudlik-Tatar 2013)



China has achieved success in the above areas. Mainly because of these efforts, cities in inner provinces, such as Kunming, Chongqing, Chengdu, Xi'an, and Xining have emerged as major metropolitan cities with urban infrastructure projects paralleling some of those in the coastal areas. A number of expressways have been constructed from the coastal cities of Shanghai and Beijing to the inner provinces (Figure 2). These include the Shanghai-Xi'an, Shanghai-Chongqing-Kunming, Shanghai-Kunming, and Beijing-Lhasa Expressways.<sup>2</sup> The Beijing-Lhasa expressway has also been completed up to Xining, the halfway point and the progress is expected to be quick (*The Economist*, 2012).

Of particular note is Lhasa's emergence as a major transportation hub in western China. There are five major highways that converge in Lhasa: Kunming-Lhasa, Shanghai-Chengdu-Lhasa, Beijing-Lhasa Expressway, Yecheng-Lhasa, and the Friendship Highway that connects Kathmandu (Nepal) with Lhasa. Also the Beijing-Tibet Railway has reached Xigaste, and is to be extended soon to reach the border with Nepal.

Figure 2, shows the key existing and proposed railway lines and pipelines in China. In addition to the north-south railway lines, some of which are high speed, connecting the major cities of the country, China has built the east-west lines to connect far-flung cities like Urumqi and Kasghar to Xi'an and the major coastal cities. A trans-Karakoram corridor has also been proposed through Pakistan (Figure 3). As already mentioned above, the Beijing-Tibet railway has also been operational for a number of years. The east-west line has also been extended to Moscow, using Central Asia as an economic corridor, and then on to Duisburg (in Germany) to become the China-Europe railway line (Figure 3).<sup>3</sup> Hewlett Packard (HP) has been using this line to ship Chinese-assembled laptops to Europe from its Chongqing factories since 2011. Logistics company DHL also runs regular express trains to Europe from Chengdu. In July 2013, this railway line was extended to Zhengzhou, the largest inland manufacturing base for the Taiwanese electronics from Foxconn, to export mainly Apple products directly to Germany via Moscow. It takes around 21 days to reach Europe by rail, while seaborne transport between China and Europe takes around five weeks, with much longer delay times. Transport from inland China to Europe by rail costs about 25 per cent more than by sea, but for these companies the benefits of speed appear to outweigh the extra costs (Bradsher, 2013 and Stratfor, 2013). China plans to build railroads not only in its country but across the length and breadth of Africa, Eurasia, and Southeast Asia.

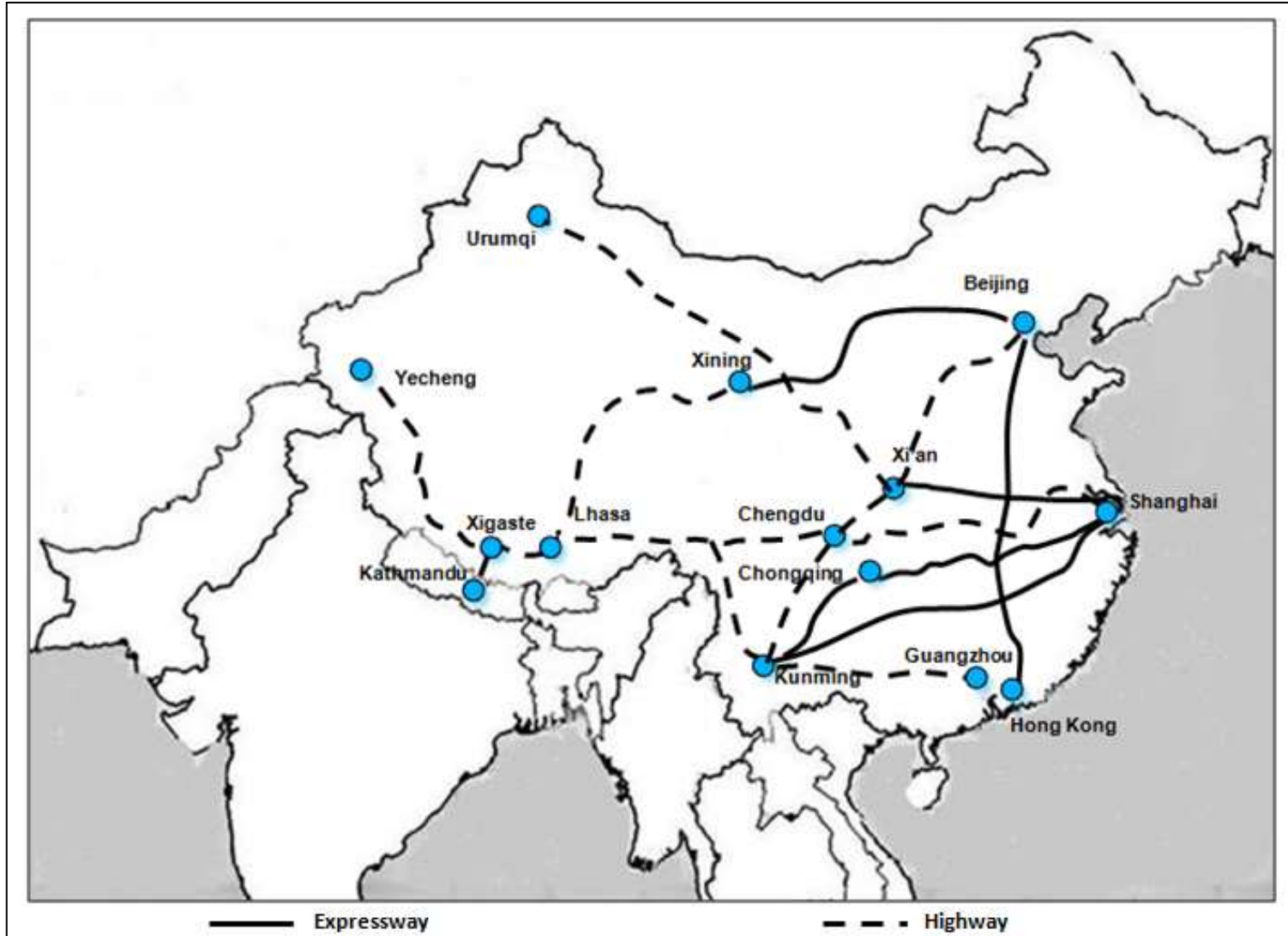
The rationale for "Go West" and the "New Silk Roads" policies are not solely economic. China has also been trying to reduce its exposure to security risks and possible disruptions to its oil and

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<sup>2</sup> China's highways have grown rapidly in total length from 271 km in 1990 to 85,000 km in 2011 making this the world's largest national freeway system. The U.S. Inter-state Highway system – started in 1956 and considered complete in 1991 – totals 75,932 km and is not expected to grow much. China, on the other hand, will expand its expressway system and is intent on connecting all provincial capitals and cities with populations over 200,000. The new highways and the economic growth they will drive will help close the gap with the U.S. (Lee, 2013). China's railway network was 27,000 km in 1949, now it is more than 110,000 km.

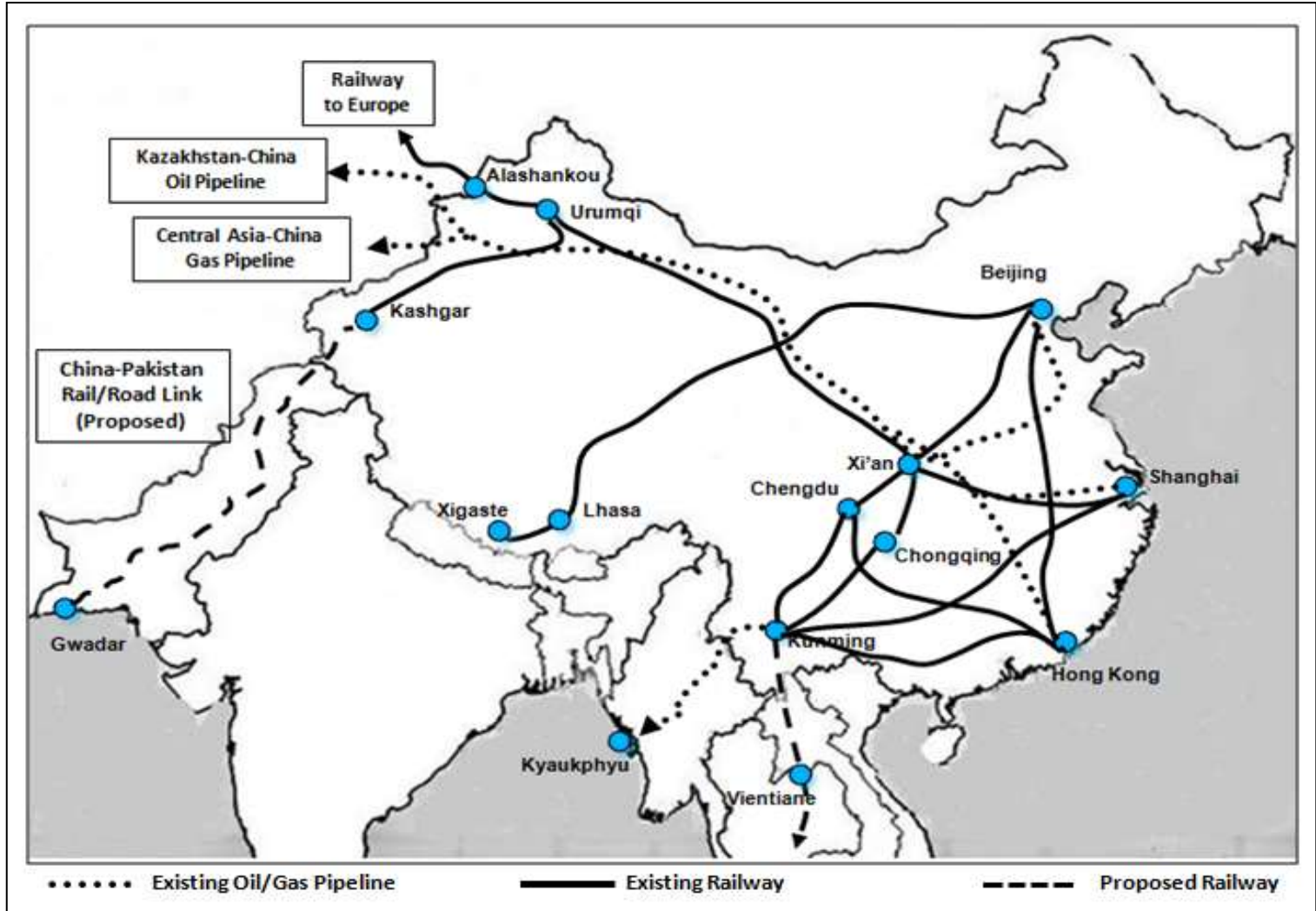
<sup>3</sup> This railway line was built in 2011 by a group of private companies. It is called the Yuxinou line and is 11,000 kilometers long, 2000 kilometers shorter than the Shanghai-Germany line.

resources supply from off its eastern coastal regions and beyond by building east-west pipelines such as the Kazakhstan-China and Central Asia-China pipelines (Figure 3). The Sino-Burma gas pipeline has been inaugurated. In both goods and energy trade, the overland transport corridor is unlikely to account for more than 5-7 per cent of China's total trade with Europe for a long time in the future. It will, however, certainly curtail China's over-reliance on China's dependence on sea-lanes in the South and East China Seas (Stratfor, 2013).



Source: Authors

Figure 2: Infrastructure Development in China: Highways and Expressways



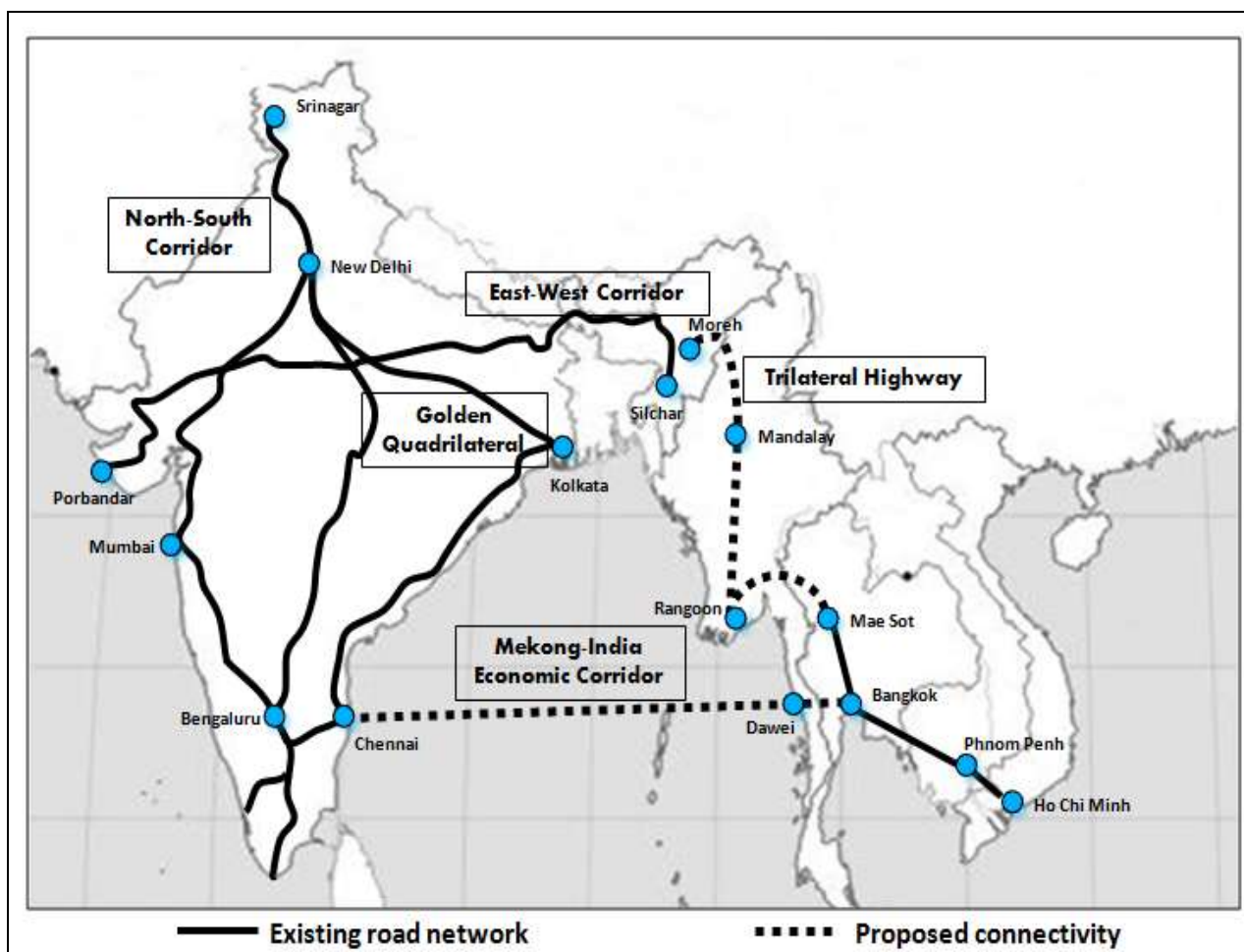
Source: Authors

Figure 3: Infrastructure Development in China: Railways and Pipelines

The second reason for the revival of land connectivity in Asia is the “Look East” policy in South Asia, specially India, and presently also Myanmar. As part of their economic reform program, these countries have sought to improve connectivity with ASEAN and China to enhance trade and investment with each other. The on-going bilateral/trilateral connectivity projects are summarised in Appendix 1. In addition, India is actively seeking to enhance ASEAN-India Connectivity through two projects, namely, the Mekong-India Economic Corridor (MIEC) and the Trilateral Highway connecting India and Myanmar with Thailand (Kimura and Umezaki, 2010) (Figure 4).<sup>4</sup> While the first project focuses on connecting production blocks and supply chains in Southeast Asia with those in India, specially the automotive industry in Bangkok, with those in Chennai (India) by sea and land, the second project focuses on the development of the North East Region of India, which is relatively under-developed. One major component of the MIEC is the US\$8.6 billion Dawei deep-sea port and industrial estate in Myanmar. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is the implementing body for the MIEC and it stands ready to bring together the stakeholders and provide technical assistance and co-financing. This role is similar to the one the ADB played in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) sub-regional cooperation efforts. In May 2013, the leaders of India and China endorsed the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Cooperation (BCIM) Economic Corridor and established a joint study group to explore idea further (Ministry of External Affairs, India 2013). Subsequently, ministerial-level talks under the BCIM framework were initiated in December 2013 transforming the Track II initiative to a Track I process.

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<sup>4</sup> India has also established the ASEAN-India Center at RIS to drive these projects



Source: Authors

**Figure 4: ASEAN-India Connectivity**

The third reason is the encouraging but gradual political and economic reforms in Myanmar, a node between South Asia and East Asia, which has provided a fillip improving connectivity between South Asia and East Asia. Both China and India are actively involved. Chinese strategists have written about the “Malacca Dilemma” with the Straits being a natural choke point and the need to find an alternative route.<sup>5</sup> The 1,100 km gas pipeline component of the Sino-Burma pipelines project from Kyaukphyu, a port in Myanmar, to Kunming became operational in 2013. This year, an oil pipeline, that is expected to meet about 10 per cent China’s oil import demand, will open along the same route. Road and railway are to follow suit. Work on the Kaladan Multi-modal Project seeking to connect Kolkata in India with Sittwe in Myanmar by sea and then the North East region of India by river and road transport is also on-going (Appendix 1).

Finally, looking forward, in order to realise the potential of dynamic complementarities associated with the newer theories of trade pioneered by Jones and Kierzkowski (1990), there is a need to strengthen

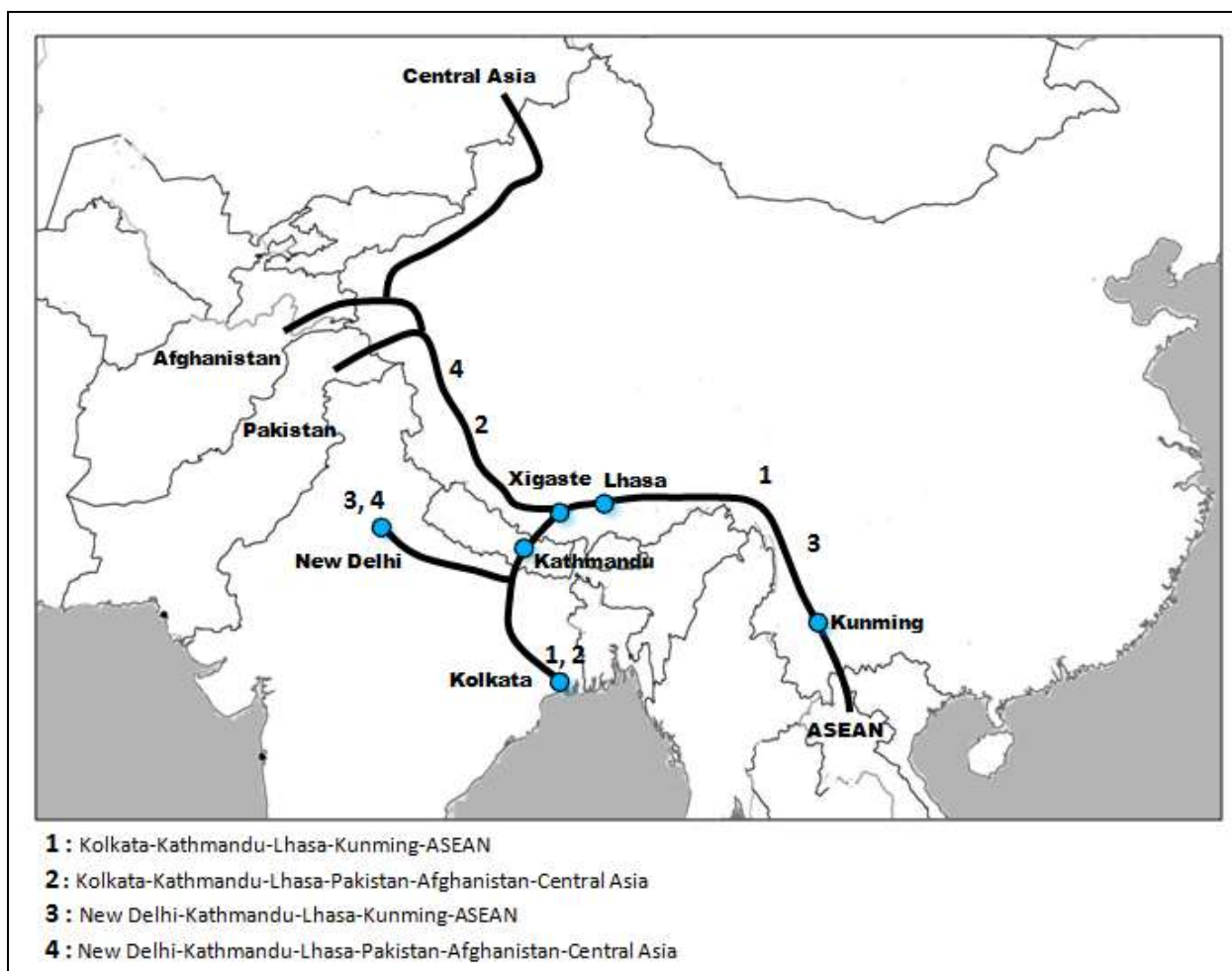
<sup>5</sup> Roughly 80 per cent of China’s crude oil imports pass through the Straits. The other strategic projects for China’s oil imports are: (i) the proposed China-Pakistan Economic Corridor passing through some of the highest and most landslide-prone mountains (Figure 3); (ii) the proposed Kunming-Laos-Thailand Railway (Figure 3); and (iii) pipelines with Central Asian countries and Russia.

connectivity between South Asia and East Asia. Under the traditional theory of comparative advantage, developing countries produced labour intensive goods which they then exchanged for relatively capital and skill intensive goods produced by the more advanced countries. All separate tasks involved in producing a good, however, were done entirely in one country. Under the newer theories, production is sliced and diced into separate fragments and production of parts and components are located in production blocks around the world which are linked by efficient service links. The type of service link required for supply-chain trade depends on the sector being considered. While for bulky items, sea freight is still the most cost effective way of moving goods, for less bulky and high value-added parts and components, road transportation could be more cost effective especially among neighbouring countries.

### **III. Need for Actions to Revive the South-western Silk Roads**

As discussed above, under the “Go West” and the “New Silk Roads” policies of China a large number of actions are already being taken to revive the Northern Silk Road and these actions have resulted in encouraging results. The situation is, however, different in the case of the SSR. In addition to several bilateral/ trilateral efforts, the two recent initiatives are the ASEAN-India Connectivity projects, and the proposed BCIM Economic Corridor. More recently, India has highlighted one of the focus of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) should be “promoting connectivity for seamless movement between India’s northeast, Myanmar, and Thailand on one side and with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal on the other” (Odisha Sun Times, 2014).

In addition to the projects discussed above, four economic corridors in South Asia could be considered to improve SA-EA connectivity. These are the: (i) Kolkata-Kathmandu-Lhasa-Kunming-ASEAN; (ii) Kolkata-Kathmandu-Lhasa-Pakistan-Afghanistan-Central Asia; (iii) Delhi-Kathmandu-Lhasa-Kunming-ASEAN; and (iii) Delhi-Kathmandu-Lhasa-Pakistan-Afghanistan-Central Asia corridors (Figure 5).



Source: Authors

**Figure 5: Proposed Conceptual Corridors in South Asia**

These corridors would lead to a win-win situation for the countries concerned especially to Nepal which is a land-locked country and has the potential to be a “land bridge” between India and China.<sup>6</sup> Other “land bridges” in Asia that have benefited significantly from regional connectivity are Laos and Mongolia.

Distances between Indian cities and the inner cities of China would be greatly reduced if the land route through Nepal were to be used (Table 1). For example, the distance from New Delhi, where the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor originates, to Kunming via Hong Kong is about 10,345 km while that through Nepal would be roughly a quarter of that distance. Similarly, the distance from Chennai to Kunming through Hong Kong is 6,841 km compared to 3,540 km through Nepal. Besides, if Nepal were to be used as a land link there would be additional cost saving as there would not be a need to tranship goods in the Chinese ports from ships to trucks to ferry them to the Chinese inner cities.

<sup>6</sup> These corridors are presented as concepts. Feasibility analysis would have to be made to prioritise them.



**Table 1: Distance between Indian Cities and Inner Cities of China**  
(in km)\*

From \ To	via Sea and Land Route (through Hong Kong)			via Land Route (through Nepal)		
	Kunming	Chongqing	Chengdu	Kunming	Chongqing	Chengdu
New Delhi	10,345	10,669	10,437	2,887	3,151	2,911
Chennai	6,841	6,745	7,004	3,540	3,804	3,564

Note: \*Sea distances are actual, land distances based on straight line method.

Sources: [www.searates.com](http://www.searates.com) and [www.freemaptools.com](http://www.freemaptools.com)

Data in Table 1 show that distances in India and China trade are reduced by one-half or even three-quarters when land routes are used via Nepal rather than the sea route via Hong Kong.<sup>7</sup> Arnold (2009) has estimated that costs per ton-km double or even triple when road/rail transport is used instead of sea freight. It is difficult to determine the net impact, but there must be some sectors where the benefits of distance and speed in road transport outweigh the additional costs.<sup>8</sup>

#### V. Perception Survey of Asian Opinion Leaders

In order to test the significance of some of the above findings, the perception survey of Asian opinion leaders (comprising government officials, academics, representative from business sectors, media practitioners, retired bureaucrats and international civil servants) recently conducted by the authors included several questions on connectivity and various related initiatives (Rana and Chia, 2014). The online survey got 390 responses (out of 5,300 in the sample) from 21 Asian countries, 13 in East Asia and eight in South Asia. Many respondents (71 per cent) felt that improving connectivity between the two regions was the best modality for promoting economic integration between South Asia and East Asia. Among the four reasons identified in Section III, most respondents (71 per cent) felt that the main reason why the case for land connectivity had increased in Asia was the growing importance of supply chains and fragmented trade in the region. In addition to sea freight, alternative modalities of transportation were required to move parts and components expeditiously across supply chains. The second most important reason was the “Look East” policies of South Asia (69 per cent) followed by the opening of Myanmar (59 per cent) and China’s “Go West” policies.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Another potential route for the India-China trade is the Nathu La pass. But the height of this pass is around 4000 meters above sea level which is higher than the passes through Nepal (for example, the pass through Kodari is about 3,700 meters above sea level (Google Map Find Altitude) and also it is covered by ice for much of the year.

<sup>8</sup> To analyse fully the economic impacts of connectivity projects one needs to develop either (i) a geographical simulation model (as done in the ERIA study, see Kimura and Umezaki, 2010) or (ii) a global computable general equilibrium model (as in the ADBI and ADB study, see Bhattacharyay, Kawai and Nag, 2012). Such an approach was not possible in the present study. Model based results from the latter study find that the biggest beneficiaries in South Asia of reduction in trading costs due to improved connectivity are India, followed by Nepal, and then Bangladesh.

<sup>9</sup> It would be interesting to assess how the views of the private and government sector differed on these issues. But this was beyond the scope of the present paper,

72 per cent of the survey respondents felt that Asia should consider projects to revive the SSR and connect South Asia/Central Asia with southern China, and ASEAN. There was a strong support for the two ASEAN-India connectivity projects (56 per cent) and the BCIM Economic Corridor (81 per cent). Nearly three-quarters of the respondents felt that trilateral cooperation between India-Nepal-China had an important role in reviving the SSR. Nine out of ten respondents felt that BIMSTEC should be more active in developing and implementing regional infrastructure projects.

## **VI. Summary and Policy Implications**

Summing up, contrary to the general belief, in the bygone era there was not one but two Silk Roads – the Northern and the lesser well-known SSR. The latter connected South/Central Asia with southern China and the present day ASEAN. It began in the Yunnan province of China, passed through Myanmar, India, Nepal and Tibet and looped back to Yunnan. After a gap of roughly five centuries, the case for reviving the Silk Roads has strengthened for economic, security, and political reasons. The focus has been mainly on reviving the Northern Silk Roads. A number of actions have also been initiated to revive the SSR, these include the various bilateral/trilateral projects, the projects under ASEAN-India Connectivity, and the proposed BCIM Economic Corridor. In addition, this paper has proposed that, mirroring the three economic corridors in the GMS and six in the CAREC region, four economic corridors could be considered to promote South Asia/Central Asia, southern China, and ASEAN connectivity. This would present a win-win situation for all countries involved and also deepen South Asian and broader Pan-Asian economic integration. A perception survey of Asian Leaders conducted by the authors supports the recommendations of the paper.

A major finding of the paper is that Maritime Asia, defined as the dynamic north-south coastal region from Korea to Indonesia, is starting to become more continental with expanding networks of roads, railways, and pipelines. This finding is not a new one because Asia was an “integrated and prosperous” region of the world for much of human history. It was only during the colonial period and the few decades that followed India’s independence that Asia was fragmented into the dynamic Maritime Asia and the more closed and less prosperous South Asia (Rana, 2012). An important implication of this finding is that several regional institutions that focus solely on Maritime Asia are losing their relevance. There is a need to either expand membership of these institutions to bring in members from continental Asia – for example, India is not a member of the APEC - or to strengthen institutions in continental Asia such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).<sup>10</sup> Bubalo and Cook (2012) have also argued that in contrast to the situation in Maritime Asia where the influence of the West was strong, in a continental Asia the influence of India, China, and Russia are also expected to be strong. This has important implications for Asia’s security.

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<sup>10</sup> The SCO was established in 2001 with Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan as its founding members and India, Pakistan, Iran, and Mongolia as observers, with Sri Lanka and Belarus as dialogue partners.

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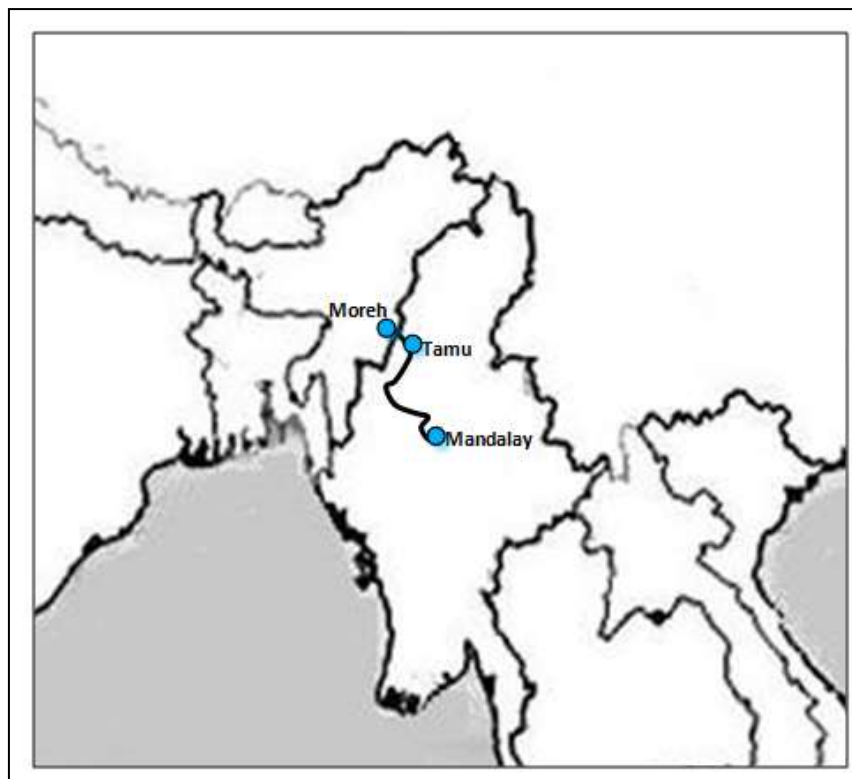
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## **Appendix 1: SSR- Bilateral and Trilateral Connectivity Projects**

- (i)** India/Myanmar: Tamu – Kalewa – Kalembo Road
- (ii)** India/Myanmar: Kaladan “Multi-Modal” Project
- (iii)** India/Myanmar: Myanmar – Bangladesh - India Gas Pipeline
- (iv)** Myanmar/ China: Kyaukpyu - Ramree Island-Kunming Pipeline
- (v)** Myanmar/ Thailand: “Death Railway” Project
- (vi)** India/Myanmar/China: Stilwell Road or Ledo Road
- (vii)** India/Nepal/China: Second Friendship Bridge Project
- (viii)** India/Nepal/China: China – Nepal - India Railway Project
- (ix)** Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway Projects

(i) **India/ Myanmar: Tamu – Kalewa – Kalemyo Road**



**Project description**

The 160 km long Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo road was constructed by India in 2001 and is being used for Indo-Myanmar border trade through Moreh-Tamu sector. From Kalemyo, there is also road connectivity to Mandalay, the second largest city in Myanmar. Along the 1,643 km long Indo-Myanmar border, this is the only road that connects India and Myanmar. Eventually, there are plans to extend this road until Mae Sot in Thailand.

**Project benefits**

This project aims to boost India's trade with Southeast Asia through Moreh and Namphalong in Myanmar.

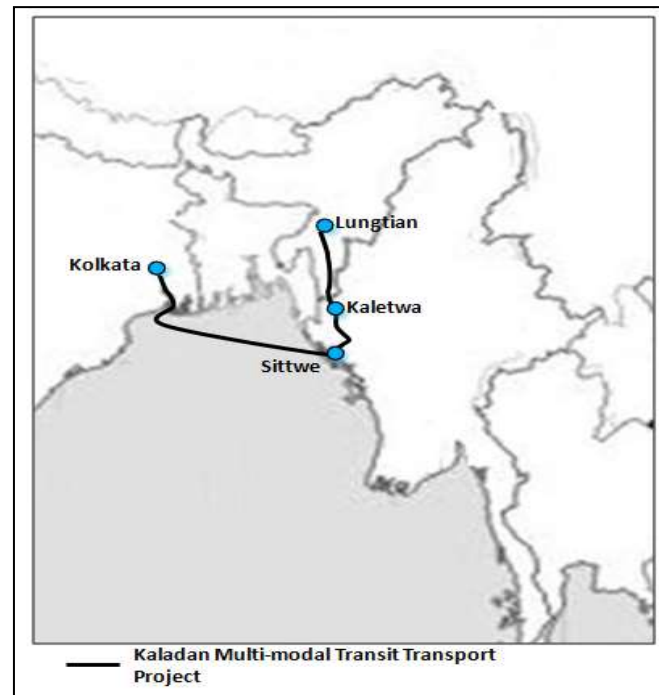
**Estimated Costs**

The road was built by India at a cost of over Rs120.5 crore.

**Project Status**

The project was completed in 2001.

(ii) **India/Myanmar: Kaladan “Multi-Modal” Project**



**Project description**

On 2 April 2008, the Indian Government signed an agreement for this project with the Burmese military junta. The project will connect the eastern Indian seaport of Kolkata with Sittwe port in Arakan State of Myanmar by sea; it will then link Sittwe to the land-locked region of Mizoram in northeastern India via river and road transport. The project has three phases, the first and second of which began in November 2010.

**Project benefit**

It is expected that the transport system will be fully-owned by the Myanmar government, but it will be used primarily by Indian companies to increase (i) trade with Southeast Asia and (ii) link the land-locked Mizoram region to the sea.

**Estimated Costs**

- Redevelopment of Sittwe port and dredging the Kaladan waterway to Paletwa (Phases 1 and 2) – initially US\$68.24 million
- Construction of highway between Paletwa and the India-Burma border (Phase 3) – US\$49.14 million

**Project Status**

The construction of the port and IWT terminals at Sittwe and the construction of the IWT terminal at Paletwa started in 2010. In May 2012, the two sides reviewed the project and announced that the project will be completed by 2015 at a total cost of US\$500 million.

(iii) **India/Myanmar: Myanmar – Bangladesh - India Gas Pipeline**



**Project description**

The Myanmar – Bangladesh – India Gas Pipeline is an important component of India's energy security policy. It had stalled in the past because of the failure to accommodate Bangladesh's needs. But it is now being revived.

**Project benefit**

The project will give India access to Myanmar's offshore gas resources.

**Estimated Costs**

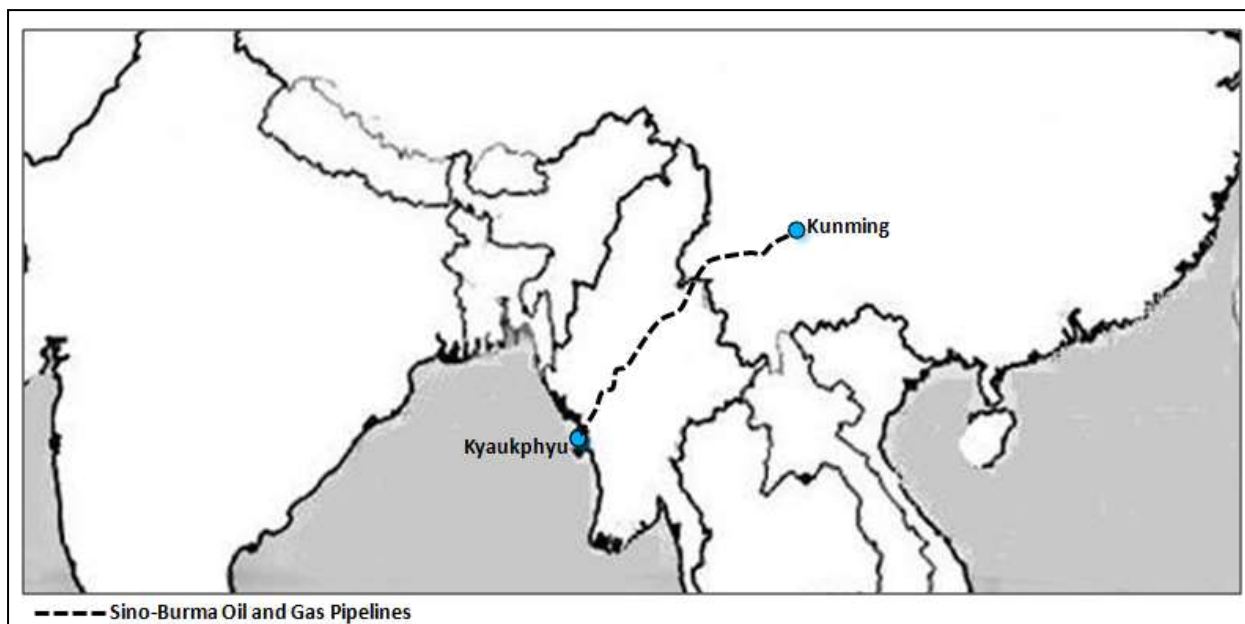
US\$1 billion to be borne mostly by India and private sector partners and Bangladesh will receive US\$125 million in annual transit fees.

**Project Status**

Slow progress in contrast to the Myanmar – China pipeline (iv).



(iv) **Myanmar/ China: Kyaukpyu - Ramree Island-Kunming Pipeline**



**Project Description**

An oil and gas pipeline connecting the natural deep sea port of Kyaukpyu, Ramree Island, to China's southern city Kunming, in the Yunnan province.

The total length of the pipelines is expected to be in excess of 1,500 kilometres for the oil pipeline and 1,700 kilometres for the gas pipeline, with around 800 kilometres of that across Burma. A railroad running adjacent to the pipelines is also planned.

**Project Benefit**

The project will decrease the reliance of China on the Malacca Straits through which much of its oil and gas supply presently passes.

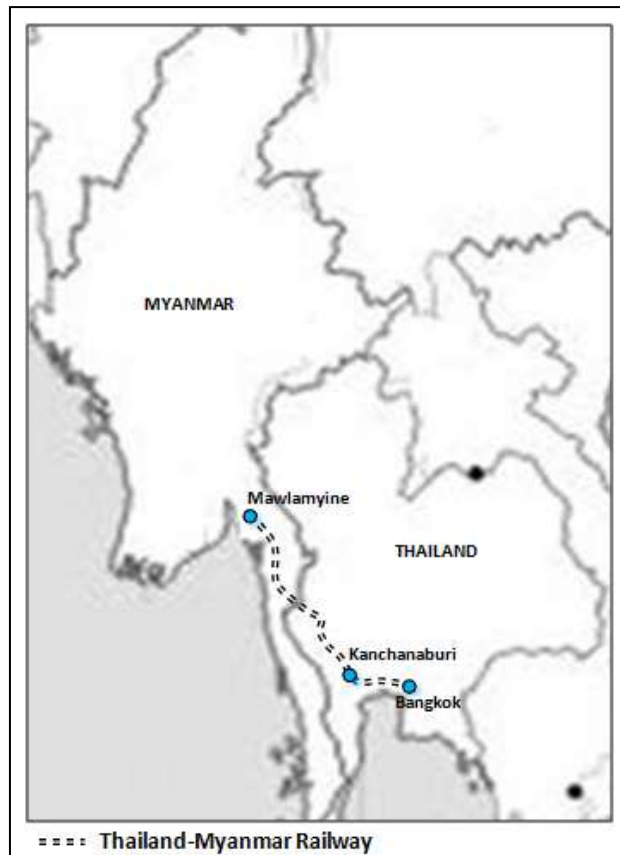
**Estimated Costs**

US\$2.5 Billion - China National Petroleum Corp. will hold a 50.9 per cent stake and manage the project and Myanmar Oil & Gas Enterprise will own the rest.

**Project Status**

The gas pipeline became operational in June 2013 and the oil pipeline is expected to be operational in 2014.

(v) Myanmar/ Thailand: “Death Railway” Project



**Project Description**

Myanmar aims to restore the infamous "Death Railway" to Thailand which was initially built by Japanese-held prisoners of war.

**Project Benefit**

Improved rail connectivity between can facilitate flow of goods and tourists between the two countries.

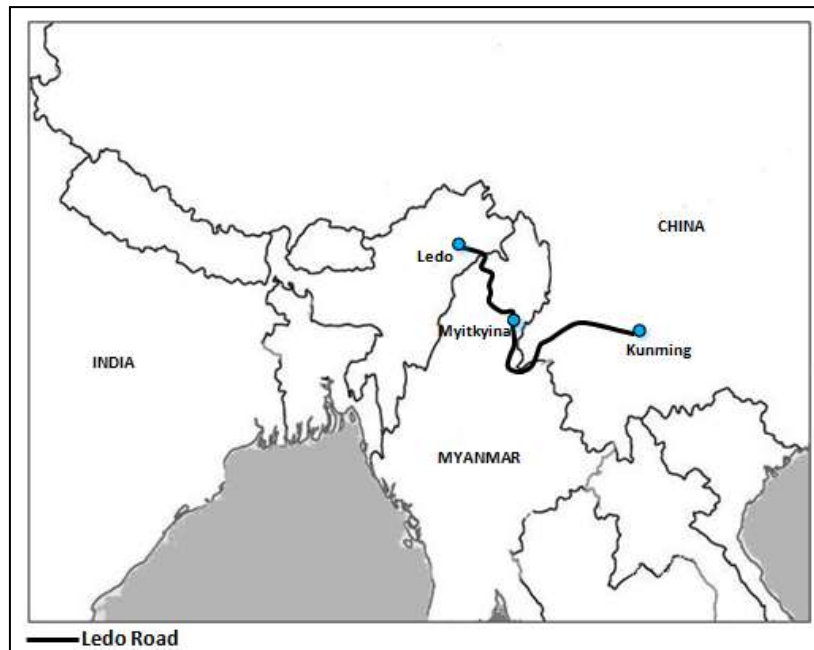
**Project costs**

There is no information available on expected costs. A feasibility study on the 105-kilometre (65-mile) stretch running from Myanmar's "Three Pagodas Pass" area to Thailand was scheduled to begin about a year back.

**Project status**

Unknown

(vi) **India/Myanmar/China: Stilwell Road or Ledo Road**



**Project Description**

Originally termed the Ledo Road, the 1,736 km Stilwell Road was built during World War II from Ledo in Assam to Kunming so that the Western Allies could supply Chiang Kai-Shek's Kuomintang forces. It was renamed after General Vinegar Joe Stilwell of the US Army in 1945. It winds its way from Ledo in Assam through Jairampur and Nampong in Arunachal Pradesh until it reaches the Pangsau Pass (aka the "Hell Pass") where it crosses into Myanmar. The road then weaves through upper Myanmar to reach Myitkyina before turning eastward to China where it culminates at Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province. Roughly 61 km runs through India, 1,035 km through Myanmar and 640 km in China.

There are plans to rebuild the Stilwell Road. The Indian Chamber of Commerce has described the potential gains from the reopening of the Stilwell Road as "unimaginable".

**Project Benefit**

The project would encourage greater overland trade especially between China and India.

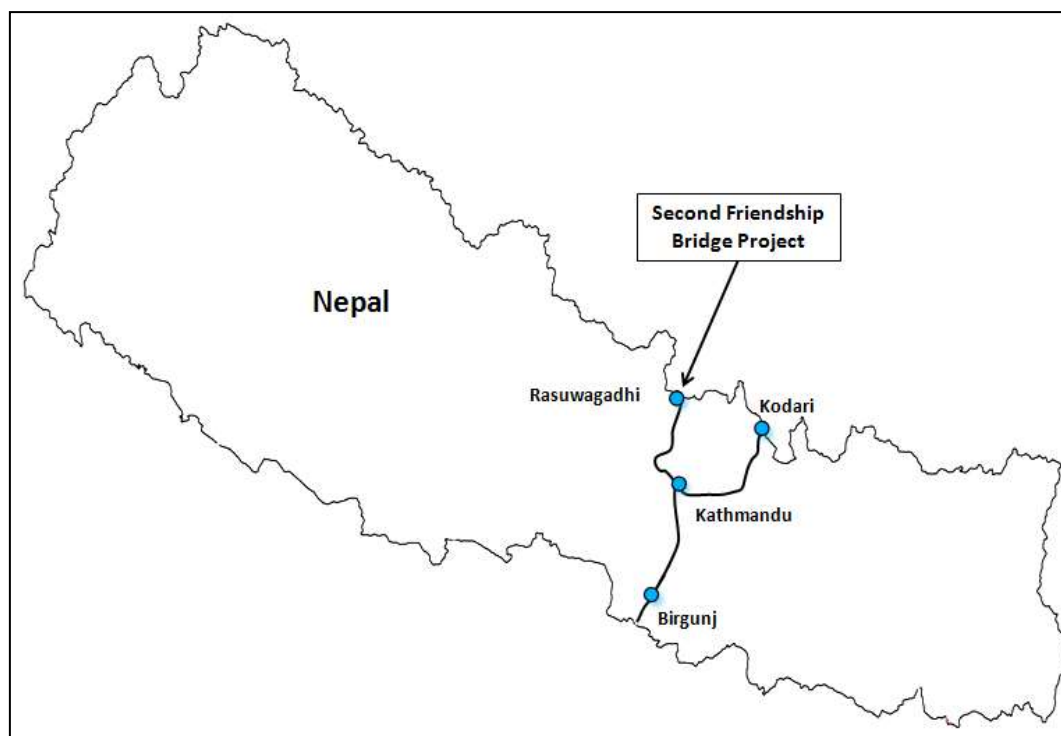
**Estimated Costs**

Not Known

**Project Status**

Contract has been awarded to China's Yunnan Construction and Engineering Group. But India fears that the road might help insurgents from North-East India, many of whom have their hideouts in Myanmar.

(vii) India/Nepal/China: Second Friendship Bridge Project



**Project Description**

Nepal and China have agreed to construct another “friendship bridge” in Rasuwagadhi on the Nepal-China border. The bridge—proposed to be located along the Rasuwagadhi highway that stretches to the border with China—is expected to help the two countries expand their cross-border trade and transport as it will link Nepal with major highways in that part of the northern neighbour. The 100-metre long bridge will be constructed over the Trishuli river with Rs100 million Chinese contribution,”

**Project Benefit**

The project will connect China with Nepali markets and vice versa.

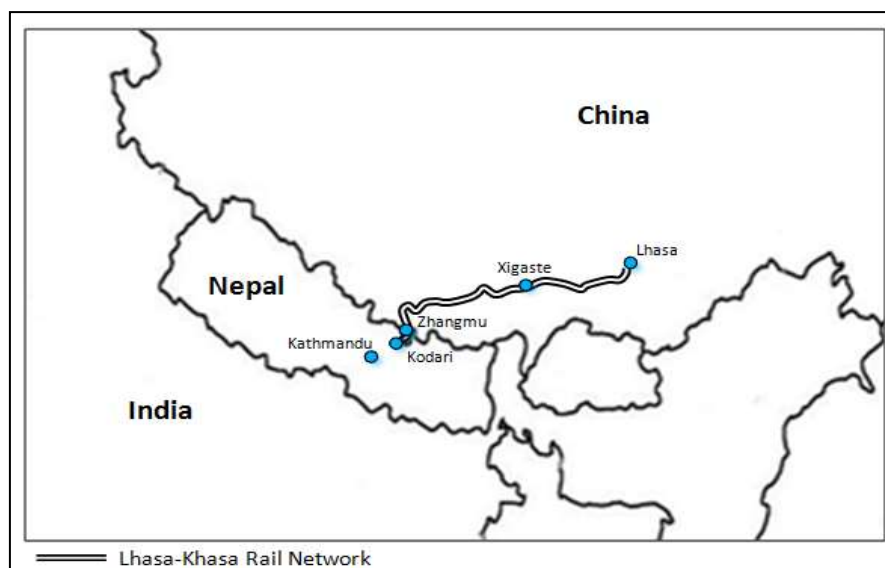
**Estimated Costs**

Rs100 million Chinese contribution plus Rs60 million Nepali contribution.

**Project Status**

Not Known

**(viii) China – Nepal - India Railway Project**



**Project Description**

In 2008, China and Nepal announced plans to connect Tibet with Nepal via a 770-kilometer long rail link between Lhasa and the Nepalese border town Khasa, which is about 80 kilometres north of Kathmandu. It was also noted that a dry port near Tatopani on the Nepali side would be developed as well. China is also exploring the possibility of linking six additional highways with Nepal and developing cross-border energy pipelines. In 2008, China set up an advanced optical fibre cable network between Zhangmu and Kathmandu.

**Project Benefit**

The Lhasa-Khasa rail network will help Nepal diversify its trade and reduce dependence on India. Nepal faces several bottlenecks in its trade and energy supply chains due to poor connectivity in Nepal and the poor efficiency of Indian ports, which add to delays and higher costs for imported goods and delays in exports.

However, the southern expansion of China's rail networks has caused concern in India, particularly in the security circles who argue that Chinese infrastructure projects serve dual purposes, meaning both civilian and military. The initial plan was to connect Khasa to Lhasa, but due to the difficulty of terrain and the rugged mountains, the railway track has been directed to the Kerung of Rasuwa District. Kerung has been developed as a special economic zone.

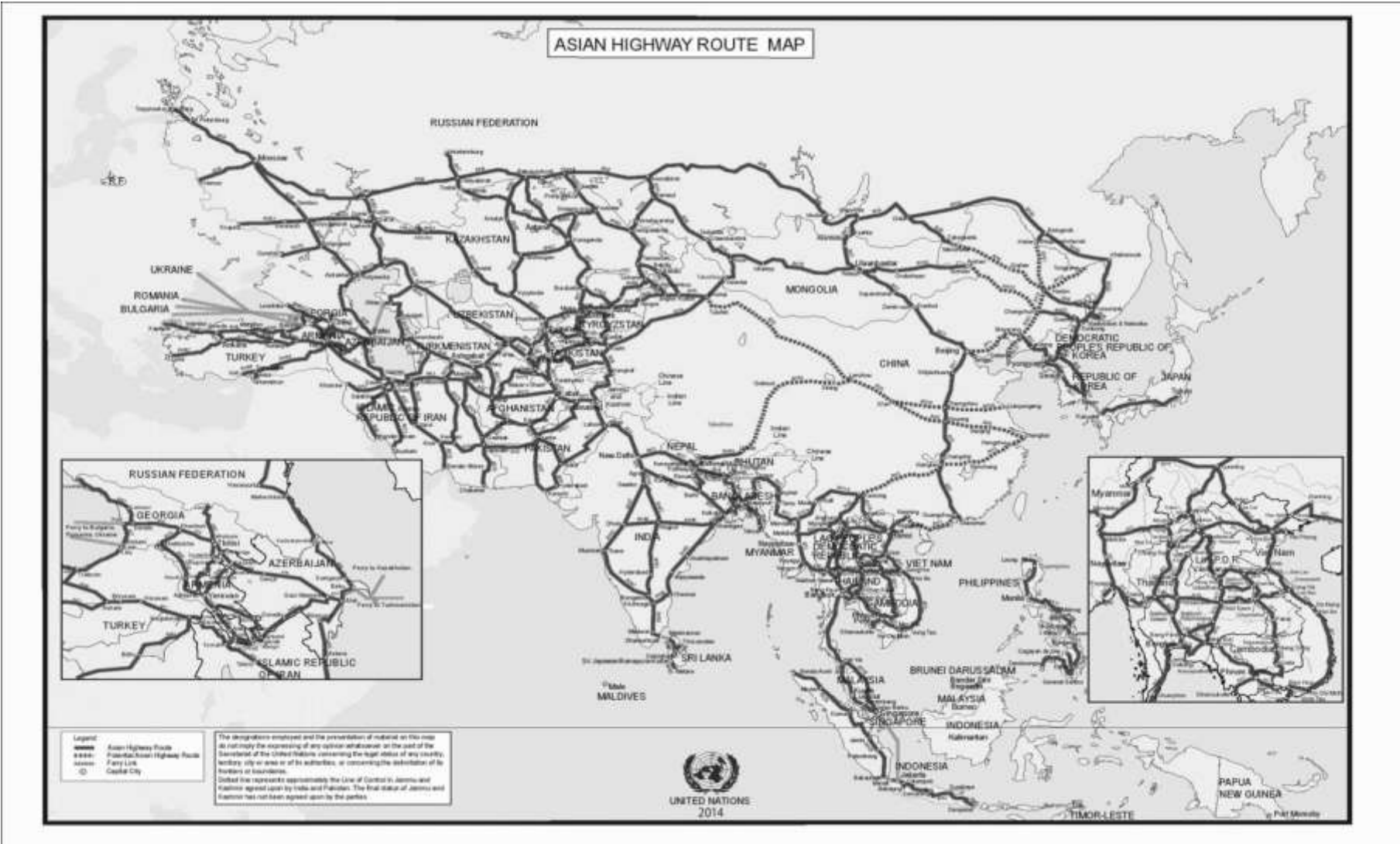
**Estimated Costs**

US\$1.98 billion

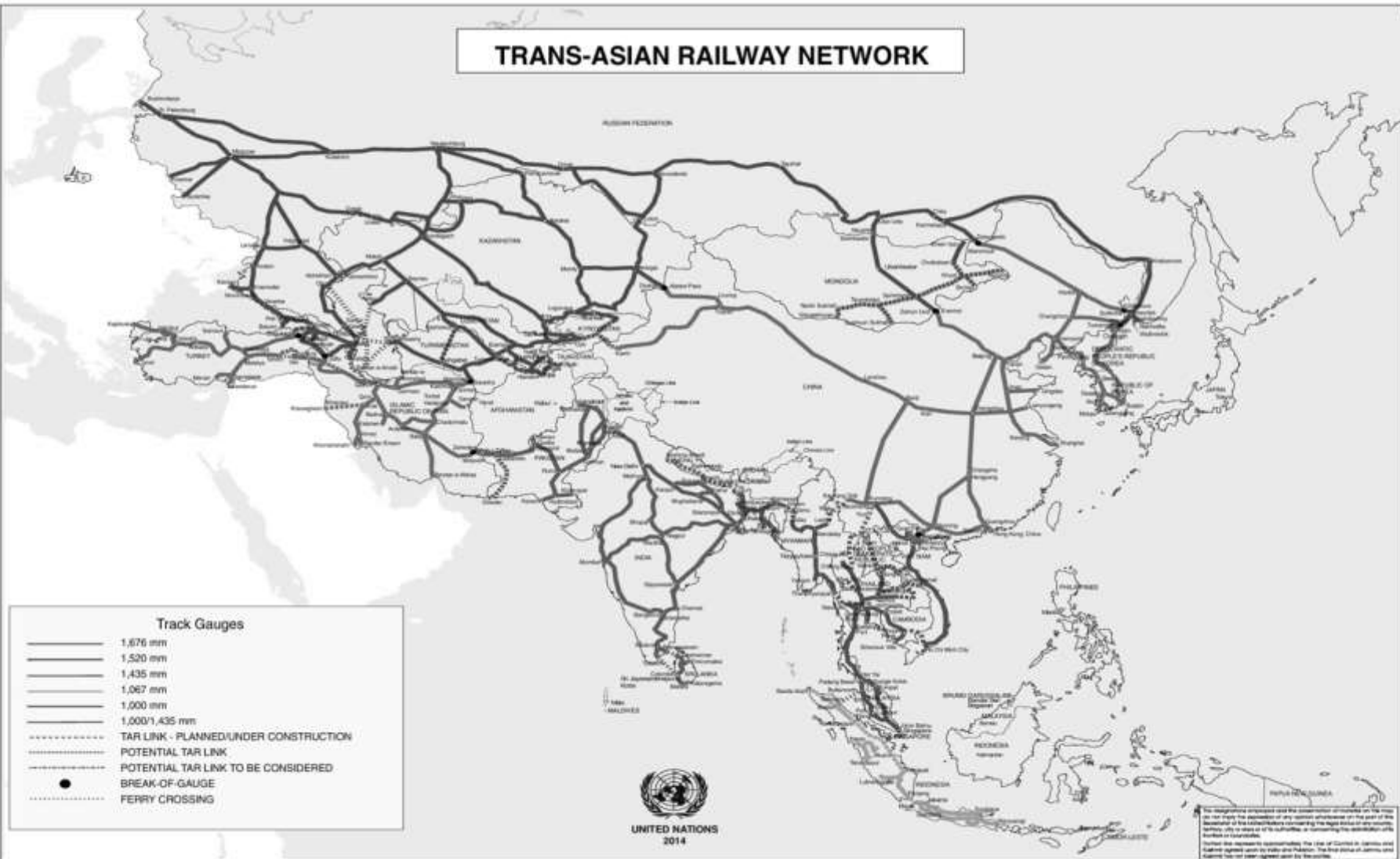
**Project Status**

Not Known

(IX) Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway Projects



# TRANS-ASIAN RAILWAY NETWORK



**Short Description of Project**

The Asian Highway was conceived in 1959. It, together with the Trans-Asian Railway project, was endorsed by UNESCAP in 1992. An Inter-governmental Agreement on the Asian Highway was adopted in November 2003. In view of the differences in standards and levels of technical development, it was decided to adopt a phased approach at the Trans-Asian Railway.

**Project Benefit**

Provide more seamless land and rail connectivity across the region.

**Estimated Costs**

Not Known

**Project Status**

Not Known



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