

**China's Belt and Road Initiative: Social Science Perspectives**  
SOSC 4000I/SOSC6030L; TuTh 10:30-11:50 CYTG002  
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**Course description:** The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a political and economic mobilization central to China's presence abroad. It has thousands of Chinese infrastructure and investment projects, mainly in developing countries, but also is said to have geo-strategic, educational, scientific, and other dimensions. The United States has mounted a counter-mobilization against the BRI, calling it neo-colonialism, a debt trap, etc. We will use social science theories, concepts, and studies that analyze the BRI's dimensions, significance and outcomes, to address this hot global debate. There will be lectures by the instructor and by guests, but the course is mainly a student-led seminar that discusses global and country analyses of the BRI.

**Course Requirements:**

1. As an individual or in a team of two students will research, write and present a paper. It can be on any BRI-related topic that they choose. Papers should be 12-15 pages for UG students and 15-20 pages for PG students, including citation material. **All papers must be the students' own writing;** plagiarism is a punishable offence. Students will briefly consult with the instructor about their paper topic. A special **voluntary** tutorial, taught by a librarian, will cover how to do research. Another **voluntary** tutorial, taught by a TA, will cover how to write a paper;
2. As an individual or in a team of two, students will lead the discussion in **one class meeting** of the course, based on the reading for that class meeting. Discussion leadership primarily involves the discussion leaders very briefly summarizing its arguments of the reading for that one class meeting and posing several questions about the day's topic, for the class to discuss.
3. Students will take a 30-question multiple choice exam at the final class meeting. The questions will be drawn **exclusively** from the lectures, discussions and paper presentations. As there are 24 class meetings, **only one or two questions will be asked about the material from each class meeting.** It is thus important for students to consistently attend class.
4. Participation in discussions is **not** required, but 20 of the 100 total marks in the course can be earned through class participation (see below), so it is in the interest of students to intervene in most class discussions. Credit will be given for posing a substantive question or for making a substantive observation about the topic being discussed. One mark can be earned for a student's intervention during each class meeting. Students who earn that one mark are encouraged to speak again in that class meeting, but they can only earn one mark per class.

**Course Grades:**

There are 100 possible marks. The maximums are: 40 marks for the paper, 10 for discussion leadership, 30 for the exam and 20 for class participation. **UG and PG students will be graded separately.** In a 4000/5000-level seminar course, such as this one, students tend to be self-selected for interest in the subject. They therefore generally perform well and **grades for both UG and PG students tend to be much higher than they are for lower level courses.**

## Course Schedule:

**3 September:** Lecture [Barry Sautman], Theories of Development: Modernization Theory. Reading: John Lee, "Understanding Authoritarian Resilience and Countering Autocracy Promotion in Asia," *Asia Policy* 13:4, 2018: 99-122, [https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/files/publications/asiapolicy13-4\\_lee\\_oct2018.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/files/publications/asiapolicy13-4_lee_oct2018.pdf).

**5 September:** Lecture [Barry Sautman], Theories of Development: World Systems Theory. Reading: Zhang Xin, "Chinese Capitalism and the Maritime Silk Road: a World-Systems Perspective" *Geopolitics* 22:2 (2017): 310-331.

**10 September:** Lecture [Albert Park], Introducing the BRI: Dimensions. Reading: Douglas McWilliams, et al, "From Silk Road to Silicon Road: How the Belt and Road Initiative will Transform the Global Economy," Center for Economic Policy Research, 2019: 5-12, [www.ciob.org/sites/default/files/CIOB-Cebr%20report%20-%20From%20Silk%20Road%20to%20Silicon%20Road.pdf](http://www.ciob.org/sites/default/files/CIOB-Cebr%20report%20-%20From%20Silk%20Road%20to%20Silicon%20Road.pdf).

**12 September:** Lecture [Barry Sautman], Introducing the BRI: Significances. Reading: Steven Brakman, et al., "The New Silk Roads: an Introduction to China's Belt and Road Initiative," *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 12 (2019): 3–16

**17 September:** Is the BRI a Strategy? Reading: Lee Jones and Zeng Jinghan, "Understanding China's Belt and Road Initiative': Beyond 'Grand Strategy' to a State Transformation Analysis," *Third World Quarterly*, 2019:

**19 September:** The BRI and Globalization. Reading: Gao Bai, "China's Belt & Road Initiative: a Counterforce to Globalization Reversal," in Wang Huiyao and Miao Lu (eds.), *Handbook on China and Globalization* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019): 156-174.

**24 September:** How the BRI is Perceived. Reading: Alicia Garcia Herrero and Xu Jianwei, "Countries Perceptions of China's Belt and Road Initiative: a Big Data Analysis," Breugel Working Paper no. 1, 2019, <http://bruegel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/WP-2019-01final.pdf>.

**26 September:** Lecture [He Yujia] The BRI, Science & Technology: Reading: Ehsan Masood, "How China is Redrawing the Map of World Science," *Nature*, May 1, 2019, [www.nature.com/immersive/d41586-019-01124-7/index.html](http://www.nature.com/immersive/d41586-019-01124-7/index.html).

**3 October:** Lecture [Barry Sautman]: "Tales of the Debt Trap: China, the US and the New Yellow Peril." Reading: Agatha Kratz, et al, "New Data on the 'Debt Trap' Question," Rhodium Group, 2019, <https://rhg.com/research/new-data-on-the-debt-trap-question/>.

**8 October** Lecture [Barry Sautman]: "China, Ethiopia and the Significance of the Belt and Road Initiative." Reading: Gu Jing, "China's South-South Development Cooperation in Practice: China and Ethiopia's Industrial Parks," in Huang Meibo (ed.), *South-South Cooperation and Chinese Foreign Aid* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019): 233-255.

**10 October** Lecture [Angela Tritto], “The Belt and Road Initiative: a Look at Indonesia.” Reading: Gong Xue, “The Belt & Road Initiative and China’s Influence in Southeast Asia,” *Pacific Review* 32:4 (2019): 635-665.

**15 October** Lecture [Naubahar Sharif]: “Pakistan on the Belt and Road.” Reading: Majed Akhter, “Geopolitics of the Belt and Road: Space, State, and Capital in China and Pakistan,” in Brett Neilson, et al (eds.), *Logistical Asia: the Labour of Making a World Region* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): 221-241.

**17 October** Financing the BRI. Reading: Gregory Chin and Kevin Gallagher, “Coordinated Credit Space: the Globalization of Chinese Development Finance,” *Development and Change* 50:1 (2019): 245-274.

**22 October** The BRI and the Environment. Reading: Zhou Lihuan, et al, “Moving the Green Belt and Road from Words to Action,” World Resources Institute, Boston University, 2018, [www.bu.edu/gdp/files/2018/11/GDP-and-WRI-BRI-MovingtheGreenbelt.pdf](http://www.bu.edu/gdp/files/2018/11/GDP-and-WRI-BRI-MovingtheGreenbelt.pdf)

**24 October** The BRI and “Chinese Neocolonialism.” Reading: Jeffrey Reeves, “Imperialism and the Middle Kingdom: The Xi Jinping Administration’s Peripheral Diplomacy with Developing States,” *Third World Quarterly* 39:5 (2018): 976-998.

**29 October** Chinese Sub-national Governments in the BRI. Reading: Dominik Mierzejewski, “The Roles of Local Governments in the New Silk Road,” in Carmen Amado Mendes (ed.), *China’s New Silk Road: an Emerging World Order* (London: Routledge, 2019): 135-152

**31 October** The BRI and Higher Education. Reading: Malaka Skinner, “How China Shapes Global Mobility Trends,” World Educational Services, 2019, <https://wenr.wes.org/2019/04/how-china-shapes-global-mobility-trends/print/>.

**5 November** Lecture [David Zweig] The BRI and Energy. Reading: Yang Chenxi, “Belt and Road Initiative and Transformation of International Energy Order,” *China International Studies* 70 (2018): 103-115.

**7 November** The BRI and Ports. Reading: Chen Jihong, et al, “Overseas Port Investment Policy for China's Central and Local Governments in the Belt and Road Initiative,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, 28: 116 (2019): 196-215.

**12 November** Lecture [Billy Wong, Hong Kong Trade Development Council], The BRI and Hong Kong. Reading: “Collaborating Along the Belt and Road,” KMPG, 2018, <https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/cn/pdf/en/2018/03/collaborating-along-the-belt-and-road.pdf>.

**14, 19, 21, 26 November** Student Paper Presentations

**28 November:** Exam

## **Some Suggested Paper Topics**

Note: A paper can be done about “The BRI and [Region X],” “The BRI and [Country X],” “The BRI and [Project X], etc. but here are some possible topics that may be more interesting:

1. Do BRI infrastructure projects have a higher failure rate than non-BRI infrastructure projects?
2. US politicians’ opposition to the BRI
3. What do Chinese analysts say about the BRI and Chinese naval bases abroad?
4. Comparing the BRI to the US post-World War II European reconstruction Marshall Plan
5. Regional differences in Implementing the BRI: is Asia different from Africa?
6. Guangdong and the BRI
7. Institutions that Study the BRI: in China and Abroad
8. Dispute Settlement Mechanisms for BRI Projects: Courts, Arbitration and Other Approaches
9. Why Hasn’t India Joined the BRI and Does it Make any Difference?
10. Japan Has not Joined the BRI; Does it Participate Anyway?
11. US/EU differences about the BRI
12. How China Promotes the BRI among Chinese Companies: Subsidies and Beyond
13. BRI Countries’ Efforts to Attract Chinese Investment: Does the BRI Matter?
14. What Does the BRI Say About Chinese Capitalism?
15. Is the BRI Successful and How would We Know?
16. BRI Infrastructure Projects and “Profitability”: What are the Proper Criteria?
17. Who Opposes the BRI in Africa?
18. The BRI and Australian Government Opposition to the Chinese Presence in the South Pacific
19. Can the US Compete with China on Infrastructure Financing and Building Abroad?
20. How has the BRI Changed over Time?
21. The “Digital BRI”
22. Does the BRI have “Chinese characteristics”?
23. Accounting and the BRI
24. Is the BRI a New Model of Development?
25. Which Countries Support the US Anti-BRI Counter-Mobilization and Why?
26. Is the US-China Trade War Related to the BRI?
27. Effects of the Belt and Road on Tourism
28. The BRI: Alternative to Neoliberalism?
29. The BRI and the International Financial Institutions (IMF, World Bank, etc.)
30. “Let’s Not Throw Away Money on Africa:” Critiques of the BRI Inside China
31. “Waking Up in Dependency”: German government Claims About the BRI
32. Russia: Positive and Negative about the BRI
33. Legal Aspects of the BRI
34. Why Does the BRI have No International Institutional Structure?
35. Does the BRI Change the “International Order”?
36. What is the “Connectivity” that the BRI is Supposed to Be About?
37. The Role of Xinjiang in the BRI
38. The Tibet Issue and the BRI
39. The BRI and Chinese Agribusiness
40. The Effects of the BRI on Trade.