

China-Laos Railway: New Development Path for BRI

Voice of the World

Edited by TANG Zhexiao

The China-Laos Railway, which connects Kunming in southwest China's Yunnan province with Laos' capital Vientiane, launched cross-border passenger services on April 13.

China-Laos Railway opens up a new path for Laos' development and prosperity. The then Laos Deputy Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone said the operation of the China-Laos Railway has greatly enhanced Laos' international strategic position, turning Laos into an important hub for transportation in the region.

Laos is the only landlocked country in the Association of the South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN), with mountains and plateaus accounting for about 80 percent of the national land area.

Huang Hong, director of CREC Laos-China Railway Project Construction Headquarters, highlighted the transformative impact of the railway on Laos, turning it from a land-locked country into a land-linked hub and bringing countless jobs for locals. He also mentioned in an interview with *Global Times* that the railway has become an Instagram-worthy landmark.



The first passenger train bound for Kunming, southwest China's Yunnan province prepares for departure from Laos capital Vientiane, April 13, 2023. (PHOTO: VCG)

The railway has shortened cross-border travel time from days to hours. Previously, a trip from Vientiane to Kunming would take two to three days and required changing buses. Now it only takes 10 and a half hours.

"This train journey from Laos to China is much more convenient compared with the highway trip I made three years ago. It saves travel time and allows me to enjoy the scenery along the route," said Saykhampha Daophasouk, a Laotian student who came to

study in Kunming.

The sections of the line that run through the hills of northern Laos are an undeniably impressive feat of engineering, according to *The Diplomat*, adding that transport infrastructure (mostly highways) has threaded its way through this terrain since the first decade of the 2000s, prompting a reorientation of the region's economy to the north of Laos.

As a major part of the trans-Asian railway network, the railway not only ben-

efits Laos but also other BRI countries.

Thailand, a neighboring country of Laos, is sharing the joy. In Thailand's northeastern border province of Nong Khai, many people in the tourism industry have already benefited since the railway was launched as many more tourists pour in.

Sometimes they stay overnight and catch the train the next day, and sometimes we have more guests than we can serve, said Jiranun Sakultangphaisal, an advisor to the tourism association in Nong Khai.

Through improved connectivity, Laos can facilitate more trade between domestic provinces and China, as well as with its BRI neighbors.

Daovone Phachanthavong, vice-president of Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said that many companies are considering investing in Laos because goods from ASEAN countries can now be sent to Europe through the Laos-China Railway.

According to a World Bank report, transit trade through Laos could reach 3.9 million tons by 2030 from 1.6 million tons in 2016 and shift an estimated 1.5 million tons of maritime transport to the railway.

Under the framework of the BRI, the China-Laos Railway is believed to further contribute to the development in BRI region.

Fabricating 'Debt Traps' has Ulterior Motive

Opinion

By QI Liming

The debt risks in some developing countries have increased significantly in recent years, with someone who has an ulterior motive taking this opportunity to hype up the so-called "debt trap" or "opaque lending" and throws mud at China.

China is committed to providing support for the economic and social development of developing countries. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aims to achieve win-win results and shared development by promoting cooperation among all countries, building a community with a shared future for mankind.

The accusation laid before the door of China has little evidence to support itself.

Firstly, economic factors are the primary driver of current BRI projects, and China's development financing system is customized according to host countries' requirements rather than coordinated to pursue detailed strategic objectives. So, there is no available evidence to support this hypothesis of the frequently portrayed geopolitical strategy, which ensnares countries in unsustainable debt and allows China undue influence.

Secondly, recipient countries are not hapless victims, but actively shape outcomes within China's development financing system. Accordingly, the BRI does not follow a top-down plan, but emerges piecemeal through diverse bilateral interactions, with outcomes being

shaped by interests, agendas and governance problems on both sides.

Thirdly, none of China's partners, so far, has accepted that the BRI has created a "debt trap." Since China's development financing system is recipient-led and relies on host-country governance, bolstering domestic regulations, inspection and enforcement capacities are led by recipients.

Meanwhile, the World Bank statistics show that multilateral financial institutions and commercial creditors account for more than 80 percent of the sovereign debt of developing countries. It is imperative that these institutions participate in debt management in accordance with the principle of "joint action and fair burden."

China has always done its best to help developing countries ease their debt burden and has conducted over-

seas investment and financing cooperation on the basis of openness and transparency. In light of the aspirations of developing countries to grow economically, China has focused its overseas investment and financing cooperation on infrastructure, production and construction to help developing countries achieve independent and sustainable development.

Over the years, China has helped African countries build or upgrade more than 10,000 kilometers of railways and nearly 100,000 kilometers of roads, vigorously boosting economic development, improving people's lives in these countries and bringing tangible benefits to the local people.

As for the debt issue, surely developing countries are aware of who is a sincere and reliable friend and who is a "rumor-maker" with ulterior motives.

China: The Future of Global Consumer Market

Research box

At the turn of the century, more than half of the world's consumers live in Asia, led by the momentum in India and China.

These two countries now make up a third of the world's population, a third of the global consumer class

(those spending more than 12 USD a day in 2017 PPP), and approximately a quarter of global consumer spending.

China remains the country with the most populous consumer class. With China's consumer class growing by 36 million, it is estimated that China will continue to have a larger consumer class for at least the next two decades. China will become the first country to reach one billion people in the consum-

er class around 2026/27.

China's consumer class is urban, with an estimated 553 million people living in cities with a population of over one million by 2030. China's consumer class is concentrated in large cities.

China's consumer class is older, with a median age of 39. China will predominantly add consumers above the age of 45. By now, China is already the

largest senior market in the world in terms of people. Almost half of the country's consumer class growth until 2030 will come from individuals aged 60 or older. By 2030, China will represent one-fourth of the [world] senior market.

— Juan Caballero, data scientist, and Marco Fengler, research analyst of World Data Lab

Deepwater Gas Production Becomes Smarter

From page 1

The technology enables Deep Sea No.1 to integrate the production, storage and transport of gas condensate, saving approximately 800 million RMB in costs as it eliminates the need for developers to build outward transporting pipelines for gas condensate, a generally practiced design for such platforms.

There are also 13 technologies that were developed for the first time in China, some of which enable large platforms like Deep Sea No.1 to remain stable while at sea even under extreme

conditions.

Sixteen anchor chains made by high-end polyester are used to keep the platform standing, with one end of the chain fastened to the corner of the platform and the other end to seabed. The breaking load of each chain exceeds 2,000 tons, which enables the platform to resist a level 16 typhoon. The technology also enables the platform to operate for a period of 30 years before requiring maintenance at the dock.

High-quality and safe platform

According to Song Jinlong, director

of the Deep Sea No.1 platform, the team actively conducted adaptive reconstruction for relevant equipment, technological processes and control systems to meet the technological requirements of the normal platform function.

To ensure the safe operation of the innovative column oil storage approach, the developers installed monitoring facilities and emergency protection systems inside the tanks.

Typically, meeting the standard requirement for airtightness involves maintaining pressure within a certain

range over a specific period of time, but the standard for Deep Sea No.1 is much higher.

No bubble is allowed onsite, said Lei Yafei, senior engineer at Lingshui-Yacheng Operation Company of CNOOC's Hainan subsidiary. To ensure this, he and his colleagues used various tools, such as hydraulic wrenches, chain blocks and hammers to check for bubbles.

All this hard work has resulted in Deep Sea No.1 becoming a stable and consistent gas production platform.

Comment

Despite ChatGPT, Huamns Are Vital for Research

By Prof. Asad Khalil

In recent years, artificial intelligence has seen remarkable advances with the emergency of new techniques and models. One such model that has captured the imagination of many is ChatGPT, a large language model trained by OpenAI.

While ChatGPT has been hailed for its ability to generate human-like responses to text prompts, it is important to understand its limitations and how it compares to traditional research methods.

Potential to revolutionize the research process

Traditionally, researchers have relied on manual methods such as literature review and data analysis to generate insights. However, with the advent of ChatGPT, researchers can use natural language processing to generate hypotheses, automate data analysis, and even conduct literature reviews.

ChatGPT, on the other hand, is a machine learning model that has been pre-trained on vast amounts of text data, allowing it to generate coherent responses to text prompts, such as language translation, summarization, and question-answering. Nevertheless, it is limited to generating responses based on the patterns it has learned from the data it was trained on.

ChatGPT has shown great potential in natural language processing, it is important to understand its limitations and how it differs from traditional research methods. Both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses, and the most effective approach will depend on the specific research question and context.

Difference between human research and ChatGPT

One key difference between research and ChatGPT is the level of control and precision that each offers. Research experiments are designed to test specific hypotheses, and researchers can manipulate variables to isolate and understand the effects of each factor. This allows for a more controlled and precise analysis of the data. ChatGPT, on the other hand, generates responses based on statistical patterns in the data it was trained on, which can lead to biases or errors in the generated responses.

Another difference is the level of interpretability of the results. In research, the goal is not just to find patterns in the data, but to understand the underlying mechanisms that drive those patterns. Researchers can analyze the data to identify causal relationships and develop models that explain why certain

outcomes occur.

With ChatGPT, however, the generated responses may not always be explainable or interpretable, as they are based on statistical patterns rather than explicit rules.

Where ChatGPT and research complement each other

ChatGPT can be a valuable tool for generating hypotheses or exploring new areas of research. Researchers can use ChatGPT to generate ideas or responses that can then be further tested or analyzed using traditional research methods. Additionally, ChatGPT can be used to augment research studies by providing a way to analyze large volumes of text data quickly and efficiently.

There are still many reasons why humans are essential for research. Here are five of the key reasons:

- Creativity: While AI can generate new ideas and solutions, humans are still better at creative thinking. Humans can think outside the box, come up with new ideas, and combine concepts in novel ways that machines simply can't replicate.

- Ethics: AI is programmed to make decisions based on algorithms and data, but ethical considerations are often complex and require human judgment. Humans can consider the impact of research on society, the environment and other stakeholders in a way that AI cannot.

- Context: Research often involves understanding the nuances of a particular field or problem. Humans can understand the context of a problem and draw on their knowledge and experience to make informed decisions, while AI may struggle with context and require extensive training data to make accurate predictions.

- Intuition: Humans are adept at recognizing patterns, making connections, and understanding the implications of information that may not be immediately obvious. This intuition is a valuable asset in research, where unexpected discoveries can lead to breakthroughs.

- Human interaction: Many research projects require collaboration and interaction between humans. Human-to-human interaction is still critical in fields such as sociology, psychology and anthropology, where research involves studying human behaviors and interactions.

In a word, researchers will continue to rely on both AI and human expertise to make new discoveries and advance our understanding of the world.

Asad Khalil is professor of Law and Politics at Southwest University of Political Science and Law.

Newly Developed Laser Composition Analyzer

Hi! Tech

By GONG Qian

After six years of efforts, China's first commercial GS-LIBS2200 laser composition analyzer was invented by Hefei GStar Intelligent Control Technical Co.Ltd.

The cutting-edge device is an online composition analysis system for rap-

id detection of high-temperature melt, solid or powder material composition.

According to Pan Congyuan, CTO of the company, it can realize long-distance high-precision detection of materials components in a mere 30 seconds without sample pretreatments of the tested objects by inducing breakdown spectroscopy technology.

At present, it has been widely used in many fields including nonferrous metals, steel and electric power.



The GS-LIBS2200 laser composition analyzer. (PHOTO: GONG Qian/S&T Daily)