

China's New Silk Road: Social Science Perspectives

SOSC 4000J/SOSC60300; MW 10:30-11:50; (Room 2406; Zoom via Canvas)

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Course description: The New Silk Road or Belt and Road Initiative (BRI; 一带一路) 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 is also 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 concepts, studies, and social science theories that analyze the BRI's dimensions, significance and outcomes, to address this hot global debate. There will be lectures by the instructor and by many guests. The course however is mainly a student-centered seminar that discusses global and country analyses of the BRI.

Course Requirements:

1. Students will research, write and present a paper. It can be on any BRI-related topic that they choose. If course enrolment is sufficient, students may be able to write their paper in teams of two. Papers should be 12-15 double-spaced pages for UG students and 15-20 pages for PG students, including citations. You may think that's a lot to write, but you'll likely find that you want to say more than you can fit into the page limit. Students should indicate their paper topics to the TA by 15 September and will later will briefly (10-15 minutes) consult with the instructor about their paper topic. **All papers must be the students' own writing**; plagiarism is a punishable offence. A special **voluntary** tutorial, taught by a librarian, may be arranged to cover how to do research; another **voluntary** tutorial, taught by a TA, will be on how to write a paper.
2. Students will lead the discussion in **one class meeting** of the course that has no lecture, based on the one reading for that class meeting. If course enrollment is sufficient, more than one student will lead each discussion. Discussion leadership first involves the discussion leaders very briefly summarizing the arguments of the reading for that one class meeting and then 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. 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, in person or online.
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 4000/6000-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: 5 lectures by the instructor, 9 or 10 guest lectures, 5 or 6 student-led discussions, 4 class meetings for student paper presentations, one meeting for an MC exam

1 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.

6 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.

8 September: Lecture [Albert Park, HKUST], Introducing the BRI: Dimensions. Reading: Chi Lo, *China's Global Disruption: Myths and Reality* (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing 2021): 181-196.

13 September: Lecture [Barry Sautman], Introducing the BRI: Significances. Reading: Eyck Freymann, *One Belt One Road: Chinese Power Meets the World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021): 9-21.

15 September: Lecture [Xue Gong, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore], Identity Constraints: Explaining the Various Performances of Chinese Financial Institutions Supervision of BRI Projects. Reading: Liu Hongsong, et al, "Development Finance with Chinese Characteristics: Financing the Belt and Road Initiative," *Revista Brasileira de Politica Internacional* 63:3 (2020): 1-15.

20 September: [Student-led], The BRI and Globalization. Reading: Jean Berlie, "The New Silk Road," in J.A. Berlie (ed.), *China's Globalization and the Belt and Road Initiative* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020): 13-40.

27 September: Lecture [Gong Xiaohan, Chinese University of Hong Kong] "For Profit or for Strategic Purpose: China's Outbound Energy Investments and the International Economic Regime," Reading: T. Kasandra Behrndt-Eriksen, *Chinese Energy Companies in Africa* (London: Routledge, 2021): 1-10, 175-186.

29 September:

Lecture [Barry Sautman], China, Ethiopia and the Significance of the Belt and Road Initiative. Reading: Riccardo Crescenzi and Nicola Limodio, "The Impact of Chinese FDI in Africa:

Evidence from Ethiopia,” LSE Working Paper, 2021, www.lse.ac.uk/iga/assets/documents/research-and-publications/FDI-in-Ethiopia-Crescenzi-Limodio.pdf.

4 October: Lecture [Barry Sautman], Tales of the Debt Trap: China, the US and the New Yellow Peril. Reading: Ganeshan Wignaraja, et al, “Chinese Investment and the BRI in Sri Lanka,” Chatham House, 2020, www.chathamhouse.org/2020/03/chinese-investment-and-bri-sri-lanka.

6 October Lecture [Angela Tritto, HKUST], The Belt and Road Initiative: A Look at Indonesia. Reading: Guanle Lim, “Why is it so Hard to Push Chinese Railway Projects in Southeast Asia? The Role of Domestic Politics in Malaysia and Indonesia,” *World Development* 138 (2021).

11 October Lecture [Chen Wanjing Kelly, HKUST] The Power of the Mirage: State, Capital, and Politics in the Grounding of the ‘Belt and Road’ in Laos. Reading: Selina Ho, “Infrastructure and Chinese Power,” *International Affairs* 96:6 (2020): 1461-1485.

13 October Lecture [Athar Mansoor and Naubahar Sharif, HKUST]: Pakistan on the Belt and Road. Reading: Islam Nazmul and Esra Cansu, “BRI, CPEC and Pakistan: a Qualitative Content Analysis on China’s Grand Strategies,” *International Journal on World Peace* 37:3 (2020): 35-64.

18 October [Student-led]. 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: 1115-1139

20 October [Student-led]. The BRI and the Environment. Reading: Wu Haitao, et al, “Does China’s Outward Direct Investment Improve Green Total Factor Productivity in the “Belt and Road” Countries? Evidence from Dynamic Threshold Panel Model Analysis,” *Journal of Environmental Management* 275 (2020): 1-13.

25 October Student-led. The BRI and “Chinese Neocolonialism.” Reading: Adam Grydehoj, et al, “Practicing Decolonial Political Geography: Island Perspectives on Neocolonialism and the China Threat Discourse,” *Political Geography* 85 (2021): 1-11.

27 October Lecture [Alice Hughes, Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden] “Understanding and Mitigating the Impact of the BRI on Biodiversity,” Reading: Divya Narain, et al, “Best-practice Biodiversity Safeguards for Belt and Road Initiative’s Financiers,” *Nature Sustainability* 3 (2020): 650-657.

1 November [Student-led]. The BRI and Higher Education. Reading: Ingrid d’Hooghe, “China’s BRI and International Cooperation in Higher Education and Research,” in Florian Schneider (ed.), *Global Perspectives on China’s Belt and Road Initiative: Asserting Agency Through Regional Connectivity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021): 35-58.

3 November Lecture [Laurence Delina, HKUST], China-Southeast Asia Energy Connectivity. Reading: Jessica Liao, “A Good Neighbor of Bad Governance? China’s Energy and Mining Development in Southeast Asia,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 28: 118 (2019): 575-591.

8 November Lecture [Billy Wong, Hong Kong Trade Development Council], The BRI and Hong Kong. Reading: Lam Kin-chung (ed.), *Hong Kong in the Belt & Road Initiative* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2020): 284-297.

10 November [Student-led or guest lecturer, China Merchants Ports, HK]. The BRI and Ports. Reading: Liu Zhigao, et al, “Demystifying Chinese Overseas Investment in Infrastructure: Port Development, the Belt and Road Initiative and Regional Development,” *Journal of Transport Geography* (2020): 1-10.

15, 17, 22, 24 November Student Paper Presentations

29 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. There are however some broader topics that may be more interesting:

1. Do BRI infrastructure projects have a higher failure rate than non-BRI infrastructure projects?
2. US politicians’ campaign against the BRI
3. Sports infrastructure and the BRI
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 [or X province] 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 and why?
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. The BRI and Climate Change: Is China the main financier of coal power projects abroad?
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. Potential 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 affect the “rule-based international order”?
36. What is the “connectivity” that the BRI is supposed to be about?
37. Xinjiang and the BRI
38. Tibet and the BRI
39. The BRI and Chinese agribusiness
40. The effects of the BRI on trade
41. The health BRI
42. The impact of Covid-19 on the BRI
43. The “collapse of the BRI” in Western discourse
44. Western predictions that the BRI would spread Covid-19
45. Political and non-political crimes against Chinese working on BRI projects
46. The role of Chinese universities in the BRI: studying it and participating in it
47. Do people in BRI countries know about the BRI?
48. Does the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank have a role in the BRI?
49. Does the BRI indicate there will be a new “Great Opening of the West”（西部大开发）？
50. What makes a country a “BRI country”?