

# Kurds

in China's Belt and  
Road Initiative

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## **Introduction**

The Belt and Road Initiative, announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, is a major global development strategy aimed at enhancing regional ties and economic globalization. The project covers more than 60 countries from China to Europe, including areas with a significant Kurdish population. Historically, Kurdish areas have faced many challenges, including political instability and economic hardship. However, the Belt and Road Initiative will revive these areas by improving economic infrastructure, creating jobs and stimulating economic growth. Increased communication and investment will strengthen Kurdish economic independence and political influence. Culturally, these projects will promote greater unity and exchange, allow Kurdish culture to develop on a global stage, and economically, the Belt and Road Initiative

will change the game. It will open new trade routes and infrastructure projects in Kurdistan regions to international markets. This economic boom is transforming domestic industries, from agriculture to manufacturing, and developing trade links with China and beyond, in terms of trade the belt and road projects are creating new business opportunities. Investment in transportation and logistics facilitates the entry and exit of goods from Kurdish areas, attracting foreign investment and promoting domestic trade. In short, China's Belt and Road Initiative is not just about building roads and railways. It is about providing opportunities for political stability, cultural exchange, economic development and commercial growth in Kurdish areas. As these areas continue to integrate into this vast network, China, as a major player with a distinct global and regional

presence, has consistently advocated for peacekeeping, promoting development and nurturing a better international system. How can the Kurds manage their relations with China while maintaining their relations with traditional allies such as the United States? What was the role of the Kurds and Kurdistan's position in the ancient Silk Road? ,the Belt and Road Project which aims to boost global trade and stimulate economic growth across Asia and beyond through an extensive network of infrastructure projects. For the Kurds, who are divided into Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, it presents a number of unique opportunities that can have a significant impact on the socio-economic landscape. Many Kurdish regions suffer from underdevelopment due to prolonged conflict and political instability. By participating in the China Belt and Road Project these areas can tap

Chinese investment to build and upgrade roads, railways and other vital infrastructure.

Improving communication infrastructure within the Kurdish regions will facilitate trade and the movement of goods and people, and the Belt and Road project can help the Kurdish regions to integrate more effectively into global trade networks. By becoming part of the Belt and Road Project, the Kurdish regions could become important transit points for the movement of goods between Asia, the Middle East and Europe. This strategic positioning could lead to increased business activity, job creation and economic diversification.

## **Kurds on the Ancient Silk Road of China**

The ancient Silk Road, a historic trade network, connected China to the Mediterranean. It played an important role in the economic, social, and cultural development of the areas it passed through, bringing prosperity to the regions along its route, building housing and services, and establishing a developed commercial system in societies. As a meeting point for people and merchants from different countries, it facilitated social contacts, bargaining, interaction, and cultural exchange. Along the ancient Silk Road, artworks, crafts, paintings, music, and information on different cultures were exchanged. Another consequence of the existence of the ancient Silk Road was the spread of religions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism to new



lands, contributing to religious diversity and syncretism along its route.

### **\*Overland Route:**

Divided into a northern route used in summer and a southern route used in winter, these routes were the most traded and formed the basis of the deep historical heritage of the Silk Road.

### **\*Sea Road:**

Established during the Han Dynasty, it revolutionized trade between China and Rome, connecting India, South Asia, North Africa, and the Red Sea.

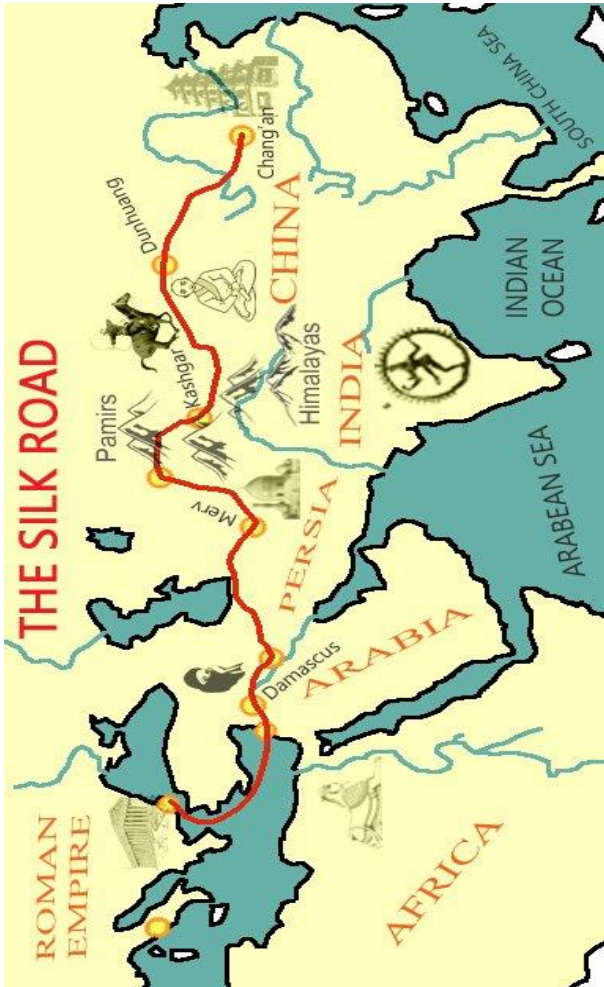
The ancient Silk Road was of immense importance to the Kurds, playing a significant role as a trade route and a cultural bridge that had a great impact on

economic, social, and cultural development. This led to the development of trading centers and markets, creating economic opportunities and prosperity for the population of the region, and establishing Kurdistan's strategic position along the Silk Road as a decisive trading center. This facilitated the exchange of goods and ideas between different civilizations. The position of Kurdish territory as a nexus of trade routes allowed it to benefit from the flow of various goods and cultures that passed through its territory. The Silk Road played a major role in shaping the economic, social, and cultural landscape of Kurdistan.

The ancient Silk Road was a source of income for the Kurdish emirates. After the weakening of the Abbasids, their caliphs could no longer control the remote areas, especially the mountainous regions of the north. In the northern regions (Urmia), a

Kurdish principality called Sedqiyah was established (770-827 AD), and in the plains of Sharazur, the Ishani took control of the region (912-961 AD). This gave Kurdish families the opportunity to declare self-government. With the arrival of the Seljuks and the defeat of the Buyids, Kurdish areas became more autonomous, and several governments were formed under the Seljuks. The Kurdish emirates extended from the southern Caspian Sea to the Arabian Sea. Three main trade routes passed through the ancient Silk Road. Kurdistan was a strategic area for the Chinese Silk Road and the mountainous region.

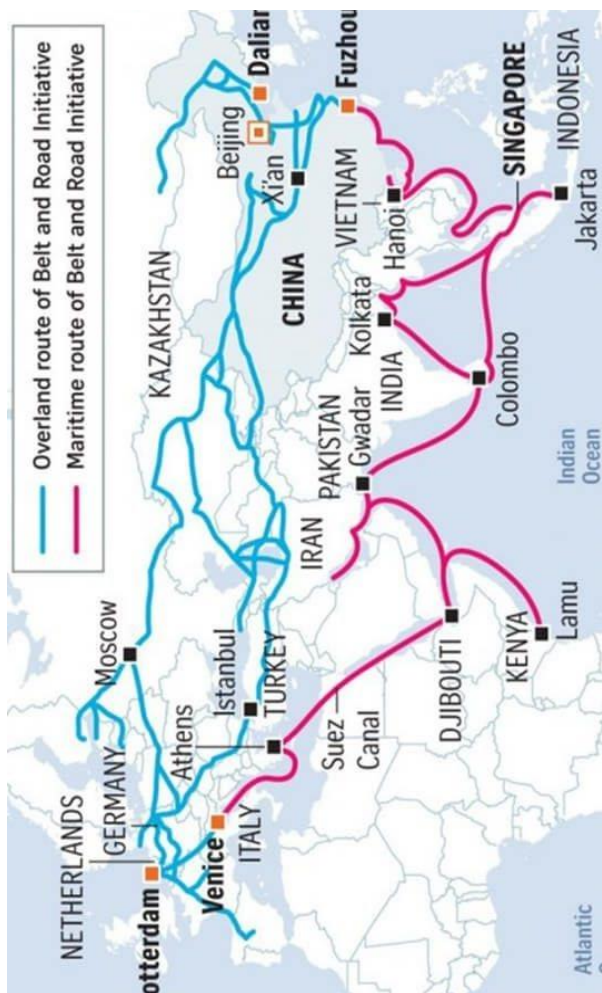




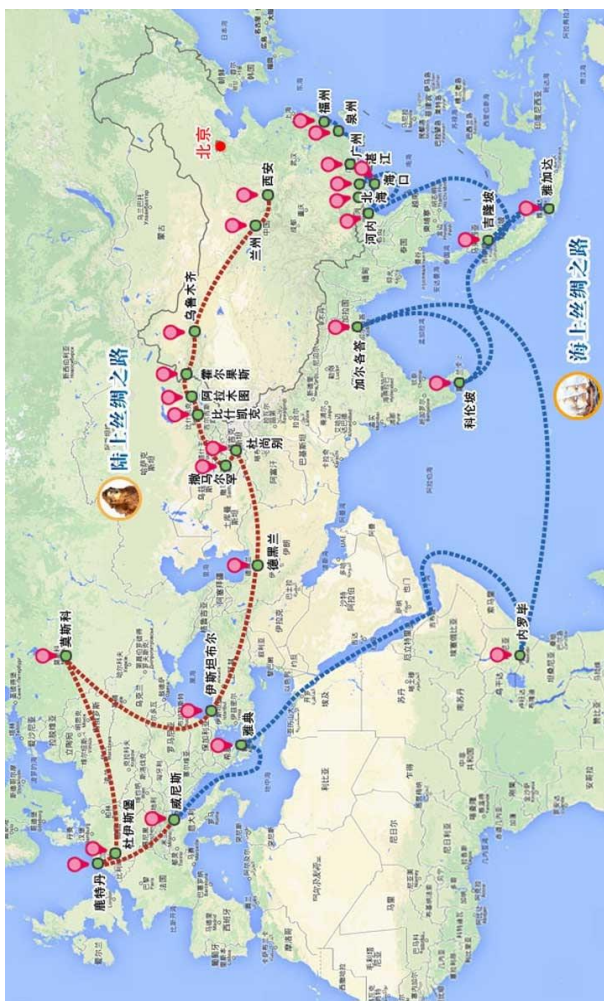
Kurds on the Ancient Silk Road of China

## **Kurds and the Belt and Road**

The Belt and Road project marks the beginning of China's extensive relations with the Middle East. Although the Kurdish regions themselves are not directly part of the Belt and Road Initiative, infrastructure projects and economic partnerships in neighboring countries affect Kurdish communities and geopolitical dynamics.



## Kurds and the Belt and Road



## Kurds and the Belt and Road



## **Upgrading Infrastructure**

The Belt and Road Initiative aims to enhance connectivity through infrastructure projects such as roads, railways, ports, and energy pipelines. While most of these projects are concentrated in countries such as Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, their completion could improve transportation networks and trade routes that would indirectly benefit the Kurdish regions.

### **\*Transport:**

Improved transport infrastructure facilitates the movement of goods and people, which can boost economic growth and regional integration.

### **\*Energy Delivery:**

Energy projects, including oil and gas pipelines, enhance energy security and promote economic cooperation. Kurdistan's large oil and gas reserves are potential beneficiaries of such projects.

### **Trade and Investment**

Focusing on trade and investment, the Belt and Road Initiative can create opportunities for economic development and foreign investment in the Kurdish regions, especially in sectors such as energy, construction, and communications.

## **- Foreign Direct Investment:**

Chinese companies involved in Belt and Road Initiative projects can provide investment opportunities in Kurdish areas, contributing to job creation and infrastructure development.

- Trade Routes: The development of new trade routes under the Belt and Road Initiative will facilitate increased trade between Kurdish regions and neighboring countries, as well as with China.

## **Geopolitical Implications**

### **- Regional Stability:**

Enhanced connectivity and economic development promoted by the Belt and Road Initiative can contribute to regional stability by addressing social and economic disparities and enhancing cooperation among countries. However, geopolitical tensions in the region may create obstacles to achieving these goals.

- The Belt and Road Initiative encourages economic cooperation and integration, which can reduce tensions and enhance peacebuilding efforts between countries, especially those with Kurdish populations.

## **Diplomatic Relations**

### **- Balancing Interests:**

China's policy of non-interference guides its approach to sensitive political issues involving Kurdish communities, as it seeks to maintain stability and positive relations with the countries of the Belt and Road.

### **- Soft Power and Influence:**

Chinese economic investments and infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative can enhance its soft power and influence in the region, which may influence the dynamics of Kurdish politics and regional geopolitics.

## **Cultural and Social Exchange**

While the Belt and Road Initiative primarily focuses on economic and infrastructure development, it also works to promote cultural and people-to-people exchanges between participating countries. The cultural interactions facilitated by the initiative may contribute to increased understanding and cooperation between Chinese and Kurdish communities.

### **-Educational and Cultural Programs:**

The Belt and Road Initiative supports initiatives such as academic exchanges, language programs, and cultural events, which can promote mutual understanding and strengthen ties between Chinese and Kurdish regions.

## **- Tourism and Heritage Preservation:**

Cultural sites in Kurdish areas may benefit from increased tourism resulting from improved infrastructure and connectivity under the Belt and Road Initiative, which contributes to local economies and cultural preservation efforts.

While the Kurdish regions themselves are not a direct part of the Belt and Road Initiative, China's economic and infrastructure projects in Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq have an impact on Kurdish communities and the broader geopolitical dynamics in the region. The future of Kurdish-Chinese relations is influenced by various factors, including economic interests, geopolitical dynamics, regional stability, and cultural exchange. While there are opportunities for cooperation between Kurdish community.

## **Xi Jinping's Vision: Fighting Poverty and Building Peace**

President Xi Jinping has played a significant role in China's efforts to eradicate poverty and promote world peace. Under his leadership, China launched a targeted poverty reduction campaign that lifted more than 800 million people from the poverty line, contributing significantly to global poverty reduction. Xi Jinping emphasized a comprehensive strategy, including economic development, infrastructure improvements, and social welfare programs, to ensure sustainable progress. In addition to domestic initiatives, Xi Jinping advocates for global peace and cooperation on the international stage. Through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, China has invested in infrastructure and



development projects around the world, promoting economic growth and stability in various regions. Xi Jinping has called for multilateralism and compliance with international law to create a more just world order. His vision emphasizes the importance of dialogue and negotiation in resolving international conflicts and promoting peaceful coexistence among nations. Moreover, President Xi's vision of a "society with a common future for humanity" underscores his commitment to global solidarity and cooperation. Xi Jinping's impact on poverty reduction and world peace continues today.

President Xi Jinping envisions the Belt and Road Initiative as a path to global prosperity and peace. President Xi's vision emphasizes the role of the Belt and Road Project in promoting economic development, reducing poverty, and enhancing relations between nations. By

investing in infrastructure and promoting trade, the Belt and Road aims to create jobs and stimulate economic growth in poor areas. Xi Jinping advocates for countries to work together towards common goals, building mutual trust. He believes this spirit of cooperation can help reduce conflicts, promote stability, and build a foundation for lasting peace and economic development, boosting global trade and stimulating economic growth across Asia, Europe, and Africa. By reviving old trade routes and developing new ones, the Belt and Road Initiative seeks to connect countries through a network of railways, ports, roads, and other infrastructure projects.



President Xi Jinping

## **Impact on Global Development:**

The Belt and Road Initiative has the potential to significantly reshape the dynamics of the global economy by improving trade relations and fostering economic cooperation among participating countries. The main effects include:

### **- Infrastructure Development:**

Construction of roads, railways, ports, and airports in the Belt and Road Project will improve the physical infrastructure of participating countries, crucial for facilitating trade and economic growth, especially in areas lacking modern transportation networks.

## **- Economic Growth:**

By enhancing connectivity and reducing transportation costs, China's Belt and Road Initiative stimulates trade and investment, leading to economic growth in participating countries. Infrastructure improvements attract foreign investment, boost local trade, and enhance market access for local products.

## **Regional Integration:**

The China Belt and Road Initiative promotes regional integration by connecting diverse economies, fostering cooperation, reducing trade barriers, and enhancing political and economic relations between participating nations.

## **Jobs:**

The Belt and Road Initiative creates numerous jobs and contributes to economic development in developing countries through various mechanisms. Projects require a significant workforce, providing millions of jobs in construction, engineering, logistics, and related sectors. These jobs can lift individuals and families out of poverty, especially in developing countries.

## **Improved Access to Services:**

Better infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and railroads, improves access to essential services like healthcare, education, and clean water, crucial for poverty reduction by enhancing quality of life and opening new economic opportunities.

## **Local Business Growth:**

Infrastructure improvements facilitate local business growth by providing better access to markets and reducing logistics costs, creating more jobs and stimulating local economies.

## **Skills Transfer and Training:**

Chinese companies participating in Belt and Road Initiative projects provide training and skills development to local workers, enhancing the capabilities of the local workforce and leading to long-term benefits for participating countries.

## **Investment in Education and Technology:**

Some Belt and Road Initiative projects include investment in education and technology infrastructure, potentially impacting human capital development and innovation in developing countries. For poor nations, the Belt and Road Initiative offers significant opportunities to improve living standards and achieve sustainable development.

## **Poverty Reduction:**

By creating jobs and stimulating economic growth, the Belt and Road Initiative helps reduce poverty in participating countries. Infrastructure improvements also enhance access to essential services like healthcare and education, contributing to overall well-being.



## **Rising Trade Opportunities:**

Poor nations often face barriers due to inadequate trade infrastructure. The Belt and Road Initiative addresses these challenges by improving connectivity and access to global markets, enabling these nations to export goods and services more effectively.

## **Access to Finance:**

Many poor nations struggle to finance major infrastructure projects; the Belt and Road Initiative provides an alternative source of funding, allowing these countries to undertake critical development projects without relying solely on traditional international financial institutions.

## **Technological and Industrial Upgrading:**

Participation in Belt and Road Initiative projects can lead to technological and industrial upgrading in poor nations. By engaging in projects requiring advanced technology and management practices, these countries can modernize industries and improve productivity.

## **Shared Economy:**

By enhancing trade and economic ties, the Belt and Road Initiative fosters economic sharing among participating countries, making conflict less likely as nations become economically interdependent.

## **Diplomatic Engagement:**

The Belt and Road Initiative facilitates diplomatic engagement and dialogue between participating countries, providing a platform for conflict resolution and confidence-building.

## **Common Development Goals:**

The focus on common economic development goals under the Belt and Road Initiative encourages countries to work together, reducing historical tensions and conflicts by fostering a sense of common purpose and mutual benefit. Improved Belt and Road infrastructure enhances communication and mobility, stabilizing conflict zones by facilitating movement of goods, services, and people, reducing isolation, and promoting economic integration.

## **Humanitarian Aid and Development:**

Belt and Road projects include humanitarian aid and development components in conflict-affected areas, such as construction of schools, hospitals, and housing, promoting poverty reduction and access to essential services for long-term peace and stability.

## **Pakistan and India:**

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a key Belt and Road Project component, has the potential to bring economic stability to Pakistan and indirectly promote peace in the region. Amidst tensions between India and Pakistan, the economic benefits of CPEC encourage both countries to maintain stability for uninterrupted economic progress.

## **Central Asia:**

Belt and Road infrastructure projects in Central Asia bring historically conflict-ridden countries closer together. Improved transport networks and economic cooperation promote regional stability and reduce likelihood of conflict.

## **Africa:**

In Africa, Belt and Road projects have contributed to economic growth and poverty reduction in several countries, including Kenya and Ethiopia. By improving infrastructure and creating jobs, these projects stabilize areas previously exposed to conflict and insecurity.

China's Belt and Road Initiative represents a transformative approach to global development, significantly impacting economic and social landscapes of participating countries through infrastructure enhancement, job creation, and regional integration.

## China as a Friend in Trouble

The rise of the Islamic State (ISIS) in the early 2010s caused significant instability and conflict in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq and Syria. The Kurdistan Region became a crucial front in the fight against ISIS. As ISIS advanced, many countries withdrew their diplomatic missions and staff from the Kurdistan Region due to security concerns. However, China made a significant diplomatic move by opening a consulate in the Kurdistan Region. China's decision to establish a consulate during a period of rising conflict and uncertainty was strategic and symbolic. It aimed to convey solidarity and support to the Kurdish authorities and people. By maintaining and even expanding its diplomatic presence, China positioned itself as a reliable ally—a country willing to step in and offer assistance during times of crisis. This stance contrasted

with the actions of many Western nations, which prioritized the safety of their personnel by withdrawing their diplomatic missions.



# **China's role in helping the Kurds during the fight against ISIS and the coronavirus pandemic.**

## **Assistance in the Fight Against ISIS**

### **Military Support and Training:**

China provided the Kurdish Peshmerga forces with military training and equipment to help in their fight against ISIS. This support included arms and ammunition, which bolstered the Peshmerga's capabilities on the battlefield.

Chinese military advisors have reportedly worked with Kurdish forces to enhance their strategic operations against ISIS.

China has shared intelligence with the Kurdish forces to aid in tracking and targeting ISIS operatives. This cooperation was part of broader international efforts to combat the terrorist organization.

## **Assistance During the Coronavirus Pandemic**

### **Medical Supplies and Equipment:**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, China sent several shipments of medical supplies to the Kurdistan Region, including masks, ventilators, and personal protective equipment (PPE).

Chinese medical experts provided guidance and protocols for handling and treating COVID-19 cases, which helped the Kurdish health authorities manage the outbreak more effectively.

## **Healthcare Collaboration:**

Chinese healthcare professionals shared their experiences and best practices with Kurdish medical staff through virtual meetings and webinars. This exchange of information was crucial in the early stages of the pandemic when knowledge about the virus and its treatment was rapidly evolving.

## **China's Diplomatic Philosophy**

Unlike some Western countries, China emphasizes non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and promotes diplomatic and economic engagement instead of military intervention. This approach aligns with the broader principles of China's foreign policy, which emphasize mutual respect, non-interference, and cooperation. Despite

being a nuclear-armed state, China consistently advocates for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and emphasizes the importance of diplomacy and dialogue. This approach is evident in its relations with the Kurdistan Region and the wider Middle East, where China seeks to foster economic and diplomatic ties without becoming entangled in the region's complex and often violent conflicts.

## **Impact of the Chinese Consulate in the Kurdistan Region**

Enhanced economic ties: The Kurdistan Region is rich in natural resources, especially oil. By establishing a consulate, China signaled its interest in deepening economic ties and securing access to these resources. This move is part of China's broader strategy to secure energy supplies to sustain its rapidly growing economy.

Political influence: By supporting Kurdish authorities during challenging times, China has positioned itself as a dependable partner likely to wield greater influence in future diplomatic and economic negotiations.

## **Happy City China in Erbil**

The \$5 billion Happy City China project, built on 2,000 acres of land by Beijing, will create 8,000 jobs in Erbil. It is designed to accommodate 80,000 people and welcome 14 million tourists annually. This project marks China's third largest tourism venture in the Middle East, following similar developments in Iran and Malaysia. Happy City will feature a playground, aquapark, hotels, shopping streets, villas, large apartments, sports centers, and service facilities such as supermarkets, hospitals, and schools. It is situated between Duhok and the villages of Daraban and Ashokan.

The Kurdistan Region holds strategic importance for China, not only due to its geopolitical position but also its abundant natural resources, especially oil. Given China's heavy reliance on energy imports,

securing access to these resources aligns closely with China's foreign policy objectives. By establishing a consulate in the Kurdistan Region, China aims to strengthen diplomatic ties and capitalize on economic opportunities in the region.



Happy City China in Erbil

## **China's Happy City Project in the Kurdistan Region: A Catalyst for Growth and Development**

China has embarked on an ambitious initiative in the Kurdistan Region known as the Happy City project. This significant endeavor is set to be completed in four years and promises substantial economic and social benefits.

### **Key Features and Benefits:**

#### **Job Creation:**

The Happy City project is expected to generate approximately 8,000 jobs during its construction and operational phases. These job opportunities will cater to a wide range of skills and professions, from construction workers to service industry professionals, significantly boosting local employment.



## **Tourism Boost:**

Upon completion, Happy City is projected to attract around 4 million tourists annually. This influx of visitors will not only highlight the region's rich cultural heritage and natural beauty but also stimulate the local economy. Increased tourism will lead to higher demand for hotels, restaurants, and other services, creating a ripple effect of economic benefits.

## **Economic Impact:**

The project is poised to enhance the Kurdistan Region's infrastructure and urban development. With improved facilities and modern amenities, the region will become more attractive to both tourists and investors, fostering a conducive environment for further economic activities.

## **Cultural and Recreational Hub:**

Happy City is envisioned as a vibrant cultural and recreational hub. It will feature a variety of attractions, including parks, entertainment venues, and cultural centers, offering residents and visitors a wide range of activities and experiences. This development will enhance the quality of life for local inhabitants and position the Kurdistan Region as a premier destination in the Middle East.

## **Strategic Implications:**

### **Strengthened Bilateral Relations:**

The Happy City project underscores the growing partnership between China and the Kurdistan Region. It represents a significant investment by China in the region's future, solidifying economic and political ties.

## **Regional Stability and Development:**

By providing job opportunities and fostering economic growth, the project contributes to the overall stability and development of the Kurdistan Region. It addresses critical issues such as unemployment and economic diversification, laying the groundwork for a more prosperous future.

China's Happy City project is a transformative initiative for the Kurdistan Region, promising to create thousands of jobs and attract millions of tourists annually. It signifies a new era of economic growth and regional development, positioning the Kurdistan Region as a dynamic and attractive destination on the global stage.



Happy City

## **China as a Peaceful Nation**

China consistently emphasizes its commitment to non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and promotes peaceful development. This stance contrasts sharply with the military interventions pursued by many European and American nations globally. China's policy of non-interference and its focus on peaceful coexistence are central to its diplomatic strategy, setting it apart from Western powers.

## **China's Nuclear Arsenal and Peaceful Policy**

Despite possessing nuclear weapons, China adheres to a "no first use" policy, pledging not to use nuclear weapons unless first attacked by a nuclear-armed adversary. This policy underscores China's commitment to peace and stability. China's nuclear capability serves as a deterrent, ensuring national security while advocating for peaceful conflict resolution and diplomatic engagement over military actions.

## **Changyan Village in Sulaimani**

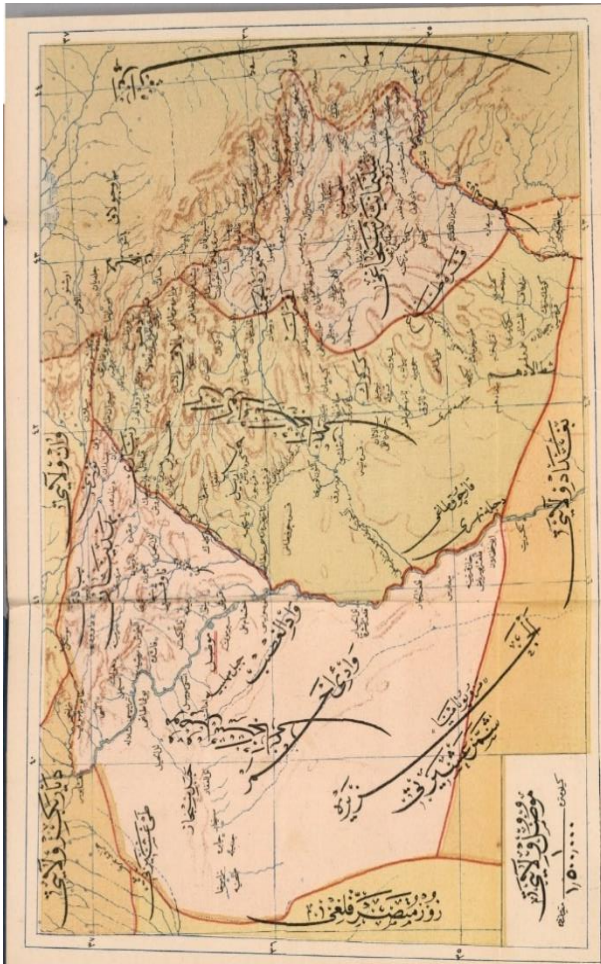
Changyan is one of the ancient villages of Sharbazher, situated in the Sitaki district of Sulaimani province within the Kurdistan Region.

"Changyan village is located in the Sharbazher district of Sulaimani province in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The village, believed to have originated from China, boasts a long history dating back to the Changan region of China!

According to a narrative recounted by Karim Zand, a historian and traveler, one of the commanders in Genghis Khan's army had a falling out and fled for his life. This man, Qin Gin Yan, had a son named Shachins. Shachins later married a woman in Iran and had a son named Shaban. Afterward, they crossed over and established the settlement in Sharbazher, now known as Changyan.







Changyan Village in Sulaimani

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