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**The Belt and Road Initiative:
an analysis through a systematic literature review**

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引言

这篇论文围绕“一带一路”（Belt and Road Initiative, 缩写 BRI），这是中国的一个成功倡议。为了理解其目的以及成果，本论文将详细地描述“一带一路”的倡议。

在过去的几十年里，中国经历了快速、强劲的经济增长。持续的经济增长大为改善了中国人民的生活条件。对外开放是中国的经济增长的一个重要因素：从 20 世纪 70 年代后期开始，中国政府开始与外国合作。这些因素最终催生了“一带一路”倡议，这个项目最初由中国政府于 2013 年提出。“一带一路”是一个宏伟的项目，通过这个项目，中国希望增进国际合作并且增加相关国家的经济增长。

这篇论文是关于“一带一路”倡议的，主要分析中国官方的叙述，并且解析国际学术论文。特别是，本论文搜集了关于该倡议的中国学术论文。为了彻底详尽地介绍该倡议，这篇论文分为四个部分。

这篇论文的第一章是关于 1949 年中华人民共和国成立后中国的发展。为了解“一带一路”的历史背景，这篇论文的第一章研究中国政府多年来的经济政策与外交政策。此外，本章还简要地介绍中国的历史。尤其，值得注意的是，在毛泽东时代（1949 年到 1976 年），因为中国由专制政权统治并且实施民主集中制，所以它的最大特征就是集中的经济体系。另外，在那个时期，这个国家与外部世界隔绝。毛泽东去世后，邓小平成为中华人民共和国的新领导人。在他的指导下，中国的经济进行改革，这个国家开始与外国合作。这种新方法催生了中国国内生产总值的巨大增长，也改善了当地人民的生活水平。从 1979 年到 1989 年，中国的年均增长率约为 9.5%。此外，中国与外国之间政治关系也改善了。这篇论文第一章的最后一段研究当前中国的领导层及其意识形态，特别关注习近平主席对外部世界的态度因为 2013 年中国新领导人提出“一带一路”倡议。目前，中国致力于提升本国在国际舞台上的作用，成为世界领先者。因此，中国政府提出了“一带一路”，以进一步加强这个国家与外国的交往。

这篇论文的第二章节会介绍“一带一路”的倡议，从中国国家主席习近平提出这个项目开始到当前的发展。2013 年 9 月，在哈萨克斯坦阿斯塔纳纳扎尔巴耶夫大学中国国家主席习近平提出了这个雄心勃勃的项目。习近平首次提出建设“

丝绸之路经济带”，以增加国家间的合作。正如中国国家主席习所说，这个项目的最终目标是造福所有国家的人民。

特别是，本章将讨论“一带一路”的项目与古代丝绸之路的联系。事实上，中国领导人经常提到过去的伟大成就。此外，本章将分析“一带一路”的路线：这个发展计划不但涉及海上通道而且涉及陆上通道，也就是说“21世纪海上丝绸之路”与“丝绸之路经济带”。另外，本论文的第二章将介绍“一带一路”的国家及该项目的好处。尤其是，本章将分析中国政府提出这个倡议的目的其中包括中国希望通过这个项目获得的经济动机和地缘政治动机。为了了解中国领导人对“一带一路”的态度，我将讨论其官方英文名称的变化。事实上，在英文名称中中国政府加入了 Initiative（倡议）一词，以强调该项目不是一个战略，而是一个全球行动呼吁。所以，“一带一路”依靠国际合作，其目的是公共福利。此外，本章还将分析中国政府向外国介绍的项目目标，以及外部世界对这个倡议的反应。这篇论文第二章的最后一段将讨论“一带一路”的资金来源和外国对中国政府提供的大量资金的想法。

这篇论文的第三章节将介绍中国官方的叙述和它的演变。多年来，中国政府对这个项目给予了极大的重视。此外，根据中国领导所说，“一带一路”对有关各方都有益处，这个倡议能够克服潜在的挑战。在中国政府的讲话和文件中，该倡议被描述为一个开放、包容和成功的项目。但是，中国政府所提供的资料并不反映国际学术文献所提供的资料。事实上，国际学术文献经常批评“一带一路”倡议，并强调这个项目在各个领域可能面临的许多潜在风险。因此，在这篇论文的第三章中，我将对关于“一带一路”的国际学术辩论进行分析。通过分析，我注意到，不但这个项目受到批评而且中国政府也受到批评。事实上，根据外国学者所说，中国政府对这个倡议没有提供详细的资料。此外，中国政府被指责为只为自己谋取利益。

这篇论文的第四章也是本论文的最后一章。本章将介绍一个系统文献综述。系统文献综述是于2022年2月至2022年4月进行的，分析的样本包括200篇有关“一带一路”倡议的中国学术文章。本章首先将介绍研究的方法，然后这个章节将介绍研究的排除以及纳入标准。为了寻找这些文章，我使用了“中国知网”（China National Knowledge Infrastructure，缩写 CNKI）的数据库，这是世界上最大、更新最快的中文期刊数据库之一。此外，这些文章必须具备一些特点，

比如说，这些文章必须是用中文写的，并且在 2013 年和 2022 年 4 月之间发表。此外，考虑到“一带一路”已经在许多的文章中进行了讨论，所以有必要为了选择相关的学术论文确定一个具体的标准。

这篇论文旨在回答以下问题：

1. 中国学术文章中分析的有关“一带一路”的主要主题是什么？
2. 这些年来，中国学术文章中关于“一带一路”的分析主题有什么变化？
3. 这些中国学术文章是否提出了关于“一带一路”的批评性内容？
4. 这些学术文章中强调的主要批评意见是什么？它们在这些年里是否有变化？

所以，本章将介绍所选文章中讨论的主要议题和主题，并对确定的每个方面进行简要讨论。确定的主要议题是：贸易和外国直接投资、文化的交流和人民之间的交流、基础设施建设、旅游业发展、绿色丝绸之路、数字丝绸之路、健康丝绸之路。此外，第四章还将介绍这些文章中所分析的“一带一路”的临界点。因为不到一半的文章提出了关键议题，所以可以说，大多数中国学术文章都赞同并且支持这个倡议。确定的关键的方面是：文化差异造成的风险、地缘政治风险、中国公司缺乏关于外国的信息、中国公司缺乏经验、环境问题、外国的消极态度、国外发展不充分。通过对这 200 篇文章的分析，我们可以发现，“一带一路”本身从未受到质疑。这些文章倾向于乐观主义并且支持这个倡议。

当我阅读这些文章时，我发现出现的主题并不表达对中国领导层的批评或者对这个倡议本身的批评，而是这些文章表达对参与的外国或者缺乏经验的企业批评。总的来说，“一带一路”被描述为一个成功的倡议。根据中国学者之见，这个项目可能克服所有的困难。例如，关于这个倡议的未来，在 2019 冠状病毒病（COVID-19）大流行之后，按照领导层划定的路径，中国的学术文献强调了必须采取的新路线，为了保证“一带一路”将有一个富有成效的未来，比如说绿色丝绸之路、数字丝绸之路、健康丝绸之路。因此，尽管未来不确定，但是我注意到对这个倡议在新形式下的适应能力以及发展能力的信心。

在本论文的编写过程中，我非常注意展现“一带一路”的完整形象，从这个项目产生的历史背景开始，到中国学者对这个倡议的认知和想法结束。在分析这些文章时，我非常注意确定中国学者对“一带一路”的看法是否发生了变化。特别是，我认为看到因 2019 冠状病毒病（COVID-19）大流行而对这个项目的态度发生变化是非常有趣的。

我选择“一带一路”倡议是因为这个话题是一个非常重要、非常严重的计划，所以我对这个项目非常感兴趣。我认为这个倡议对中国以及其他的国家都非常重要，所以了解这个项目的运作方式以及这个倡议可能遇到的麻烦非常有意思。在这篇论文的写作过程中，我能够从中国的角度来理解“一带一路”，中国政府以及中国学者都对这个项目未来的发展持高度乐观和积极态度。

总之，“一带一路”倡议是一个非常雄心勃勃和非常重要的项目，这是与很多的国家有关的一个倡议。此外，在未来几年里这个计划将继续发展，所以我认为懂得这个计划的目标以及参与国的原因非常重要。另外，关注“一带一路”的未来发展对了解中国与外国关系非常重要，于是我认为我们应该继续学习并分析这个倡议。

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Introduction

Over the past few decades, China has experienced a rapid and astonishing economic growth, which has led to significant improvements in the living conditions of the Chinese people. At the same time, the Chinese government changed its approach in foreign policies by opening-up to the external world, allowing the development of the country as a major international power. All these elements have influenced the decision taken by the Chinese leadership of implementing the project known as the Belt and Road Initiative, ideated by China in recent years. This final thesis aims at analysing the Belt and Road Initiative, by examining the Chinese official narrative and the international academic debate about the project; in particular, this research focuses on how the initiative has been portrayed by the Chinese scholars in academic articles.

In the first chapter of this thesis, the evolution and development that took place in China following the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949 will be analysed. In order to understand the historical background that eventually led to the creation of the initiative, a brief examination of the Chinese government's economic and foreign policies through the years will be carried out. In particular, during the Maoist years, an authoritarian power ruled over the country, which was characterized by a centralized economic system and was isolated from the external world. After Mao's death, the new leadership guided by Deng Xiaoping decided to reform the country's economy by opening up to the external world. This new approach led to a huge growth in the Chinese GDP, to an improvement of the conditions of life and in the relations with foreign countries. In the last paragraph of the first chapter of this thesis, the current Chinese leadership and its ideology will be examined, focusing on President Xi Jinping's approach towards the external world. At present, China is committed to improve its role in the international arena by becoming a leading country worldwide. Therefore, the Belt and Road Initiative was announced by the Chinese government to further increase its involvement with foreign countries.

The second chapter of this research will present the Belt and Road Initiative, starting from the announcement of the project by the Chinese President Xi to its present development. In particular, the project's connection to the Ancient Silk Road will be discussed and the Modern Road's spatial configuration will be analysed; the land corridors and the maritime routes that compose the BRI will be presented. Furthermore, the reasons that led the

country to the development of the initiative will be presented; these include both economic and geopolitical motivations that the country aims at obtaining through the BRI. In order to comprehend how the project is presented by the Chinese leadership, the changes in its official English name will be discussed. In addition, the objectives of the project, presented to the foreign countries by the Chinese government, and the response of the external world to the BRI will be analysed. At the end, the initiative's sources of financing and the foreign countries' perception of the numerous funds provided by the Chinese government will be discussed.

In the third chapter of this research, the Chinese and international interest and attention towards the Belt and Road Initiative will be presented. In particular, the chapter will analyse the Chinese official narrative about the BRI and how it has evolved through the years. The Chinese government has given great importance to the project, which is described as highly beneficial to the parties involved, but this description does not reflect the one provided by the international literature. Therefore, an analysis of the international academic debate about the initiative will be provided; it will be possible to notice that a high number of critics is directed towards the project and also towards the Chinese government, accused of lacking clarity.

The fourth and last chapter of this thesis will present a systematic literature review of a selected sample of two hundred Chinese academic articles regarding the Belt and Road Initiative. In particular, the methods used for the research, the exclusion and inclusion criteria will be presented, followed by the general characteristics of the chosen literature. Furthermore, the main topics and themes discussed in the selected articles will be presented and a brief discussion about each of the identified aspects will be carried out. In addition, the critical aspects analysed in the articles will be presented; less than half of the selected papers present critical topics and it will be possible to notice that the project itself is never questioned.

Chapter 1: China's evolution towards the Belt and Road Initiative

1.1 China's economy before the Economic Reforms

In the last four decades, China's economy has experienced a rapid growth, which has led the country to become a major economic power. This growth began after Mao Zedong's death, with a change in the leadership and, most of all, with the implementation of the economic reforms and with the liberalization of trade and investments.

On October 1st 1949, Mao Zedong, the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), proclaimed the foundation of the People's Republic of China. After the Civil War between the CCP and the Kuomintang, the Chinese Nationalist Party, the country was mostly rural, very poor and underdeveloped, with a low life expectancy and a high child mortality rate. During the Maoist Period, which lasted from the birth of the People's Republic until the death of Mao in 1976, an authoritarian power was established to rule over China and its economy was mainly controlled and planned by the government, which decided prices, managed the resources available and established the production goals that the nation had to achieve; furthermore, private ownership was abolished. The Chinese leadership at the time wanted to make China's economy self-sufficient and to liberate the country from foreign powers; for this reason, its economy was isolated from the external world and foreign trade and exchanges were very limited. During the Maoist years, industrialization was the main goal set by the leadership and, at the same time, agricultural production had to be increased.

Even though the main objective of the leadership during this period was to raise the level of the economic development of the country, the leadership of the CCP, and particularly Mao, also aimed at the creation of a socialist society and, for this reason, implemented some policies, such as the collection and redistribution of lands to small peasants. However, many of Mao's policies had catastrophic effects and the Maoist Period was also characterized by the difficult years of the Great Leap Forward¹ and of the Cultural

¹ The Great Leap Forward was an initiative led by Mao Zedong between 1958 and early 1960. The campaign's aim was to rapidly develop China's economy through its industry and agriculture. At the same time, the government planned a total collectivisation. However, the plan did not succeed, and the campaign was followed by a grave famine, which, according to some estimates, led to the death of at least 20 million of people. For more details, see: <https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/ea/archives/chinas-great-leap-forward/>
<https://www.wondriumdaily.com/how-maos-great-leap-forward-failed-miserably/>

Revolution², during which, China experienced a significant economic decline and the country's industrial and agricultural production decreased. According to Chinese government statistics, from 1953 to 1978, China's GDP grew at an average annual rate of 6.7%; however, many analysts questioned the veracity of these data and believe that the actual growth rate is lower.³

After Mao's death in 1976 and the defeat of the Gang of Four⁴, a new leadership, formed by the reform wing of the CCP and guided by Deng Xiaoping, slowly prevailed and because of their ideas, China's modernization process began.

1.2 Opening up: from Deng Xiaoping's reforms to the Go out policy

The policies and initiatives that were implemented during the Maoist Period led the Chinese economy to be closed and centrally planned, dominated by state ownership and aiming at national self-sufficiency. For this, there was not a growth path, and the country was characterized by a high poverty rate.

The 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP in 1978 was a turning-point in the history of China because the leadership announced that the country would undergo major changes. The government decided to change the development path of the country, by reforming the Chinese economy, eliminating its isolation and international marginality and moving from a centrally planned economy to an economy opened towards the external market. The leadership believed that involving foreigners in its economic affairs would enrich the nation; for this, opening up to the West, and developing trade and investments with foreign countries were necessary. These substantial changes were required, according to the leadership, in order to develop China's national economy, through economic and technical exchanges based on equality, and to improve the

² The Cultural Revolution was a socio-political movement, which took place in from 1966 to 1976. It marked Mao's return to a position of power after the failure of the Great Leap Forward. Its goal was to enforce Communism, to purge the Communist Party of its opponents and to remove any capitalistic, foreign, or traditional cultural elements from the society. The movement was characterized by the use of violence, and it led to the death of thousands of people.

For more details, see: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Cultural-Revolution>

³ Morrison Wayne M., "China's economic rise: History, trends, challenges, and implications for the United States", *Congressional Research Service*, 2019, URL: <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL33534.html#:~:text=Measured%20in%20U.S.%20dollars%20using,the%20U.S.%20per%20capita%20level> (accessed on May 19, 2022)

⁴ The Gang of Four was a group composed by four Chinese Communist Party members: Jiang Qing, Mao's wife, Wang Hongwen, Yao Wenyuan, and Zhang Chunqiao. After Mao's death, the group was sentenced for treasonous crimes.

For more details, see: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gang-of-Four>

influence of China in foreign countries. The ultimate goal was the creation of a “moderately prosperous society”⁵, that is a society which guarantees decent living standards to all citizens.⁶

The President of the People’s Republic of China at the time, Deng Xiaoping, represents the key figure in shaping the reforms that would lead China to become one of the world’s fastest-growing economies. The goals Deng set can be summarized in the Four Modernizations, which referred to the need of strengthening and improving four major fields: agriculture, industry, national defence and science and technology. In the countryside, the commune system was abandoned, and peasants were granted more freedom in managing their farming activities; this decision led to an increase in the agricultural production, in the income of the citizens and, in turn, in consumption. Furthermore, state-owned enterprises were reformed and partly decentralized, becoming more market-oriented, while the private economy expanded.⁷ The weight SOEs had in the national GDP, which was more than 70% prior to the reforms, was reduced to less than 30%.⁸

The new leader of the CCP wanted to achieve the “Socialism with Chinese characteristics”, which means a socialism that fit the Chinese characteristics; for this, implementing these new reforms also meant a less reliance on the ideology, which used to have a particularly important role during the Maoist Period. With the new role given to the ideology, more importance was given to the aspirations and desires of the individual and the personal responsibility in the economic process was highlighted, by also introducing the concept of individual property. Citizens were encouraged to become entrepreneurs in order to contribute to the common good.

In order to test and experiment the reforms and opening-up, the Chinese leadership established four Special Economic Zones in Zhuhai, Shenzhen, Shantou and Xiamen; these pilot cities, located in strategic positions close to the borders of Macao, Hong Kong,

⁵ The term, which originally comes from Confucianism, was proposed by Deng Xiaoping based on the Four Modernizations project.

⁶ Lavagnino Alessandra, Mottura Bettina, *Cina e modernità. Culture e istituzioni dalle Guerre dell’oppio a oggi*, Carocci editore, Rome, 2016

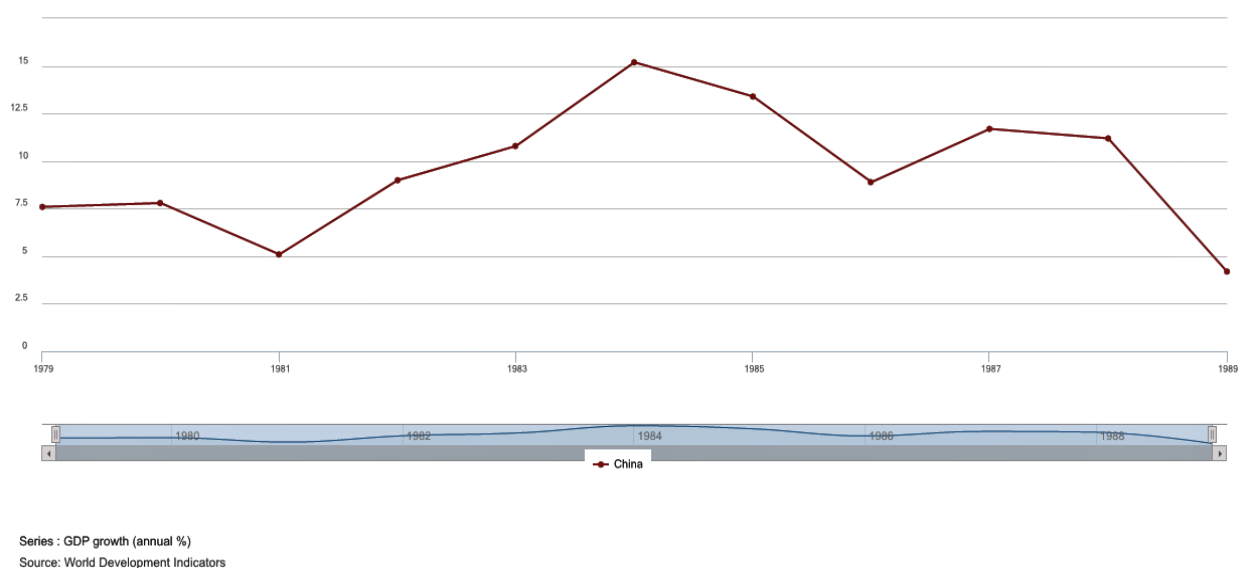
⁷ For more details, see: https://clb.org.hk/content/reform-state-owned-enterprises-china#part1_1
<https://www.europeanguanxi.com/post/why-are-chinese-state-owned-enterprises-so-powerful>
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/05/why-chinas-state-owned-companies-still-have-a-key-role-to-play/>

⁸ Lin Yifu Justin, “State-owned enterprise reform in China: The new structural economic perspective”, *Structural Change and Economic Dynamics*, Elsevier, Vol. 58 (C), 2021, pp. 106-111

and Taiwan, were called to cooperate with the international economy and, for this, trade and investments could be conducted without the authorization of the government. Furthermore, these localities could benefit from free-market reforms and could provide particularly good conditions for investments by foreign companies. In fact, they offered plants built according to the needs of the investors, well-trained employees at low wages, and incentives in order to attract foreign investments, technologies, and know-how. This project was highly successful and it was followed by the foundation of other Special Economic Zones in other areas of the country.

The implementation of these reforms allowed the country to accumulate funds necessary for the economic growth and greatly helped China's economy to develop more rapidly and more efficiently. Since the reforms began, China has impressively grown, and its GDP's annual growth between 1979 and 1989 averaged at 9.5%, with a maximum increase of 15.2% in 1984, as shown in Graph 1.1.

GRAPH 1.1 – CHINA'S GDP ANNUAL PERCENTAGE GROWTH (1979-1989)



Source: The World Bank

Through the implementation of the reforms, the opening-up policies and the liberalization of investments and trade, China was able to lift more than 800 million of people out of poverty and to improve the access to education and health services.⁹

⁹ The World Bank In China – Overview, *The World Bank* (2022), URL: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview#1> (accessed on May 17, 2022)

The Open Door Policy adopted by Deng, which has its basis in the opening up to the external world, culminated in China's entry in the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. Joining the WTO led to a reduction in tariffs on both imported and exported goods, which further boosted trade with foreign countries. Chinese merchandise exports grew from \$14 billion in 1979 to \$2.5 trillion in 2018, while imports grew from \$18 billion to \$2.1 trillion.¹⁰ In this period, the abolishment of the trade barriers and the low labour costs attracted many foreign enterprises. The enormous amounts of goods that China exported led the country to become the world's largest manufacturer, known as "the world's factory".

In 2000, there has been a further evolution in the plans that the Chinese government developed to improve its economy and its international influence, through the implementation of the Going Global Strategy, firstly announced by the Premier of the People's Republic of the time Zhu Rongji and later reinforced by his successor Wen Jiabao. The strategy encouraged Chinese enterprises to invest abroad and to operate in foreign countries; the Chinese leadership decided to move its focus from attracting foreign investments into the country to the pursuing of Chinese investments overseas, in order to secure a presence in the international scene. Some of the major driving forces of this strategy include China's huge foreign reserves, the need to obtain natural resources, sophisticated technologies, and specific skills.¹¹ The strategy proved to be very successful and, since the early 2000s, China has experienced a rapid growth in foreign investment by Chinese enterprises, which are going out in an extensive manner: Chinese outward foreign direct investment in 2006 were 19 times that of 2000, increasing at an average annual rate of 116%.¹²

Nearly 40 years of economic reforms and the further opening up to the external world that took place in the last decades allowed China to deeply change, both regarding its economy and its society. China was able to become the world's fastest growing economy;

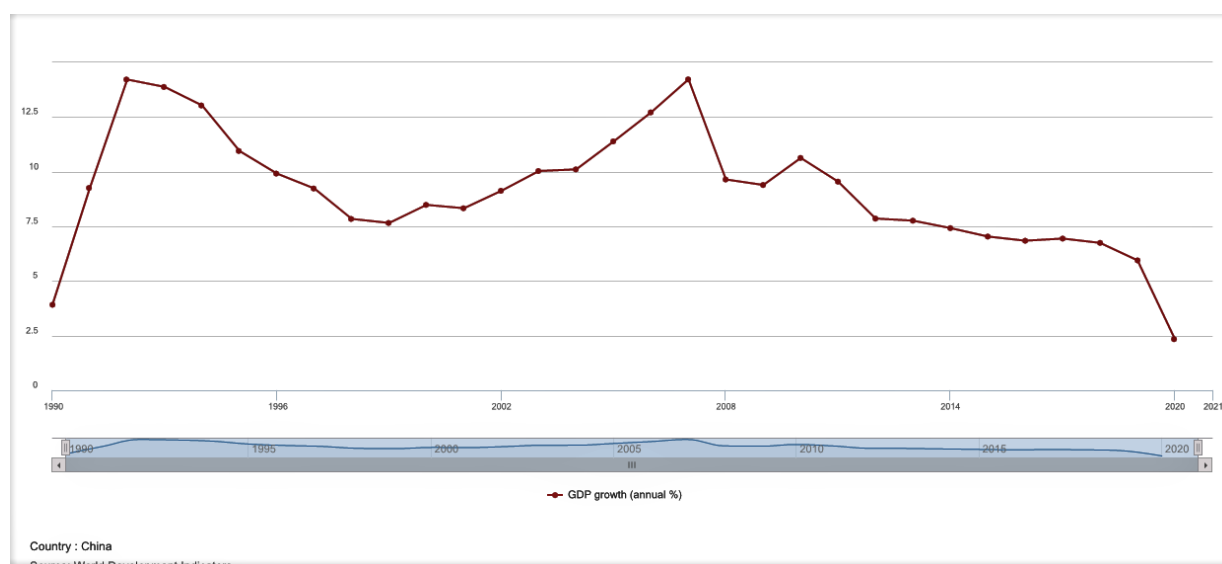
¹⁰ Morrison Wayne M., "China's economic rise: History, trends, challenges, and implications for the United States", *Congressional Research Service*, 2019, URL: <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL33534.html#:~:text=Measured%20in%20U.S.%20dollars%20using,the%20U.S.%20per%20capita%20level> (accessed on May 19, 2022)

¹¹ Morrison Wayne M., "China's economic rise: History, trends, challenges, and implications for the United States", *Congressional Research Service*, 2019, URL: <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL33534.html#:~:text=Measured%20in%20U.S.%20dollars%20using,the%20U.S.%20per%20capita%20level> (accessed on May 19, 2022)

¹² Goldsmith Stephen, Wagner Daniel, "Think Tank: The rise of China as an outward investor", *FDI Intelligence* (2010), URL: <https://www.fdiintelligence.com/content/feature/think-tank-the-rise-of-china-as-an-outward-investor-26819> (accessed on May 20, 2022)

from 1990 to 2020, China’s annual GDP growth rate averaged at 8.9%, as shown in Graph 1.2. The global economic crisis that begun in 2008 and that caused many Western economies to go in recession, partly affected the Chinese economy, causing a decrease in its annual GDP growth rates; however, the government quickly responded by implementing an economic fund of \$586 billion.¹³ Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 there was a decrease in the GDP annual rate, which dropped to 2.3%; however, China was the only major economy that had an economic growth in that year.¹⁴ The country’s GDP has raised to 8.1% in 2021, but this growth is expected to slow to 5% in 2022; the forecast is based on the decrease in domestic demand, the Covid-19 wave the country is experiencing in the Spring of 2022, and the worsening of the global economic environment due to the war in Ukraine.¹⁵

GRAPH 1.2 – CHINA’S GDP ANNUAL PERCENTAGE GROWTH (1990-2020)



Source: The World Bank

¹³ Morrison Wayne M., "China's economic rise: History, trends, challenges, and implications for the United States", *Congressional Research Service*, 2019, URL: <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL33534.html#:~:text=Measured%20in%20U.S.%20dollars%20using,the%20U.S.%20per%20capita%20level> (accessed on May 19, 2022)

¹⁴ Cheng Jonathan, “China is the Only Major Economy to Report Economic Growth for 2020”, *The Wall Street Journal*, 2021, URL: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-is-the-only-major-economy-to-report-economic-growth-for-2020-11610936187> (accessed on May 20, 2022)

¹⁵ The World Bank In China – Overview, *The World Bank* (2022), URL: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview#1> (accessed on May 17, 2022)

1.3 Xi Jinping Era: the Chinese Dream

In March 2013, Xi Jinping, already General Secretary of the CCP and chairperson of the Central Military Commission¹⁶, was elected president of the PRC by the National People's Congress¹⁷. His leadership has been guided the "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era", which was added to the CCP Constitution during the 19th Congress in October 2017. The addition of Xi's name in the constitution of the CCP elevated his power to the levels of two former leaders that guided China in the two periods that changed the most its shape and that had the privilege of having their name added in the constitution, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping.

The new leading ideology provided a development plan made of two main phases: during the first phase, from 2020 to 2035, the realisation of the socialist modernisation needs to be achieved; while, during the second phase, from 2035 to 2050, China has to be developed into a democratic, culturally developed, harmonious modern socialist country.¹⁸ The leadership is aware that there is the need of improving the economy's quality because China is facing a "new normal" phase of development, with a slowdown in the economic growth. Therefore, innovation is a new driver of the economic development.¹⁹ The new purposes include the improving of living conditions, protecting the environment and implementing the green development, and giving private consumption a key role in the economy,²⁰ which is now less dependent on capital input from foreign countries and also on foreign trade.

The continuation of the reforms, through further opening up, by granting a new leading role to China in the international arena, and greater access to the market, is a part of the

¹⁶ The highest national defence organization in the People's Republic of China.

¹⁷ The highest organ of state power and the national legislature of the People's Republic of China.

¹⁸ Peters Michael A., The Chinese Dream: Xi Jinping thought on Socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 2017, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2017.1407578> (accessed on May 21, 2022)

¹⁹ McGregor James, The 13th Five-Year Plan: Xi Jinping Reiterates his Vision for China, *APCO Worldwide*, 2017, URL: <https://apcoworldwide.com/blog/the-13th-five-year-plan-xi-jinping-reiterates-his-vision-for-china/> (accessed on May 21, 2022)

²⁰ Morrison Wayne M., "China's economic rise: History, trends, challenges, and implications for the United States", *Congressional Research Service*, 2019, URL: <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL33534.html#:~:text=Measured%20in%20U.S.%20dollars%20using,the%20U.S.%20per%20capita%20level> (accessed on May 19, 2022)

new ideology,²¹ which also emphasizes the protectionism of the rights and interests of foreign investors.²²

The goals are now the growth and strengthening of the country and its economic, social, and cultural system, but also the need to guarantee it a leading role in international affairs. At the same time, the CCP needs to reinforce its role. For this reason, the government also aims at improving the discipline of the members of the Party. In consequence, Xi has conducted an extensive drive against corruption, which led to the fall of some important current and former members of the CCP, military officers and the investigation of both members and non-CCP member, including entrepreneurs, and managers. However, it has been argued that the campaigns were used to consolidate Xi's power than instituting reforms²³, thus turning into a fight against dissent.

Furthermore, the "Chinese dream" was set as the slogan of the new leadership, calling for the rejuvenation of the country and indicating a development in terms of both wealth and prestige in the international context. The term, which was firstly used by President Xi during a visit at the National Museum of China in Beijing in 2012, has since appeared a numerous amounts of times in the official narrative, becoming a leitmotiv of the official political discourse.²⁴ In order to realize the dream, the Chinese government has set two goals, referred to as the "Two 100s":

- Becoming a "moderately well-off society" by 2020, the 100th anniversary of the CCP. This means that the 2010 GDP per capita should be doubled in 10 years' time and then urbanization should be completed by 2030. Even though the pandemic caused a slowdown in the Chinese economy, the first goal was achieved.

²¹ Peters Michael A., *The Chinese Dream: Xi Jinping thought on Socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era*, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 2017, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2017.1407578> (accessed on May 21, 2022)

²² Morrison Wayne M., "China's economic rise: History, trends, challenges, and implications for the United States", *Congressional Research Service*, 2019, URL: <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL33534.html#:~:text=Measured%20in%20U.S.%20dollars%20using,the%20U.S.%20per%20capita%20level> (accessed on May 19, 2022)

²³ Morrison Wayne M., "China's economic rise: History, trends, challenges, and implications for the United States", *Congressional Research Service*, 2019, URL: <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL33534.html#:~:text=Measured%20in%20U.S.%20dollars%20using,the%20U.S.%20per%20capita%20level> (accessed on May 19, 2022)

²⁴ Lavagnino Alessandra, Mottura Bettina, *Cina e modernità. Culture e istituzioni dalle Guerre dell'oppio a oggi*, Carocci editore, Rome, 2016

- Becoming a fully developed nation by 2049, the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the People's Republic.²⁵

The Chinese Dream's aim is the continuation of the enormous successes in the economic growth that China has experienced since the beginning of the reforms, in order to create a wealthy, modern, and socialist society; thus, it should be achieved by the nation as a whole and not by single individuals. It implies the restoring of the international dominant position the country had at the beginning of the 19th century, before the Century of Humiliation²⁶ and a return of China's magnificent past, characterized by harmony and peace. The new development promoted by the Chinese leadership also points at the promotion of the Chinese culture²⁷, which Xi himself vowed to promote²⁸ by spreading the values of the modern China. The leadership has worked to improve the international image of the country, using soft power techniques. According to the President of the Chinese Republic, China should be painted as a civilized, economically developed country with a long history. For this, it should be promoted as a country that seeks a peaceful development, meaning that it does not represent a threat to other countries; it, instead, is willing to promote the building of relations with other international players that can benefit both parts. A significant role is therefore attributed to the media that needs to create and communicate an appealing image of the country.

The Chinese Dream stands for the identification and the pursuit of the Chinese values and the realization, by each Chinese citizen, of the aspirations designed by the leadership, in order to contribute to the renovation and development of the nation.

The Chinese leadership under Xi has liberalized the economy further, but, at the same time, the government has been given once again a leading role because it has to guide the citizens in the development. Socialism values are central in today's China, as well as the in Party, which directs every aspect of the government. The leadership has also

²⁵ Lawrence Kuhn, Robert Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream, *The New York Times*, 2013, URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/05/opinion/global/xi-jinpings-chinese-dream.html> (accessed on May 21, 2022)

²⁶ The century of humiliation is the term used in China to describe the about hundred years, from 1839 to 1949, characterized by the intervention, subjugation, and occupation of China by Western powers and Japan, before the proclamation of the People's Republic of China.

²⁷ Peters Michael A., The Chinese Dream: Xi Jinping thought on Socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 2017, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2017.1407578> (accessed on May 21, 2022)

²⁸ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Nepal (2014), "Xi: China to promote cultural soft power", URL: <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cenp/eng/News/t1113938.htm> (accessed on May 21, 2022)

modernized the army, while further promoting the loyalty toward the Party and toward the ideology, which is represented by a mix of Confucianism, Marxism and a strong sense of patriotism that should unite the country.

In order to achieve the goals set by the Chinese leadership, the country is ready to increase the government's efficiency, increase the level of innovation of the Chinese enterprises and get further involved in the international arena, by further developing a dynamic market-based economy, reinforcing multilateral cooperation and promoting economic and trade exchanges. Strengthening the country's economy and its political guide is necessary in order to undertake a more important role in the global scene. In fact, in the new Era, the leadership aims at shifting China from being the "factory of the world" to being a leading country in the international arena. In this light, the Belt and Road Initiative was born to connect countries and bring benefits to all the parties involved.

Chapter 2: The Belt and Road Initiative

2.1 The Launch of the Initiative

In ancient times, China used to be open to the external world, through contacts and exchanges, both in terms of products and in terms of ideas and concepts. For about 2000 years, from the Han dynasty (202 BC – 220 AD) to the Qing dynasty (1644 -1911), the country maintained trading relationships with most Eurasian countries and parts of Africa, exporting products that included silk, tea and spices while importing goods such as silver, gold, and woods. At the same time, through the connection of different countries and civilizations, religious interactions, cultural and people-to-people exchanges took place between the eastern and the western worlds, which led to the introduction in China of many new notions. For example, as a consequence of these exchanges, Buddhism spread in the country.²⁹ The ancient routes covered an area of around 8000 kilometres and extended from Xi'an (formerly called Chang'an), China's ancient capital, to Rome, going through Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa. They were given the name of Silk Road by the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877, and in the early 20th century, the concept was extended to include the historically used maritime trade routes by the French Sinologist Édouard Chavannes.³⁰ The Silk Road played an important role in the history of China, giving to the country an important role in the international scene and, at the same time, providing a source of economic growth and cultural exchanges. Owing to the establishment of trade between far regions and the exchanges between diverse cultures, the Silk Road is rich in historical and cultural heritage and was given the recognition as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site in 2014.³¹

Through the years, the ancient Silk Road has fallen into disuse, but its concept has seen a revival in recent years, since Xi Jinping unveiled China's new ambitious project for regional economic cooperation. On September 7th 2013, during a visit to the Republic of Kazakhstan, President Xi gave a speech titled "Promote Friendship Between Our People

²⁹ Liu Weidong, Dunford Michael, "Inclusive globalization: unpacking China's Belt and Road Initiative", *Area Development and Policy* (2016), URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2016.1232598> (accessed on May 27, 2022)

³⁰ Liu Weidong, Dunford Michael, "Inclusive globalization: unpacking China's Belt and Road Initiative", *Area Development and Policy* (2016), URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2016.1232598> (accessed on May 27, 2022)

³¹ Liu Weidong, Dunford Michael, "Inclusive globalization: unpacking China's Belt and Road Initiative", *Area Development and Policy* (2016), URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2016.1232598> (accessed on May 27, 2022)

and Work Together to Build a Bright Future” to faculty members and students at the Nazarbayev University, in Nur-Sultan. In his discourse, Xi Jinping proposed for the first time the building of a “Silk Road Economic Belt”, calling for regional cooperation between the countries along the road “to forge closer economic ties, deepen cooperation and expand development space in the Eurasian region”,³² with the final goal of benefiting the citizens of all the involved states. The name used by President Xi was a clear reference to the ancient Silk Road, which was also mentioned during the speech; the Chinese leader pointed out that the history of the exchanges that took place for around 2000 years along the route proved that countries with different cultures and believes could cooperate, develop together and obtain win-win results, while keeping a peaceful environment, maintaining unity, emphasizing mutual trust, equality and mutual benefit.³³ The goals that Xi proposed reinforce this idea of the renewal of the Silk Road; as conceived by the Chinese President, the project would strengthen the cooperation among the countries involved in different fields. First of all, it would allow countries to communicate about development policies and formulate together plans for regional cooperation. Second, it would improve the road connectivity and cross-border transportation infrastructure through the Asian continent. Third, it would promote trade and investment cooperation between the countries involved. Furthermore, it would increase the circulation of local currencies and finally, it would increase the people-to-people exchanges.³⁴

One month after this speech, in October 2013, Xi Jinping referred to the Silk Road again, while attending the APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation) Economic Leaders Meeting. In this occasion, the Chinese leader underlined that, in ancient times, the Southeast Asia region had a central role in the “Maritime Silk Road”, and that, in the present, China was willing to reinforce the cooperation via sea with The Association of

³² Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Kingdom of Belgium (2013), “Promote Friendship Between Our People and Work Together to Build a Bright Future”, speech by Xi Jinping, URL: <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cebel/eng/zxxx/t1078088.htm> (accessed on May 28, 2022)

³³ Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Kingdom of Belgium (2013), “Promote Friendship Between Our People and Work Together to Build a Bright Future”, speech by Xi Jinping, URL: <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cebel/eng/zxxx/t1078088.htm> (accessed on May 28, 2022)

³⁴ Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Kingdom of Belgium (2013), “Promote Friendship Between Our People and Work Together to Build a Bright Future”, speech by Xi Jinping, URL: <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cebel/eng/zxxx/t1078088.htm> (accessed on May 28, 2022)

Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)³⁵ and to set up a maritime partnership with foreign countries in order to build together the 21st Century “Maritime Silk Road”.³⁶

The BRI can be considered a revival and expansion of the ancient Silk Road in modern times, but the new project is even more ambitious in three main ways. Firstly, it goes over the region of the old routes and extends in a wider area, with a higher number of more developed routes and infrastructures, generating an increase in trade volumes and a reduction in transportation time. Secondly, its goals are more extensive: it links infrastructures, promotes trade, coordinates policies made in different countries and people-to-people contacts. Thirdly, the ancient Silk Road allowed foreigners to travel to China to purchase products, while the modern road is a result of China’s opening-up and going-out policy; it would, therefore, create a huge Eurasian market, exceeding the concepts of trade and culture channels.³⁷

As President Xi explained, the project is formed by an economic “belt” across the Eurasian region and a maritime “silk road” through South-East and South Asia to the Middle East and it will involve more than 900 foreign-invested infrastructure projects, including ports, highways, railways, oil and gas pipelines, digital structures, and communication networks valued at about \$1.3 trillion in 2018.³⁸ In the years after its introduction, the scope of the project has expanded to different fields, such as culture and education. Along the Belt and Road, there are 65 countries from Central and West Asia, ASEAN, South Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, and North Africa, with a population of 4.4 billion people, and with a disposable income of about 21 trillion dollars, making up respectively of 63% (along the belt) and 29% (along the road) of global capacity.³⁹ These two routes represent an economic initiative, that seeks international cooperation and that is supposed to bring win-win results to all the parties involved.

³⁵ The ASEAN is a regional grouping made of ten member states in Southeast Asia, which aims to promote economic and security cooperation. For more details, see: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-asean>

³⁶ Wang Yiwei, “China’s ‘New Silk Road’: A Case Study in Eu-China Relations”, in Amighini Alessia, Berkofsky Axel (edited by), *Xi’s Policy Gambles: The Bumpy Road Ahead*, Novi Ligure, Edizioni Epoké – ISPI, 2015, pp. 93-109

³⁷ Wang Yiwei “China’s ‘New Silk Road’: A Case Study in Eu-China Relations”, in Amighini Alessia, Berkofsky Axel (edited by), *Xi’s Policy Gambles: The Bumpy Road Ahead*, Novi Ligure, Edizioni Epoké – ISPI, 2015, pp. 93-109

³⁸ Thussu Daya, “BRI: Bridging or breaking BRICS?”, *Global Media and China*, Vol. 3 No. 2, 2018, pp. 117-122, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2059436418792339> (accessed on May 29, 2022)

³⁹ Wang Yiwei, “China’s ‘New Silk Road’: A Case Study in Eu-China Relations”, in Amighini Alessia, Berkofsky Axel (edited by), *Xi’s Policy Gambles: The Bumpy Road Ahead*, Novi Ligure, Edizioni Epoké – ISPI, 2015, pp. 93-109

The Chinese government did not choose to name the project with the old name of the network of routes, Silk Road, because it had been used in the previous years to indicate two programmes that did not enjoy a big success: the name had been used by the Japanese government in the 1990s, which announced a “Silk Road Diplomacy” to improve its presence in Central Asia; furthermore, the name had been used by the United States in 2011 to introduce a project that was supposed to link Afghanistan to Central Asia. The Chinese project was conceived as different from these two previous ones because China was not implementing it to seek dominance in the region, but only cooperation. Therefore, the initiative was announced with the official Chinese name Yidaiyilu 一带一路, which was firstly translated into “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR); this translation soon became popular in the Western world, although it was not easily comprehensible for many Westerners. To make it easier to understand, from September 2015, the Chinese government changed the English translation to “The Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI)⁴⁰. This choice was determined by the many misinterpretations by Westerners, which focused on the presence of only one land route and one maritime route, while, instead, the project involves more routes.⁴¹ Furthermore, the word initiative was added to the name in order to underline that it was not a strategy, but a simple call for action, in the name of a public good and depending on international collaboration.⁴²

The initiative fitted Xi’s political interests and goals in two different manners. First of all, it has further legitimized the CCP because it has increased the country’s wealth and international power. Secondly, the BRI has strengthened President Xi’s ideological control because it has come to cover every aspect of the country’s economic and foreign policies.⁴³

The BRI represents an innovative approach to China’s opening-up to the eternal world; however, the project is not completely new, as its content and form were defined by

⁴⁰ Belt and Road Portal (2019), “*Qingwen ‘yidai yilu’ guanfang yingwen fanyi shi shenme ne?*” 请问‘一带一路’官方英文翻译是什么呢? (What is the official English translation of the Belt and Road Initiative?), URL: <https://www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/ldzd/dejgfld/wd/86480.htm> (accessed on May 31, 2022)

⁴¹ Li Yuan, “China’s ‘Belt and Road: A Logic Behind the Myth”, in Amighini Alessia (edited by), *China’s Belt and Road: a Game Changer*, Novi Ligure, Edizioni Epoké – ISPI, 2017, pp. 13-33

⁴² Zhao Hong, “China’s One Belt One Road: An Overview of the Debate”, Singapore, ISEAS Publishing, 2016

⁴³ Jones Lee, Zeng Jinghan, “Understanding China’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative’: beyond ‘grand strategy’ to a state transformation analysis”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 8, 2018, pp. 1415-1439, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1559046> (accessed on May 31, 2022)

economic interests that were established before Xi's emergence,⁴⁴ and several similar actions had been taken in recent years. One of them is represented by the Great Western Development (GWD) campaign, launched between 1999 and 2000, which in some way anticipated the implementation of the initiative. The GWD's origins lay in the requests made by the western provinces in the 1980s, which asked for concessions to help local economic development. The focus of the initiative were six provinces (Gansu, Guizhou, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Sichuan, and Yunnan), five autonomous regions (Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Tibet, and Xinjiang), and one municipality (Chongqing).⁴⁵ The project, which was launched by President Jiang Zemin, aimed at developing these areas by encouraging them to establish trade relationship, to invest and to set out transboundary infrastructures with foreign neighbouring states. However, the GWD was not highly successful: from 2000 to 2010, the western provinces' share of China's total GDP increase was only of 1.6%, moving from 17.1% to 18.7%. It is clear, though, that the BRI and the GWD present some elements in common: both were designed to develop links with foreign countries and the unfolding of both was determined by different actors at different levels and not by a top-down design.⁴⁶ Through the implementation of the BRI, the Western regions, which have relatively weaker economies, are expected to form a new opening frontier.⁴⁷

Furthermore, also the infrastructure's construction is not completely new: it had already been discussed by the United Nations and the Chinese government, which had talked about building a land bridge that had to link the Eurasian region.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Jones Lee, Zeng Jinghan, "Understanding China's 'Belt and Road Initiative': beyond 'grand strategy' to a state transformation analysis", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 8, 2018, pp. 1415-1439, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1559046> (accessed on May 31, 2022)

⁴⁵ Clarke Michael, "The Belt and Road Initiative: China's New Grand Strategy?", *Asia Policy*, Vol. 24, 2017, pp. 71-79, URL: [doi:10.1353/asp.2017.0023](https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2017.0023) (accessed on June 1, 2022)

⁴⁶ Jones Lee, Zeng Jinghan, "Understanding China's 'Belt and Road Initiative': beyond 'grand strategy' to a state transformation analysis", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 8, 2018, pp. 1415-1439, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1559046> (accessed on May 31, 2022)

⁴⁷ He Maochun, Zhang Jibing, "Xin sichou zhi lu jingji dai de guojia zhanlue fenxi - Zhongguo de lishi jiyu, qianzai tiaozhan yu yingdui celue" 新丝绸之路经济带的国家战略分析——中国的历史机遇、潜在挑战与应对策略 (Analysis of the Influence of the New Silk Road Economic Belt on National Strategy - China's Historical Opportunities, Potential, Challenges, and Solutions), *Frontiers*, Vol. 23, 2013, pp. 6-13, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDHIS2&filename=RMXS201323003&uniplatform=OVERSEAS_EN&v=Jnfl3k1GmSMPVNTZWsvJhGChIaI82pkLmNyS7OwRdvzWzGPH9ftHHQz38deAr9BZ (accessed on June 1, 2022)

⁴⁸ Lee Jones, Jinghan Zeng, "Understanding China's 'Belt and Road Initiative': beyond 'grand strategy' to a state transformation analysis", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 8, 2018, pp. 1415-1439, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1559046> (accessed on May 31, 2022)

Consequently, China started investing in near countries even before the launch of the BRI. According to the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, China signed several agreements with the countries along the routes on trade facilitation, currency swaps and investments, and also invested over \$13.7 billion in 2013 in the area.

The BRI is meant to put together these different initiatives in a unified framework. It represents one of China's highest priorities; hence, the Chinese government has invested financial, intellectual and political resources in the project. The concept of the BRI was formally established in November 2013 at the Third Plenum of the 18th CCP Congress and, since 2015, it has appeared a conspicuous amounts of times in State's Council's Reports. In February 2015, a Central Leading Small Group on "Advancing the Development of the OBOR" was established, indicating the central government's decision to control and coordinate the initiative at the highest levels.⁴⁹ Furthermore, all major communications about the initiative have been made by Xi himself, suggesting the importance attributed to it.⁵⁰

The BRI is an international, forward-looking, strategic plan with economic cooperation as the guide, political cooperation as channel of promotion, and with the important goal of encouraging cultural exchanges and resolving security risks along the route.⁵¹ In the initial stage, the BRI's aim was to connect countries in Central, South, and Southeast Asia with China. However, the initiative is not limited to neighbouring countries and the BRI partners have spread geographically over time. Already in 2015, the BRI began to expand over its initial corridors, with other seventeen countries joining the initiative and in 2017 it opened to Latin America. The BRI has become the nucleus of China's economic diplomacy and, in October 2017, the BRI was included in the constitution of the Chinese

⁴⁹ Rolland Nadège, "China's 'Belt and Road Initiative': Underwhelming or Game-Changer, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 1, 2017, pp. 127-142, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2017.1302743> (accessed on June 1, 2022)

⁵⁰ Rolland Nadège, "China's 'Belt and Road Initiative': Underwhelming or Game-Changer, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 1, 2017, pp. 127-142, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2017.1302743> (accessed on June 1, 2022)

⁵¹ He Maochun, Zhang Jibing, "Xin sichou zhi lu jingji dai de guojia zhanlue fenxi – Zhongguo de lishi jiyu, qianzai tiaozhan yu yingdui celue" 新丝绸之路经济带的国家战略分析——中国的历史机遇、潜在挑战与应对策略 (Analysis of the Influence of the New Silk Road Economic Belt on National Strategy – China's Historical Opportunities, Potential, Challenges, and Solutions), *Frontiers*, Vol. 23, 2013, pp. 6-13, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDHIS2&filename=RMXS201323003&uniplatform=OVERSEAS_EN&v=Jnfl3k1GmSMPVNTZWsvJhGChtaI82pkLmNyS7OwRdvzWzgPH9ftHHQz38deAr9BZ (accessed on June 1, 2022)

Communist Party, which led to an increase in the countries involved.⁵² Most of the area along the BRI is made of developing countries, with relatively underdeveloped economies, complicated political environments, and lack of stable legal systems.⁵³ Many of these developing countries have rapidly responded in a positive way to the initiative because, for them, it represents a quick access to modern infrastructures and facilities and the possibility to provide materials needed in the building of infrastructures. However, not all countries view the BRI in the same manner: some Western governments, such as the United States of America, and Southeast and South Asian countries have been more reticent about participating in the project and have been hesitant regarding China's intentions, due to the geo-political implications of the BRI, which is thought to bring a change in the power structure in the areas involved and, therefore, used by the Chinese government in order to improve its presence and influence in the countries involved.⁵⁴ In general, the countries that had reservations about the initiative tend to be more politically stable, democratic, more involved in the international arena, and economically developed than those that have taken part in it.⁵⁵ However, the number of the countries that take part in the project has over time kept on growing and as of March 2022, 147 countries have joined the BRI by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China, of which 43 are located in Sub-Saharan Africa, 35 in Europe and Central Asia, 25 in East Asia and Pacific, 20 in Latin America and Caribbean, 18 in Middle East and North Africa, and 6 in South East Asia⁵⁶, as shown in Figure 2.1.

⁵² Sacks David, "Countries in China's Belt and Road Initiative: Who's In and Who's Out", *Council on Foreign Relations* (2021), URL: <https://www.cfr.org/blog/countries-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-whos-and-whos-out> (accessed on June 1, 2022)

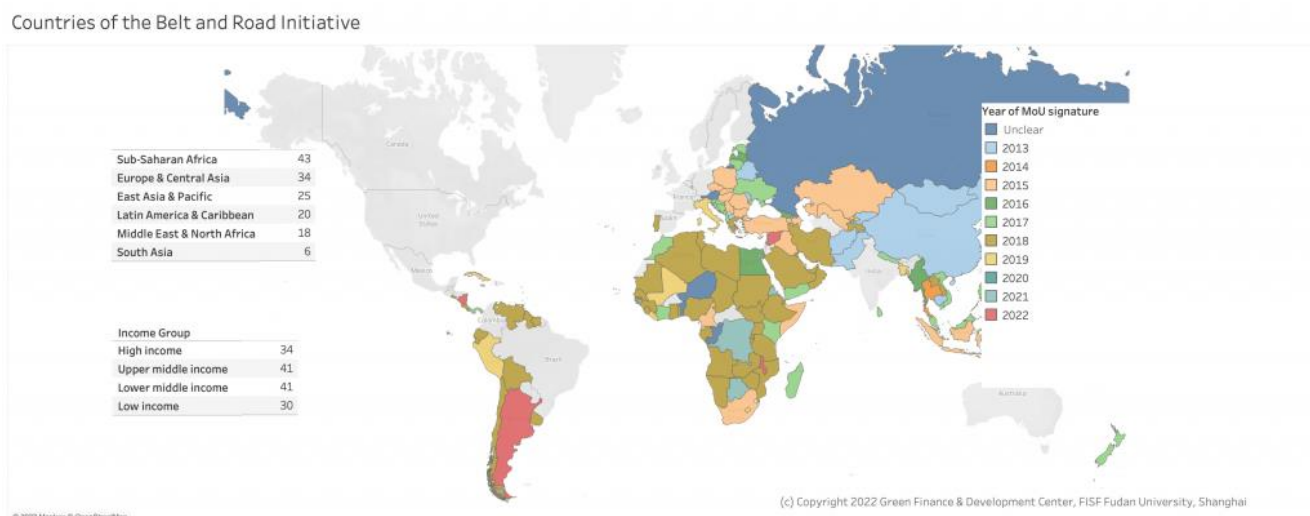
⁵³ Shang Tao, Zhao Yujin, " 'Yidai yilu' yanxian guojia ying shang huanjing dui Zhongguo duiwai zhijie touzi de yingxiang yanjiu " " 一带一路" 沿线国家营商环境对中国对外直接投资的影响研究 (A Research on Effects of Business Environment of Countries along "The Belt and Road Regions" on China's OFDI, *Journal of Shanxi Normal University (Social Science Edition)*, Vol. 01, 2021, pp. 54-61, URL: cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDAUTO&filename=HLJW202008006&v=MjU0NTZZb1I4ZVgxTHV4WVM3RGgxVDNxVHJXTTFGckNVUjdxZmJlWnJGATdoVmI3S0xTSEJlYkc0SE5ITXA0OUY= (accessed on June 1, 2022)

⁵⁴ Zhao Hong, "China's One Belt One Road: An Overview of the Debate", Singapore, ISEAS Publishing, 2016

⁵⁵ Thussu Daya, "BRI: Bridging or breaking BRICS?", *Global Media and China*, Vol. 3 No. 2, 2018, pp. 117-122, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2059436418792339> (accessed on May 29, 2022)

⁵⁶ Nedopil Christoph, "Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative", *Green Finance & Development Center, FISF Fudan University* (2022), URL: <https://greenfdc.org/countries-of-the-belt-and-road-initiative-bri/> (accessed on June 2, 2022)

FIGURE 2.1: COUNTRIES OF THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE, BY MARCH 2022



Source: Green Finance & Development Center, FISF Fudan University, Shanghai

Owing to its extent, the BRI has the potential of boosting the global GDP by nearly \$7.1 trillion by 2040 and of reducing global trade costs by approximately 2.2%.⁵⁷ BRI projects are not hosted in all the countries involved, but some of them committed to cooperate with China in the promotion of the initiative by signing nonbinding MoU. One of these countries is Italy, which pledged to collaborate with China in different fields, but the document that the two countries signed did not specify the projects in which the European country would be involved. In many cases, China pushes to get more countries involved in order to further attract the developing world and to give more credibility to the project, and not by the necessity to work on specific projects. In the future, China will probably continue to involve other countries in the initiative, focusing on Latin America and Western Europe, where some key states are still out of the BRI.⁵⁸ In the last years, China's trade with the countries involved in the BRI has grown faster than trade with non-participating countries. In 2019, the total trade of the country with BRI partners was \$1.34 trillion, 7.4% higher than China's total growth in trade. Furthermore, since many BRI

⁵⁷ Hillman Jennifer, Sacks David, "China's Belt and Road: Implications for the United States", *Council on Foreign Relations* (2021), URL: <https://www.cfr.org/report/chinas-belt-and-road-implications-for-the-united-states/findings#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20China's%20total%20trade,and%20building%20materials%20from%20China.> (accessed on June 3, 2022)

⁵⁸ Sacks David, "Countries in China's Belt and Road Initiative: Who's In and Who's Out", *Council on Foreign Relations* (2021), URL: <https://www.cfr.org/blog/countries-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-whos-and-whos-out> (accessed on June 1, 2022)

partners have imported construction materials from China, its exports have been greater than its imports.⁵⁹

Although the Chinese government underlines the openness of the BRI and many countries participate in the project, Chinese companies are still the most present. In BRI contracts, 89% of the contractors are Chinese companies, 7.6% are local companies, which are based in the country in which the project is located, and 3.4% are foreign companies. As a consequence of the BRI, China was able to form industrial champions, which adapt technologies imported from foreign firms to the Chinese market requests. Due to the huge size of this market, these companies are able to grow in size and to build sophisticated production process, needed for export markets, including markets of BRI countries.⁶⁰

2.2 Aims and objectives

Soon after President Xi Jinping proposed the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013 China started to collaborate with foreign countries, but the first official Chinese document regarding the initiative appeared only in March 2015, when the Chinese State Council authorized the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce of China to publish the Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (hereinafter referred to as Vision and Actions),⁶¹ an action plan that included the principles, the framework and the priorities of the project. However, due to the very nature of the BRI, its scope was not clearly defined, but it was written vaguely enough to accommodate different interests.⁶² The project involves the creation of economic areas that stretch from China to Europe, but it is described as dynamic and flexible, and its

⁵⁹ The Economic Times, “China’s trade with BRI countries surges to \$1.34 trillion in 2019” (2020), URL: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/business/chinas-trade-with-bri-countries-surges-to-1-34-trillion-in-2019/articleshow/73271222.cms> (accessed on June 3, 2022)

⁶⁰ Hillman Jennifer, Sacks David, “China’s Belt and Road: Implications for the United States”, *Council on Foreign Relations* (2021), URL: <https://www.cfr.org/report/chinas-belt-and-road-implications-for-the-united-states/findings#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20China's%20total%20trade,and%20building%20materials%20from%20China.> (accessed on June 3, 2022)

⁶¹ Liu Weidong, Dunford Michael, “Inclusive globalization: unpacking China's Belt and Road Initiative”, *Area Development and Policy* (2016), URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2016.1232598> (accessed on May 27, 2022)

⁶² Jones Lee, Zeng Jinghan, “Understanding China’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative’: beyond ‘grand strategy’ to a state transformation analysis”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 8, 2018, pp. 1415-1439, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1559046> (accessed on May 31, 2022)

boundaries are not openly stated.⁶³ In the footsteps of the ancient Silk Road, China wishes to utilize the new routes in order to increase the economic and social development of the countries involved, while strengthening trade and economic cooperation with them.

The document states that “The Belt and Road Initiative aims to promote the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas, establish and strengthen partnership among the countries along the Belt and Road, set up all-dimensional, multitiered and composite connectivity networks, and realize diversified, independent, balanced and sustainable development in these countries”.⁶⁴ Therefore, the initiative is described by the Chinese government as a project that will enhance investments and consumption, it will encourage people-to-people and cultural exchanges, it will build or modernize the infrastructures between Asia, Africa, and Europe, and it will promote the economic development of the involved countries, while maintaining harmony and peace. Furthermore, the initiative will accelerate the pace of scientific and technological exchanges. The BRI is based on the principles of joint discussion and construction, tolerance and openness to foreign countries. For this reason, the project undertaken must fit the local conditions of the foreign states.

In the Vision and Actions, the Chinese government stated that the BRI acts in accordance with the principles and purpose of the UN Charter, the founding document of the United Nations, and it supports the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence: “mutual respect for each other’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual nonaggression, mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence”.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the document states that the initiative is open and inclusive, as it extends cooperation to countries that are not along the ancient Silk Road; it follows market rules and international norms, and it looks for mutual benefit and win-win results. The development projects and the measures for cooperation should be jointly formulated.

⁶³ Chaisse Julien, Matsushita Mitsuo, “China’s ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative: Mapping the World’s Normative and Strategic Implications”, *Journal of World Trade*, Vol. 51 No.1 , 2018, pp. 163-185, URL: 10.54648/TRAD2018008 (accessed on June 3, 2022)

⁶⁴ The State Council (2015), Full text: Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, URL: http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm#:~:text=The%20Belt%20and%20Road%20Initiative%20is%20a%20way%20for%20win,and%20strengthening%20all%20around%20exchanges (accessed on June 4, 2022)

⁶⁵ The State Council (2015), Full text: Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, URL: http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm#:~:text=The%20Belt%20and%20Road%20Initiative%20is%20a%20way%20for%20win,and%20strengthening%20all%20around%20exchanges (accessed on June 4, 2022)

According to the Vision and Actions, the BRI has five major cooperation priorities, which recall the first speech Xi Jinping made about the project:

1. Policy coordination: the promotion and expansion of intergovernmental cooperation, intergovernmental and multi-level macro policy exchange, and the expansion of shared interests and mutual political trust to increase the cooperation consensus among countries interested in the initiative.
2. Facilities connectivity: the improvement of infrastructures' connectivity in Asia, Europe, and Africa and the facilitation of transportation channels and logistics by removing technical and institutional constrictions.
3. Unimpeded trade: the elimination of trade barriers, the improvement of trade structures, through the use of clear regulations, and the introduction of innovations in trade technologies.
4. Financial integration: cooperation in monetary policies to ensure the efficiency and the solidity of financial systems and offer remarkable financial services.
5. People-to-people bond: academic, cultural and scientific exchanges, tourism promotion, students' exchanges, and media collaboration to increase the support for the initiative.⁶⁶

The Vision and Actions delineates the routes that are included in the project and, at the same time, underlines the necessity of improving the maritime logistics, the aviation infrastructures, and the connectivity of energy infrastructures. Furthermore, the Chinese government aims at improving and expanding the investments in agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry, farming, tourism, and renewable energy sources; hence, foreign companies are encouraged to invest in China and, simultaneously, Chinese companies should participate in the infrastructure's development abroad.

2.3 Drivers of the Initiative

Given the Chinese economy's development in the last years, the country is now looking for an active role in the global environment; the BRI can be considered partly as a consequence of China's unfolding as a major economic power, an impulse for global

⁶⁶ The State Council (2015), Full text: Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, URL: http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm#:~:text=The%20Belt%20and%20Road%20Initiative%20is%20a%20way%20for%20win,and%20strengthening%20all%20around%20exchanges (accessed on June 4, 2022)

economic growth and a driver of regional economic integration.⁶⁷ China faces several economic and non-economy related challenges that the Chinese government believe can be solved by the initiation of the BRI. One of these was the unbalanced economic growth that took place in China since the beginning of the implementation of the economic reforms in the Deng Xiaoping's era. The inequality levels in income were particularly evident from the regional differences between the prosperous coastal provinces and the poorer Western provinces.⁶⁸ The BRI, therefore, like its processor, the GWD, aims at evening the unbalances between China's interior provinces and western provinces, boosting the latter's economic development to reduce the regional inequalities by linking these less-developed regions with neighbouring countries. Aside from developing the western regions, the BRI should also boost the provinces in the north-east and south-west of China, which are economically underperforming and poorer⁶⁹, though the "use of the advantages of inland regions, including a vast landmass, rich human resources and a strong industrial foundation".⁷⁰

The major reason that pushed the leadership to embark on the initiative came from the slowdown in economic growth after the global financial crisis that took place between 2007 and 2008. The stimulus package of \$586 billion dollars that was implemented to finance infrastructure projects had been spent by the early 2010s; at the same time, due to a saturation in the local market and a slowdown in the Chinese economy, many industries, especially state-owned sectors such as rail, steel, real estate construction, aluminium, and shipbuilding,⁷¹ faced an overcapacity crisis in production, while Chinese banks suffered over-accumulation problems. Dealing with this massive excess capacity and low domestic demand has become one of the economic priorities of the government.

⁶⁷ Liu Weidong, Dunford Michael, "Inclusive globalization: unpacking China's Belt and Road Initiative", *Area Development and Policy* (2016), URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2016.1232598> (accessed on May 27, 2022)

⁶⁸ Li Jiatao, Van Assche Ari, Fu Xiaolan, Li Lee, Qian Gongming, "The Belt and Road Initiative and international business policy: a kaleidoscopic perspective", *Journal of International Business Policy* (2022), URL: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s42214-022-00136-x> (accessed on June 3, 2022)

⁶⁹ Cai Peter, "Understanding China's Belt and Road Initiative", *Lowy Institute* (2017), URL: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/understanding-belt-and-road-initiative> (accessed on June 3, 2022)

⁷⁰ The State Council (2015), Full text: Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, URL: http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm#:~:text=The%20Belt%20and%20Road%20Initiative%20is%20a%20way%20for%20win,and%20strengthening%20all%20around%20exchanges (accessed on June 4, 2022)

⁷¹ Li Jiatao, Van Assche Ari, Fu Xiaolan, Li Lee, Qian Gongming, "The Belt and Road Initiative and international business policy: a kaleidoscopic perspective", *Journal of International Business Policy* (2022), URL: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s42214-022-00136-x> (accessed on June 3, 2022)

Internationalizing these state-owned enterprises was supposed to bring a solution to this problem of under-utilization of capacity and to triggering economic growth. In the course of its modern history, China has mainly focused its attention on developed countries, attracting and collecting funds, while also obtaining technologies and know-how from these countries. Therefore, Chinese exports were mainly directed towards these countries; however, due to the decline in demand during the global economic crisis that started in 2007, China began to diversify its trading partners and the focus shifted to developing, neighbouring countries, which, according to Xi, have “extremely significant strategic value”.⁷² The BRI is expected to take an additional step in creating new markets for Chinese exports, consequently offering an outlet for the production in excess, and giving the Chinese enterprises the possibility of exporting materials more easily and at a lower cost along the new routes.⁷³ Hence, it represented an opportunity to internationalize the domestic surplus⁷⁴, and to promote the internationalization of the local currency, the RMB. In recent years, the Chinese development has entered a new phase and the country has emerged as a major outward investor, with an annual OFDI (Outward foreign direct investment) of 23.7% from 2006 to 2014.⁷⁵ This new phase of the economic growth of the country represents an impulse for China’s new international economic cooperation strategies. The growth in OFDI and the improvements in the economic development are seen as a mean to maintain stability, both at home and in the foreign countries along the route, fighting separatism, terrorism, and extremism, while strengthening the authoritarian governments that rule over the close states, which are considered friendlier than democratic government.⁷⁶ Maintaining security and peace in the area through the use of economic resources is considered a key objective of the so-called peripheral diplomacy, introduced by Xi Jinping in 2013, which indicates China’s approach towards foreign

⁷² Cai Peter, “Understanding China’s Belt and Road Initiative”, *Lowy Institute* (2017), URL: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/understanding-belt-and-road-initiative> (accessed on June 3, 2022)

⁷³ Shobhit Seth, “One Belt One Road (OBOR)”, URL: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/o/one-belt-one-road-obor.asp> (accessed on June 5, 2022)

⁷⁴ Jones Lee, Zeng Jinghan, “Understanding China’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative’: beyond ‘grand strategy’ to a state transformation analysis”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 8, 2018, pp. 1415-1439, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1559046> (accessed on May 31, 2022)

⁷⁵ Liu Weidong, Dunford Michael, “Inclusive globalization: unpacking China’s Belt and Road Initiative”, *Area Development and Policy* (2016), URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2016.1232598> (accessed on May 27, 2022)

⁷⁶ Rolland Nadège, “China’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative’: Underwhelming or Game-Changer”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 1, 2017, pp. 127-142, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2017.1302743> (accessed on June 1, 2022)

affairs in the surrounding regions.⁷⁷ Therefore, the integration with the global economy through direct investments abroad can further advance with the implementation of the BRI, which should also allow the country to become a regional leader.

The implementation of the initiative could not only increase and strengthen the economic and trade cooperation between China and other countries, but also create an opportunity for further developing the local economy and trade. The project is estimated to reduce transportation costs by 2.8% and shipment times by more than 3.2%.⁷⁸ As a consequence of the reduction of shipping costs, the implementation of the initiative could help China, which is the world's leading trading nation, to further increase its trade competitiveness and also the demand for Chinese goods in foreign countries, therefore, increasing its economic growth.⁷⁹ In the new phase of its economic history, China is trying to update its manufacturing industry, making it more innovative and quality driven. For this, the BRI represents an opportunity for Chinese enterprises to facilitate the export of higher-end manufactured products, to increase the volume of their exports and to accelerate the pace of going abroad to invest in foreign countries.

Apart from economic reasons, the Chinese government decided to institute the BRI for some geopolitical reasons. The country saw the BRI as an important opportunity to arise as a regional leader and to increase its international political influence on external countries; by helping other countries in their development process, the initiative will elevate China's regional consensus and its international position as a global power. Due to the dimensions of its population and the size of its economic growth, China's consumption and production of energy have quickly increased, and the country has become the world's biggest importer of oil and natural gas. In particular, China aims at obtaining energy supplies by strengthening its role in the international environment, especially with closer countries⁸⁰; for this reason, the project involves several energy-

⁷⁷ Cai Peter, "Understanding China's Belt and Road Initiative", *Lowy Institute* (2017), URL: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/understanding-belt-and-road-initiative> (accessed on June 3, 2022)

⁷⁸ Li Jiatao, Van Assche Ari, Fu Xiaolan, Li Lee, Qian Gongming, "The Belt and Road Initiative and international business policy: a kaleidoscopic perspective", *Journal of International Business Policy* (2022), URL: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s42214-022-00136-x> (accessed on June 3, 2022)

⁷⁹ Li Jiatao, Van Assche Ari, Fu Xiaolan, Li Lee, Qian Gongming, "The Belt and Road Initiative and international business policy: a kaleidoscopic perspective", *Journal of International Business Policy* (2022), URL: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s42214-022-00136-x> (accessed on June 3, 2022)

⁸⁰ Li Jiatao, Van Assche Ari, Fu Xiaolan, Li Lee, Qian Gongming, "The Belt and Road Initiative and international business policy: a kaleidoscopic perspective", *Journal of International Business Policy* (2022), URL: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s42214-022-00136-x> (accessed on June 3, 2022)

related infrastructures and investments.⁸¹ Chinese national oil and gas companies are trying to vary the sources of supplies and import routes in order to secure energy reserves and acquire technical know-how, thus, making investments and partnerships in foreign oil and gas projects.⁸² Therefore, one of the reasons for the implementation of the project was for China the possibility of securing the country an access to natural resources, easing some of the country's vulnerability due to the reliance on external countries. Chinese companies have set up pipeline connection with Russia and Kazakhstan, while assets were acquired in the oil sector in the Middle East, North and Latin America, Africa, Australia, and Asia; furthermore, the country will increase the imports of pipeline gas and liquefied natural gas from neighbouring countries in Central Asia and Russia, linking them with the domestic pipeline system.⁸³

2.4 Structure and spatial configuration

As stated in the Vision and Actions, the BRI aims at connecting Asia, Europe and Africa, encompassing countries with great potential for economic development. In the years following the proposal of the initiative, the number of countries that have decided to take part in the project has kept on growing and, at the same time, new goals and objectives have been added to the project. In order to connect the countries involved and create trade and exchanges facilitation, the initiative is characterized by two different routes, one on land and one on sea, as show in the following Figure 2.2, named respectively “Silk Road Economic Belt” and “21st Century Maritime Silk Road” by President Xi in his speeches. In the map, the orange line denotes the overland route of the BRI, which goes across Asia and reaches Europe, while the blue line represents the maritime route of the initiative, which spreads in China, India, Indonesia, then it touches parts of the African costs and eventually arrives in Europe.

⁸¹ Clarke Michael, “The Belt and Road Initiative: China’s New Grand Strategy?”, *Asia Policy*, Vol. 24, 2017, pp. 71-79, URL: doi:10.1353/asp.2017.0023 (accessed on June 1, 2022)

⁸² Liu Weidong, Dunford Michael, “Inclusive globalization: unpacking China's Belt and Road Initiative”, *Area Development and Policy* (2016), URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2016.1232598> (accessed on May 27, 2022)

⁸³ Liu Weidong, Dunford Michael, “Inclusive globalization: unpacking China's Belt and Road Initiative”, *Area Development and Policy* (2016), URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2016.1232598> (accessed on May 27, 2022)

FIGURE 2.2: THE MAP OF THE “ONE BELT ONE ROAD”



Source: Wang Yiwei, “China’s ‘New Silk Road’: A Case Study in Eu-China Relations”, in Amighini, Berkofsky (edited by), *Xi’s Policy Gambles: The Bumpy Road Ahead*

2.4.1 The Silk Road Economic Belt

The trans-continental overland route that the Chinese government proposed resembles the ancient Silk Road trade roads. This route covers an area of 11,000 kilometres across the Eurasian continent and, together with a network of telecommunication links, fibre optic cables, and pipelines was considered by the Chinese authorities as the first step in building an economic corridor to link the foreign countries to China.⁸⁴ The areas between the two extremities, China and Europe, are linked by railroads, highways, air routes and other modes of transport. The “belt” is subdivided in two major routes, the North Line, and the Middle Line. The first one begins in Beijing, then it goes through Russia, Germany and eventually reaches the Scandinavia countries, while the second one begins

⁸⁴ Rolland Nadège, “China’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative’: Underwhelming or Game-Changer, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 1, 2017, pp. 127-142, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2017.1302743> (accessed on June 1, 2022)

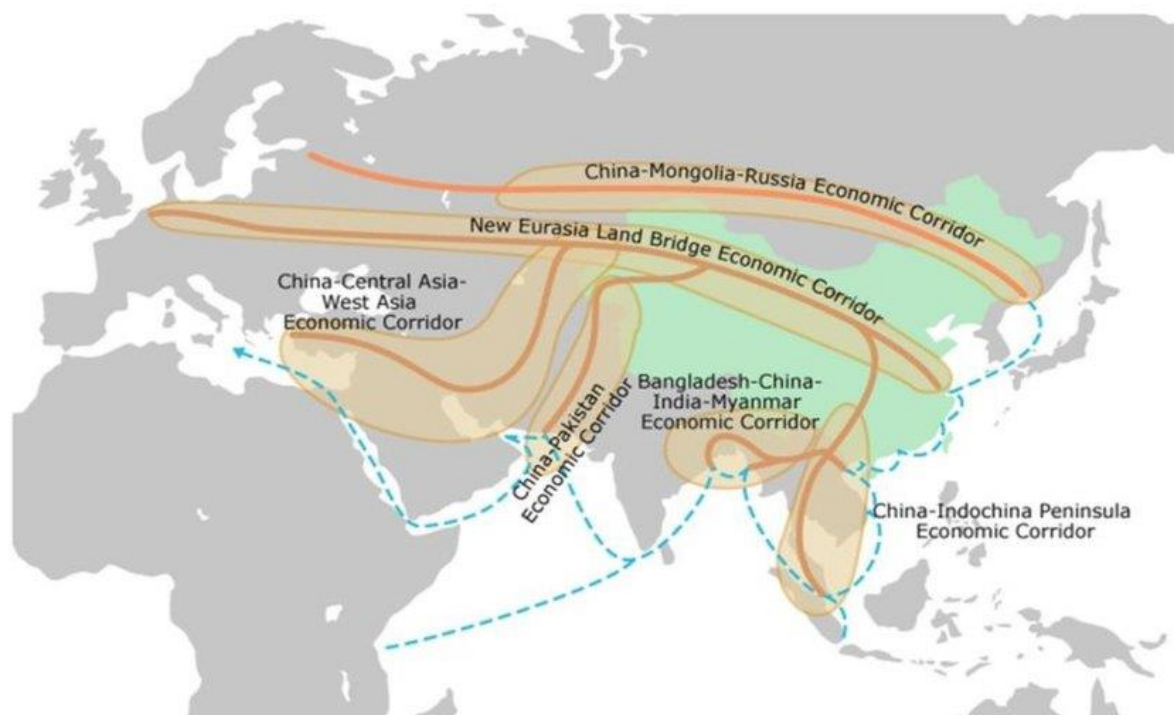
in Beijing, goes to Xinjiang, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Hungary and reaches several European capitals, such as Paris, London, Hamburg, or Lisbon.⁸⁵

Furthermore, the overland route compasses six bigger international economic cooperation corridors, which increase China's connectivity with local existing economic communities, and other smaller ramifications.

The six corridors, shown in the following Figure 2.3, are:

1. The China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor (CMREC)
2. The New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor (NELB)
3. The China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor (CCWAEC)
4. The China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor (CICPEC)
5. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)
6. The Bangladesh-China-India Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIMEC)

FIGURE 2.3: THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE: SIX ECONOMIC CORRIDORS SPANNING ASIA, EUROPE, AND AFRICA



Source: World Economic Forum (2017)

⁸⁵ Chaisse Julien, Matsushita Mitsuo, "China's 'Belt and Road' Initiative: Mapping the World's Normative and Strategic Implications", *Journal of World Trade*, Vol. 51 No.1 , 2018, pp. 163-185, URL: 10.54648/TRAD2018008 (accessed on June 3, 2022)

The creation of the CMREC, the corridor that would link China, Russia, and Mongolia was firstly proposed by Xi Jinping during a meeting in Tajikistan with the Russian President Putin and the Mongolian President Elbegdorj in September 2014. Two years later, in 2016, a development plan was signed between these three countries with the aim of developing part of the BRI. This corridor is made of two main routes: one expands from the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region to Hohhot, in Inner Mongolia, reaching Mongolia and Russia, while the other one begins in Dalian, goes through Shenyang, Changchun, Harbin, and Manzhouli and reaches Chita, in Russia. It is mainly made of railways, highways, and border ports.⁸⁶ The corridor's goal is taking advantage of the strengths of the involved countries in order to obtain win-win results, promote regional economic integration, and increase the countries' international competitiveness. Infrastructures and connectivity, port construction, border inspection, investment and trade, cultural and informal exchanges, environmental protection are some of the principal areas of collaboration in this corridor.

The NELB, a railway route of 10,800 kilometres, links the Pacific and the Atlantic, going from Lianyungang, in Jiangsu province, and Rizhao, in Shandong province, both located on the eastern coasts of China, to Rotterdam in Holland and Antwerp in Belgium. The corridor, which goes through Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Poland and Germany, serves more than 30 countries and regions. Firstly opened in the early 1990s, it is now facilitating trade and exchanges under the BRI.

The CCWAEC covers an area that was part of the ancient Silk Road and links China to the Arabian Peninsula. It begins in Xinjiang and goes through Central and West Asia, areas rich in resources, but with underdeveloped infrastructures; the creation of the corridor, therefore, will help this region in building new structures and develop its economy.

The CICPEC passes through Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar and Malaysia, and links China to the Indochina Peninsula. A web of highways and railways allows the flow of products, capital and people-to-people exchanges.

The CPEC links an area of 3,000 kilometres, beginning in Kashi, in China, and ending in Gwadar, in Pakistan, thus, connecting the overland route of the BRI to the maritime route of the initiative. The corridor, which saw an investment of \$45 billion, should be

⁸⁶ Belt and Road Portal (2019), "An Overview of Six Economic Corridors and Six Connectivity Networks", URL: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/88408.htm> (accessed on June 6, 2022)

concluded by 2030 and will include highways, railways, optical cables and pipelines. The main goals of the CPEC include cooperation in transportation and energy sectors.

The BCIMEC was firstly proposed by Premier Li Keqiang in 2013, in order to connect China and India and later the corridor was welcomed by Bangladesh and Myanmar. Some of the sectors involved in the cooperation include energy, investment and financing, trade facilitation and cultural exchanges. Apart from the four countries involved, it should bring benefits also to South, East and Southeast Asia.⁸⁷

2.4.2 The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road

The “21st Century Maritime Silk Road” is made of maritime commercial routes that are part of the BRI. On sea, the BRI connects the Chinese coastal regions to Europe, passing through the Southeast and South of Asia, the South Pacific, the Middle East and Eastern Africa. The maritime initiative recalls the ancient maritime Silk Road that began in Fuzhou, in the Fujian province, then reached the Southeast Asia, passing through the South China Sea, and Europe, passing through the Malacca Strait, the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean.⁸⁸ The maritime routes are able to exploit the presence in China of seven of the world’s biggest ports (namely Shanghai, Ningbo-Zhoushan, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Qingdao, Hong Kong Special Administrative Zone, and Tianjin), which has helped the country in becoming an important exporter of port management services.⁸⁹

The modern road, which can expand the Chinese strategic maritime space beyond its water, can be divided in two maritime routes:

1. One of them begins, like the ancient route, in the Fujian province and points East, passing through the Chinese provinces of Guangdong, Guangxi, and Hainan, moving towards the Strait of Malacca and then going through Kolkata, in India, and Colombo, in Sri Lanka, and then Nairobi, located in Kenya. From there, the

⁸⁷ The State Council Information of the People’s Republic of China (2020), “What are six economic corridors under Belt and Road Initiative?”, URL: http://english.scio.gov.cn/beltandroad/2020-08/04/content_76345602.htm (accessed on June 7, 2022)

⁸⁸ Blanchard Jean-Marc F., Flint Colin, “The Geopolitics of China’s Maritime Silk Road Initiative”, *Geopolitics*, Vol. 22 No. 2, 2017, pp. 223-245, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2017.1291503> (accessed on June 7, 2022)

⁸⁹ Puga Gómez Jimena, “A new Silk Road for the 21st Century”, URL: <https://www.unav.edu/web/global-affairs/detalle/-/blogs/a-new-silk-road-for-the-21st-century#> (accessed on June 8, 2022)

road will move North, towards the Mediterranean sea, stopping in Athens, Greece, and eventually reaching Venice, in Italy.

2. The other route moves from China over the South Sea of China and extends towards the islands located in the to the South Pacific.⁹⁰

As the overland route, the maritime one aims at increasing the international cooperation, promote trade and exchanges of different types through the connection of the involved harbours. However, the focus of the maritime initiative has recently been characterized by a major cooperation on common maritime security, particularly important due to the risks and uncertainties present in the area. At the same time, it serves some of China's main interests, which include food and energy security, diversifying the sea lines of communication, and the development of the "blue economy", which denotes the preservation of the marine environment.⁹¹

China is deeply involved in the construction of the maritime routes and has vigorously looked for connections with the participating countries, through presidential visits in the involved states, diplomatic and political interactions. In order to allow easier and more efficient linkages, the Maritime Silk Road has stimulated the construction of ports and infrastructures in both China and in all the countries involved. Regarding the construction of hard infrastructure, the maritime route is linked to different projects regarding the energy or transportation sectors in some participant countries, such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, or the Maldives. For example, in the last country mentioned, a memorandum of understanding was signed to build the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge, now called Sinamalé Bridge, which connects the country's international airport and its capital.⁹²

2.4.3 The Polar Silk Road

Climate change and global warming are having a huge negative impact on the Earth's ecosystem, but China has been able to take advantage of these changes for economic reasons. In the last decades, due to global warming and the melting of polar ice caps, the Arctic has become viable and, therefore, it is possible for the area to open to navigation.

⁹⁰ Puga Gómez Jimena, "A new Silk Road for the 21st Century", URL: <https://www.unav.edu/web/global-affairs/detalle/-/blogs/a-new-silk-road-for-the-21st-century#> (accessed on June 8, 2022)

⁹¹ Su Fei, Saalman Lora, Ghiasy Richard, "The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road: Security Implications and Ways Forward for the European Union", SIPRI, 2018

⁹² Blanchard Jean-Marc F., Flint Colin, "The Geopolitics of China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative", *Geopolitics*, Vol. 22 No. 2, 2017, pp. 223-245, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2017.1291503> (accessed on June 7, 2022)

By exploiting these new conditions, a new route was added to the original Chinese strategy. In January 2018, the State Council Information Office of the PRC released a white paper titled “China’s Arctic Policy”, which emphasized the Arctic as one of the country’s main priorities. The document stated that China, defined as a “Near-Arctic State”, was working on jointly building a “Polar Silk Road” with Arctic coastal countries to facilitate connectivity and the economic and social development of the region.⁹³

The Arctic shipping routes, as shown in the following Figure 2.4, are designed to connect East Asia, Western Europe, and North America through the Arctic Circle.

FIGURE 2.4: THE POLAR SILK ROAD



Source: Asia Briefing Ltd.

⁹³ The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China (2018), Full text: China’s Arctic Policy, URL: <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/32832/Document/1618243/1618243.htm> (accessed on June 8, 2022)

The Polar Silk Road represents a faster commercial maritime route, offering China a drastic reduction in the amount of time necessary to reach the North Europe. Compared to the time required for maritime transportation through the traditional route, which would go across the Indian Ocean, the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean Sea, the Polar Silk Road would bring a reduction of around twenty days.⁹⁴

In order to build the Polar Silk Road, the Chinese government encourages its enterprises to take part in the construction of infrastructure in the Arctic routes, but, at the same time, given the fragile environment in the Arctic, the Chinese companies are also encouraged to protect and to rationally use the resources present in the area. The development of this route reflects China's concerns regarding the "Malacca Dilemma", a term coined by the former President of the PRC Hu Jintao. The Malacca Dilemma represents the country's fear that an eventual conflict or political accident in the Middle East could block the oil imports in the country.⁹⁵ Therefore, even before the official announcement of the development of the Polar Silk Road, China had been active in the region: it was a Chinese shipping company, called COSCO, which in 2013 sailed a multipurpose ship through the Northern Sea for the first time ever.⁹⁶ In the white book, the Chinese government states that the activities involved in the new route should sustainably develop, in order to protect the Arctic's eco-environment and to respect the local people's concerns. Furthermore, the document asserts China's aim of operating in the region, through the exploration and exploitation of natural resources, such as oil gas, minerals and other non-fossil energies, of living resources, such as fisheries, and also of the tourism industry, while respecting the sovereign rights of the Arctic States on these resources.⁹⁷

The Polar Silk Road represents an opportunity for China and Russia to collaborate on important projects, such as liquified natural gas projects. Chinese banks have already lent

⁹⁴ Karimpour Reza, "China's Silk Road, a threat or an opportunity", URL: <https://www.docksthefuture.eu/chinas-polar-silk-road-a-threat-or-an-opportunity/> (accessed on June 9, 2022)

⁹⁵ Santoro Federica, "La Polar Silk Road: un riflesso dell'ambizione di Pechino nella conquista della leadership globale", *Centro Studi Internazionali* (2020), URL: <https://www.cesi-italia.org/it/articoli/la-polar-silk-road-un-riflesso-dellambizione-di-pechino-nella-conquista-della-leadership-globale> (accessed on June 9, 2022)

⁹⁶ Silk Road Briefing (2021), "New Polar Silk Roads Discussed at the Arctic Circle Assembly", URL: <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2021/10/19/new-polar-silk-roads-discussed-at-the-arctic-circle-assembly/> (accessed on June 10, 2022)

⁹⁷ The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (2018), Full text: China's Arctic Policy, URL: <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/32832/Document/1618243/1618243.htm> (accessed on June 8, 2022)

\$12 billion to the Yamal liquefied natural gas project, located in Russia's Yamal Peninsula, in the middle of the Northern Sea Route, in exchange of four million tonnes of gas per year. Furthermore, Russia's shipments of gas to Asia will further increase after China Communications Construction Company gained, in August 2021, the possibility of building a liquefied natural gas terminal in the Kamchatka Peninsula, in Russia.⁹⁸

In order to understand the BRI, the overland Silk Road Economic Belt, the sea-crossing 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and the Polar Silk Road in the Arctic have to be considered as a unique project, with the different routes as complementary to each other.

2.5 Sources of financing

The development of the Belt and Road Initiative requires a large amount of funds, estimated between US\$4 and US\$8 trillion. The largest beneficiaries of the BRI investments are represented by Africa and the Middle East, followed by East and West Asia, which have acquired more importance in recent years⁹⁹. The financial needs of the project are secured by several sources of financing, namely international financial institutions, state funds, state-owned bank, and state-owned policy banks. The latter two account for the majority of funding in the BRI, providing 81% of total funds.¹⁰⁰

The most important international financial institution involved in the BRI is the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), a multilateral development bank founded in 2016, with a seed capital of \$100 billion, by fifty-seven members, thirty-seven of which were regional members and the remaining twenty were non-regional members. The number of AIIB members has raised to 104 members, but the majority of the bank's shares (30.77%) are owned by the PRC, thus, giving the country a right of veto over the decisions taken. Other important regional shareholders include India, Russia, South Korea and non-regional shareholders include Germany, France, United Kingdom, and Italy. The bank's aim is to improve the Asian socio-economic performance, by investing in five main areas:

⁹⁸ Karimpour Reza, "China's Silk Road, a threat or an opportunity", URL: <https://www.docksthefuture.eu/chinas-polar-silk-road-a-threat-or-an-opportunity/> (accessed on June 9, 2022)

⁹⁹ García-Herrero Alicia, "China's Financing of the Belt and Road Initiative During the Pandemic", *ISPI* (2021), URL: <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione/chinas-financing-belt-and-road-initiative-during-pandemic-29948#:~:text=First%2C%20China%20has%20continued%20to,the%20fastest%20pace%20since%202016> (accessed on June 9, 2022)

¹⁰⁰ He Alex, "The Belt and Road Initiative: Motivations, Financing, Expansion and Challenges of Xi's Ever-expanding Strategy", *CIGI Paper*, No.225, 2019, URL: <https://www.cigionline.org/publications/belt-and-road-initiative-motivations-financing-expansion-and-challenges-xis-ever/> (accessed on June 10, 2022)

transport, logistics, energy, rural and urban development.¹⁰¹ Another important international institution is the New Development Bank (NBD), established in 2015 with an initial capital of \$50 billion, by the BRICS developing countries, Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, which have the same share capital and, therefore, the same voting power. The bank aims at providing financial aids to developing countries in the creation and development of infrastructures and in sustainable development projects. Until the end of 2021, it has planned to finance 74 projects for a total value of about \$30 billion in the BRICS countries; most of the projects financed are in the transport sector, followed by energy and sustainable development.¹⁰² Even though the AIIB and the NBD were not established to provide financial aids exclusively to the countries and regions in the BRI, most of the loans the two banks provide are destined for projects involved in the initiative, in particular in the infrastructure development sector.¹⁰³

The policy banks' goal is to support the development of large projects, agricultural and rural development, and cross-border investments, through the issuing of bonds. The Chinese government's policy banks include the Chinese Development Bank (CDB), the Chinese Export-Import Bank (EXIM Bank) and the Chinese Agricultural Development Bank (ADBC).¹⁰⁴

Regarding state-owned banks, the most important ones are the China Industrial and Commercial Bank (ICBC), Bank of China (BOC), China Construction Bank (CCB), and the Agricultural Bank of China (ABC), which also finance some activities and projects in the BRI. For example, the BOC provided loans for the BRI for a total of \$ 100 billion by the end of 2017, while the ICBC financially supports 212 projects for a total of \$ 100 billion.¹⁰⁵

Another important source of financing is the Silk Road Fund, a state fund established in 2015 with an initial capital of \$ 40 billion. The fund was created by four Chinese

¹⁰¹ Klecha-Tylec Karolina, "One Belt, One Road from the Perspective of Funding Sources", *European Research Studies Journal*, Vol. 24 Issue B, 2021, pp. 621-633

¹⁰² Klecha-Tylec Karolina, "One Belt, One Road from the Perspective of Funding Sources", *European Research Studies Journal*, Vol. 24 Issue B, 2021, pp. 621-633

¹⁰³ He Alex, "The Belt and Road Initiative: Motivations, Financing, Expansion and Challenges of Xi's Ever-expanding Strategy", *CIGI Paper*, No.225, 2019, URL: <https://www.cigionline.org/publications/belt-and-road-initiative-motivations-financing-expansion-and-challenges-xis-ever/> (accessed on June 10, 2022)

¹⁰⁴ Klecha-Tylec Karolina, "One Belt, One Road from the Perspective of Funding Sources", *European Research Studies Journal*, Vol. 24 Issue B, 2021, pp. 621-633

¹⁰⁵ Klecha-Tylec Karolina, "One Belt, One Road from the Perspective of Funding Sources", *European Research Studies Journal*, Vol. 24 Issue B, 2021, pp. 621-633

institutions, namely the State Administration of Foreign Exchange, which owns 65% of the total shares, the state-owned property fund of the Chinese Investment Corporation and the Chinese Export-Import Bank, which have 15% of total share each, and the Chinese Development Bank, with the remaining 5% of shares. This fund's aims are to financially aid the private sector, and to finance the sectors of infrastructure construction, natural resources extraction, financial cooperation and industry under the BRI. Being a public investor in relation to private entities, the Silk Road Fund is expected to enable the creation of public-private partnerships.¹⁰⁶ The fund accounts for 2% of the total BRI funding and, by the end of 2018, it had financed thirty projects, for a total of \$ 11 billion.¹⁰⁷

Through these financing sources, China represents an important creditor for the countries involved in the initiative. Only a year after the launch of the BRI, China provided \$49 billion to 52 countries, which represented around 16% of total official external debt, and 47% of which owned to official bilateral creditor. This debt then increased up to \$102 billion by 2019, 21% of the total official debt and 62% of which was owned to official bilateral creditors.¹⁰⁸ However, this reliance on Chinese loans has raised doubts in many foreign countries about the debt sustainability in developing countries, and whether the projects involved in the BRI will help them in paying back the debts. Chinese loans typically have an interest rate of around 4%, which is close to commercial market rates and higher than the rates of interest of western governments. Furthermore, the repayment period required for Chinese loans are of less than 10 years, shorter than the period required by other lender's to developing countries.¹⁰⁹

Since 2017, when the Indian scholar Brahma Chellaney affirmed that the BRI was a debt trap, the Chinese government has been accused of carrying out a "debt-trap

¹⁰⁶ Klecha-Tylec Karolina, "One Belt, One Road from the Perspective of Funding Sources", *European Research Studies Journal*, Vol. 24 Issue B, 2021, pp. 621-633

¹⁰⁷ He Alex, "The Belt and Road Initiative: Motivations, Financing, Expansion and Challenges of Xi's Ever-expanding Strategy", *CIGI Paper*, No.225, 2019, URL: <https://www.cigionline.org/publications/belt-and-road-initiative-motivations-financing-expansion-and-challenges-xis-ever/> (accessed on June 10, 2022)

¹⁰⁸ Mengdi Yue, Nedopil Wang Christoph, "Brief: Public Debt in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) — How Covid-19 has Accelerated an Ongoing Problem of China's Lending", *Green Finance & Development Center, FISF Fudan University*, 2020, URL: <https://greenfdc.org/public-debt-in-the-belt-and-road-initiative-bri-covid-19/?cookie-state-change=1655718926115> (accessed on June 16, 2020)

¹⁰⁹ Wang Kai, "China: Is it burdening poor countries with unsustainable debt?", BBC News, 2022, URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/59585507> (accessed on June 16, 2020)

diplomacy”.¹¹⁰ The debt trap indicates the Chinese efforts of financing projects in foreign countries and thus increasing these countries’ debt in order to achieve specific political goals. A notorious example of this allegation is the Sri Lanka case: the country, supported by Chinese investments, began to build a port project in Hambantota; however, the project turned out to be impracticable and generated growing debts for Sri Lanka. In order to get more investments from China, in 2017 the country decided to give to a Chinese state-owned corporation, called China Merchants, the control of 70% of the port on a 99-year lease.¹¹¹ This decision, coupled with a lack of transparency in the whole process, had a negative impact on the international perception of China’s intention for its investment. However, both in the Sri Lanka case and in other similar cases, there are no solid evidence for the intentional debt-trap accusation against the Chinese government, which has also denied claims of making use of a debt-trap diplomacy. In order to resolve the debt sustainability problem, China has tried to improve the quality of debt management and the conditions of investment decision making.¹¹² Furthermore, in 2019 the country’s Ministry of Finance has published the Debt Sustainability Framework for Participating Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative, a facultative framework to examine debt sustainability in low-income countries along the BRI and in 2020, due to the challenges brought by the Covid-19 pandemic, China signed the Debt Service Suspension Initiative to postpone the loan repayments for some of world’s poorest countries until the following year; however, the country still does not have a debt relief strategy. This lack is perceived as risky because the global community expects China to create extensive plans to resolve debt issues and because it could bring an increase in the cost of examining the various debt exemption cases and an increase in doubts regarding the transparency and equity in decision making.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ He Alex, “The Belt and Road Initiative: Motivations, Financing, Expansion and Challenges of Xi’s Ever-expanding Strategy”, *CIGI Paper*, No.225, 2019, URL: <https://www.cigionline.org/publications/belt-and-road-initiative-motivations-financing-expansion-and-challenges-xis-ever/> (accessed on June 10, 2022)

¹¹¹ Wang Kai, “China: Is it burdening poor countries with unsustainable debt?”, BBC News, 2022, URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/59585507> (accessed on June 16, 2020)

¹¹² He Alex, “The Belt and Road Initiative: Motivations, Financing, Expansion and Challenges of Xi’s Ever-expanding Strategy”, *CIGI Paper*, No.225, 2019, URL: <https://www.cigionline.org/publications/belt-and-road-initiative-motivations-financing-expansion-and-challenges-xis-ever/> (accessed on June 10, 2022)

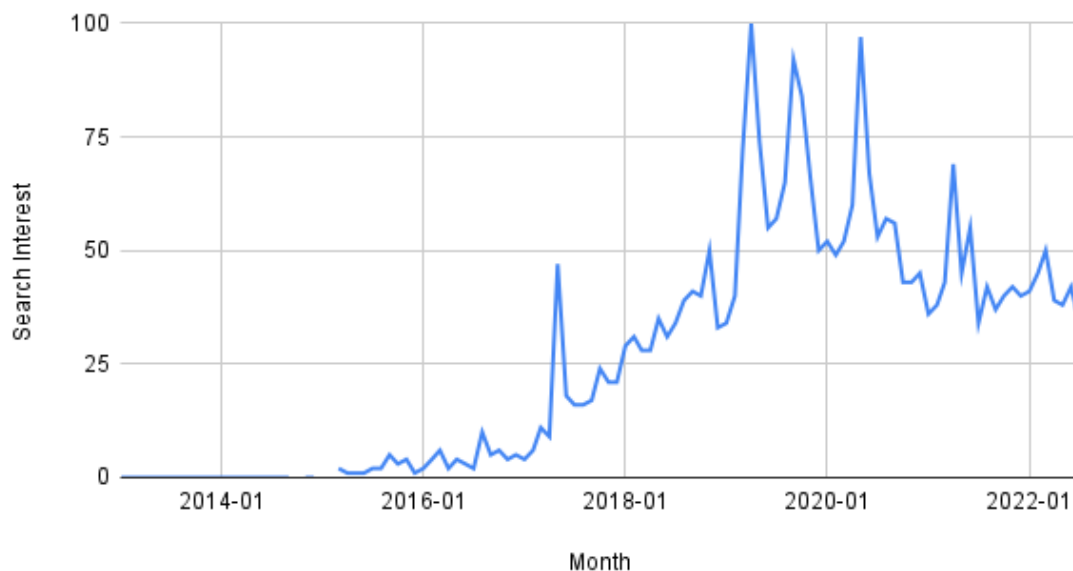
¹¹³ Mengdi Yue, Nedopil Wang Christoph, “Brief: Public Debt in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) — How Covid-19 has Accelerated an Ongoing Problem of China’s Lending”, *Green Finance & Development Center, FISF Fudan University*, 2020, URL: <https://greenfdc.org/public-debt-in-the-belt-and-road-initiative-bri-covid-19/?cookie-state-change=1655718926115> (accessed on June 16, 2020)

Chapter 3: The Belt and Road Initiative through different lenses

Since its presentation in 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative has gained great attention, both from China and from foreign countries. In order to comprehend the interest that the BRI has generate, an analysis on the popularity of the search string of words “Belt and Road Initiative” was conducted on the Google engine and an analysis of the number of published academic articles that featured the words “Belt and Road Initiative” in the title, abstract or keyword was carried out on the Scopus database.

Regarding the first research, the website used for this examination is Google Trends, a search tool developed by Google. This website shows the frequency of specific searched keywords or phrases in the Google search engine in various languages and regions.¹¹⁴ Given that Google is not a database of scholarly articles or papers, this analysis regarding the popularity of the initiative on the Google search engine was conducted in order to examine whether there have been changes in the interest of the public towards the project.

GRAPH 3.1: BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE WORLDWIDE INTEREST OVER TIME (2013-2022)



Source: Google Trends

¹¹⁴ WordStream, “Google Trends: What is Google Trends?”, URL: <https://www.wordstream.com/google-trends> (accessed on July 14, 2022)

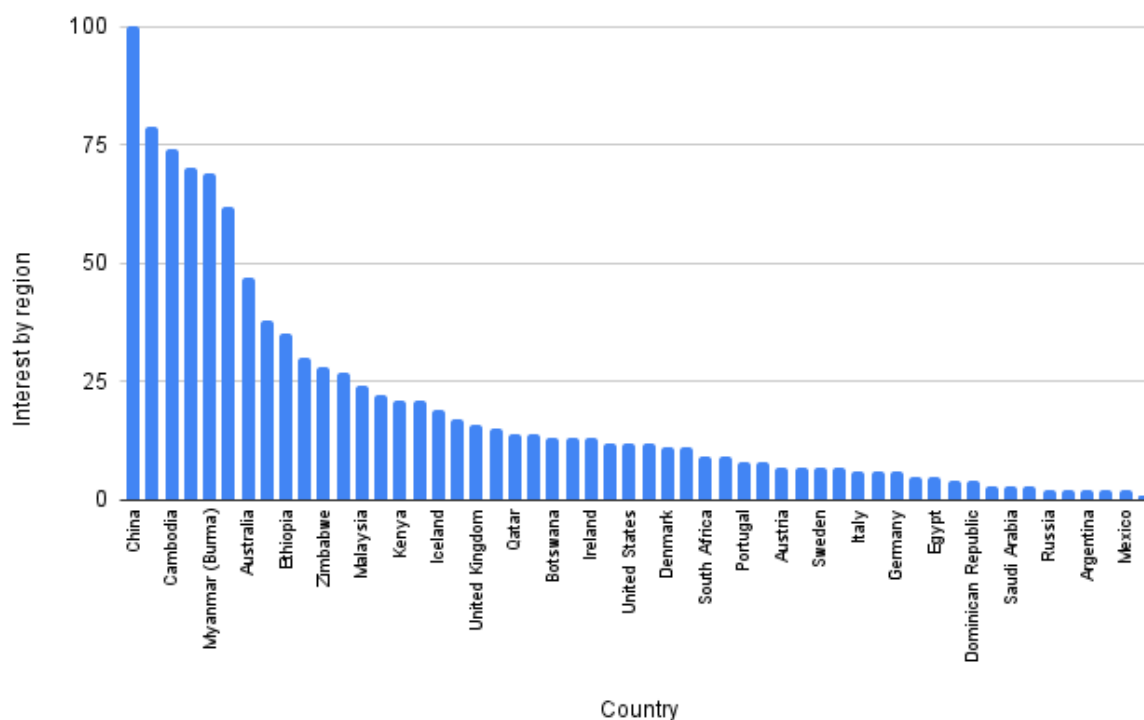
The research conducted on Google Trends regards the search interest generated by the string of words “Belt and Road Initiative” in a period of time ranging from 2013, when the BRI was firstly introduced, to July 2022, when the analysis was carried out. As shown in Graph 3.1, the number of Google searches done by international users (therefore, including Chinese users) about the initiative and hence the worldwide interest for the BRI has not been stable over time. In Graph 3.1, the search interest is represented by various numbers, with 100 indicating the term’s peak in popularity and 0 meaning that not enough data was provided for the searched term. Therefore, according to Graph 3.1, the BRI has begun to gain attention from the public in 2015, when the Chinese government published the Vision and Actions, the initiative’s action plan was published. The number of Google searches then highly increased in May 2017 and a in April 2019. Both of these growths could be seen as a result of the first and the second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, which were held in Beijing respectively on 14 - 15 of May 2017 and on 25-27 of April 2019 and were attended by foreign head of states or representatives¹¹⁵; therefore, gaining great international attention. As shown in Graph 3.1, after the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, the public interest towards the Belt and Road Initiative did not decrease; instead, there has been a big increase in the search trends in May 2020, soon after the elimination of some lockdowns in China. However, since then, the number of the Google searches has been relatively low and has not reached the high levels it had reached in the past

Furthermore, the tools provided by Google Trends permitted to analyse the interest by region. In Graph 3.2, it is possible to identify the countries that have searched more the Belt and Road Initiative on the Google engine in the same period of time analysed before, i.e. from the beginning of 2013 to July 2022. The country that has shown more interest towards the selected string of words is represent by China, the country which proposed the implementation of the project; but, given the international aspect of the BRI which involves various countries and region, not surprisingly, it has also been searched in foreign Asian, Oceanian, African, European and American countries. However, it is interesting to notice that less developed and smaller countries, such as Cambodia or

¹¹⁵ *Zhongguo guanjian ci – quanwei jiedu dangdai zhongguo* 中国关键词 – 权威解读当代中国 (Chinese Keywords - An Authoritative Interpretation of Contemporary China), *Yidaiyilu guoji hezuo gaofeng luntan* “‘一带一路’国际合作高峰论坛” (The Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation), URL: http://keywords.china.org.cn/2020-01/19/content_75629478.htm (accessed on July 14, 2022)

Ethiopia have shown more interest to the BRI compared to more advanced countries, including the United States or Italy. This could be due to the fact that, in contrast to developed nations, these developing counties, and therefore also their inhabitants, expect to receive more benefits from taking part in the project

GRAPH 3.2 – BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE INTEREST BY REGION (2013-2022)

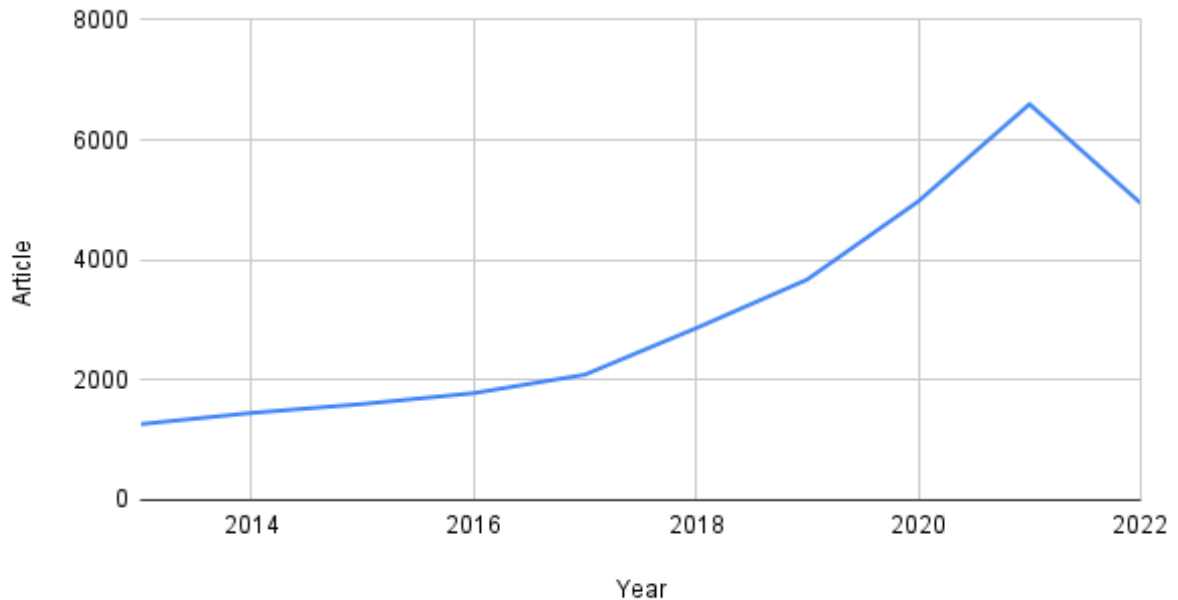


Source: Google Trends

A different kind of analysis was conducted on Scopus, the world’s largest database of research literature, which was developed by Elsevier, a Dutch academic publishing company. Scopus’s content includes various types of documents, such as journals’ articles, books and books’ chapters, review and conference papers. Through the tools provided by this website, it is possible to look into the number of published documents regarding a certain topic during a particular period of time. Therefore, in order to examine the number of academic articles about the BRI published since the beginning of the project, the selected search words were “Belt and Road Initiative”, the selected years range to analyse included the period of time between early 2013 and July 2022, and the

type of document was limited to “articles”. Subsequently, the search results were analysed through the instruments provided by the Scopus website.

GRAPH 3.3 – PUBLISHED INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC ARTICLES PER YEAR (2013-2022)



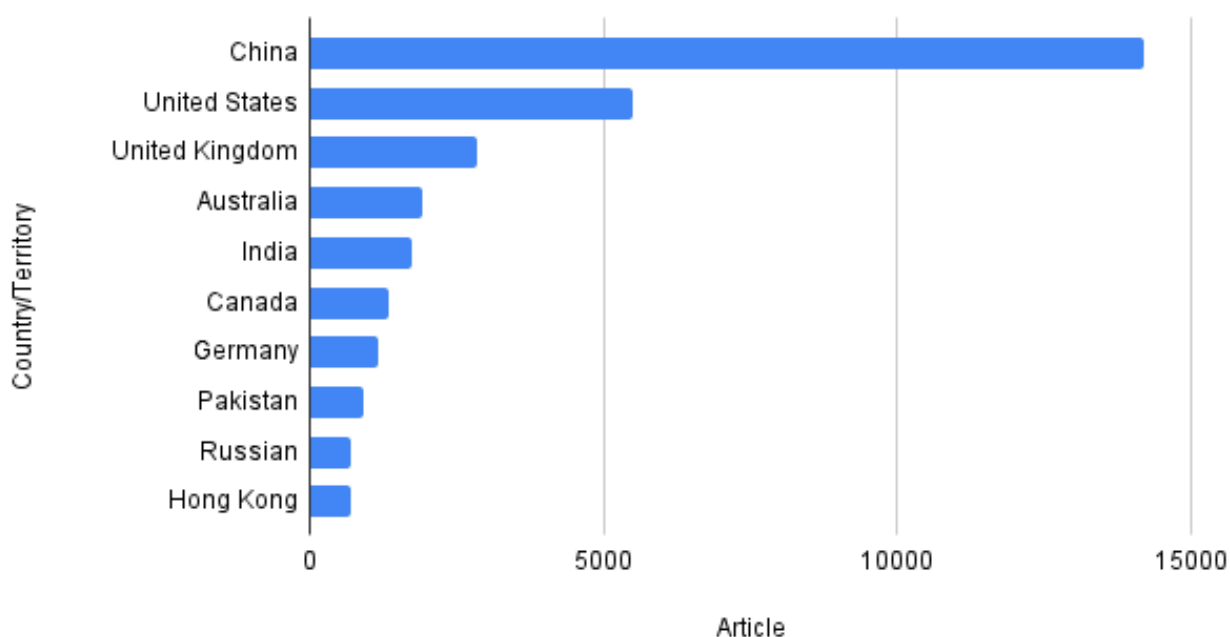
Source: Scopus

As shown in Graph 3.3, the BRI has attracted considerable academic attention and the number of international scientific articles, including Chinese articles, published on the Scopus database in the selected period of time has constantly increased, reaching a peak in 2021 and then decreasing in 2022; however, this decrease could be due to the fact that the research was conducted in July 2022; therefore, the number of articles published is not definitive and could be lower due to a shorter period of time available. As opposed to the searches conducted on the Google search engine, the publication of academic articles has been more continual and the scholarly interest about the Belt and Road Initiative has constantly grown. Therefore, by comparing the two analyses, the academic attention towards the BRI, indicated by the number of articles per year, has been higher than the public interest., indicated by Google searches.

Furthermore, on the Scopus database it was possible to analyse the place of publication of the academic articles. As shown in Graph 3.4, also in this case China represents the most interested country. However, in contrast to the previous analysis conducted on Google Trends, the countries that follow China in the number of academic articles about

the initiative published are represented by developed countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, which have, on the contrary, shown less interest in the searches on the Google engine. Therefore, most of the international academic analysis are conducted in Western and more advanced countries.

GRAPH 3.4: ACADEMIC ARTICLES PUBLISHED PER COUNTRY (2013-2022)



Source: Scopus

3.1 The Chinese official narrative about the BRI

Since the Belt and Road Initiative was firstly introduced by President Xi Jinping in 2013, the Chinese government has attached significant importance to the project, which has been the subject of numerous official speeches and official governmental documents issued by the Chinese leadership. Therefore, in the last few years, the BRI has saturated the Chinese official discourse and, consequently, the initiative has entered the popular culture of the country, being also the inspiration of poems and songs.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the Chinese government has organized several Silk Road forums and events, both in China

¹¹⁶ Rolland Nadège, “China’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative’: Underwhelming or Game-Changer, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 1, 2017, pp. 127-142, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2017.1302743> (accessed on June 1, 2022)

and in foreign countries, to obtain support and reduce other nations' potential doubts about the project.¹¹⁷

The first appearance of the initiative in the official narrative took place in September 2013, when the Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed for the first time the construction of the “Silk Road Economic Belt” during a speech given at the Nazarbayev University, in Nur-Sultan. During this important discourse¹¹⁸, the BRI was promptly linked by Xi to the ancient Silk Road: before the introduction of the new project, the leader of the PRC mentioned the famous Chinese explorer Zhang Qian, who had been sent off to Central Asia in 138 BC by Wudi, an emperor of the Han dynasty, to promote friendly and peaceful exchanges between the Eastern and Western populations.¹¹⁹ Therefore, by evoking tranquil images that recall the “camel bells echoing in the mountains” and “the wisp of smoke rising from the desert”¹²⁰, Xi clearly underlined the importance of the old Silk Road, described as a network of routes that allowed the exchange of products, people, and ideas and permitted a progress in mutually learning relationships between the countries involved. In the speech given by President Xi, the reciprocally beneficial collaborations that took place in ancient times were depicted as the inspiration for the further development of cooperation, trust and friendship between China and Central Asian countries in modern times.

The Chinese leader did not offer a clear definition or specific guidelines of the overland route, but rather only provided a vague idea of the project, calling for an original approach to create closer economic relationships. In the initial stages of the BRI, the main goals of the project were represented by the improvement of policy communication and of road connectivity, the promotion of unimpeded trade, the enhancement of monetary circulation, and of people-to-people and cultural exchanges between the countries involved. In order to implement this new project, the countries involved were called to promote and support

¹¹⁷ Rolland Nadège, “China’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative’: Underwhelming or Game-Changer, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 1, 2017, pp. 127-142, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2017.1302743> (accessed on June 1, 2022)

¹¹⁸ Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Kingdom of Belgium (2013), “Promote Friendship Between Our People and Work Together to Build a Bright Future”, speech by Xi Jinping, URL: <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cebel/eng/zxxx/t1078088.htm> (accessed on May 28, 2022)

¹¹⁹ For more details about Zhang Qian, see: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Zhang-Qian>

¹²⁰ Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Kingdom of Belgium (2013), “Promote Friendship Between Our People and Work Together to Build a Bright Future”, speech by Xi Jinping, URL: <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cebel/eng/zxxx/t1078088.htm> (accessed on May 28, 2022)

political cooperation and to defend important interests, which included state sovereignty, stability and security. To reassure foreign countries about China's aims and intentions regarding the new project, President Xi described the country as “committed to the path of peaceful development”¹²¹, far from seeking local dominance, and willing to enhance regional development and coordination to build local harmony and to benefit the people of all the countries involved. When discussing the BRI, in order to avoid suspicions and doubts, the Chinese government makes use of propaganda tools and of a very careful communication. Therefore, the images regarding the BRI evoked in the official narrative need to be reassuring and, at the same time, China has to be depicted as a benevolent country that aims at helping other countries.¹²²

The historical roots of the project represent a recurring theme in the official narrative about the initiative; by referring to the ancient Silk Road, the Chinese government grants an important validation to the initiative, emphasizing that the project will not involve the use of hard power;¹²³ therefore, it does not represent a threat to foreign countries. The ancient origins of the initiative were underlined once again by Xi Jinping when the on-sea component of the BRI, the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”, was unveiled to the Indonesian Parliament in October 2013.¹²⁴ Following the same pattern of the previous BRI-related speech, the President of the PRC made reference to an emblematic figure of China’s past. In this occasion, Xi mentioned the famous Chinese admiral and diplomat Zheng He, who made voyages in the Western Seas and contributed to the expansion of the maritime influence of the country during the early Ming Dynasty.¹²⁵ Once again, great importance was given to the cooperation and friendly exchanges that linked the countries in ancient times. Additionally, in this speech, Xi further emphasized the historical ties between China and Indonesia by mentioning the bilateral relations and exchanges that

¹²¹ Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Kingdom of Belgium (2013), “Promote Friendship Between Our People and Work Together to Build a Bright Future”, speech by Xi Jinping, URL: <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cebel/eng/zxxx/t1078088.htm> (accessed on May 28, 2022)

¹²² Rolland Nadège, “China’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative’: Underwhelming or Game-Changer, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 1, 2017, pp. 127-142, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2017.1302743> (accessed on June 1, 2022)

¹²³ Blanchard Jean-Marc F., “Probing China’s Twenty-First-Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI): An Examination of MSRI Narratives, *Geopolitics*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2017, pp. 246-268, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2016.1267147> (accessed on June 28, 2022)

¹²⁴ “*Zhongguo-dongmeng zhongxin*” 中国—东盟中心 (ASEAN-China Centre), (2013), “Speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Indonesian Parliament, URL: http://www.asean-china-center.org/english/2013-10/03/c_133062675.htm (accessed on June 20, 2022)

¹²⁵ For more details about Zheng He, see: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Zheng-He>

have taken place between the two countries in the past, stressing the creation of people-to-people exchanges and the assistance provided by the Chinese government and the Chinese people to Indonesia in 2004, after a massive earthquake hit the country; therefore, China was described once more as a generous and supporting country.

Also in this occasion, the purported modern maritime Silk Road was not described in detail, nor were the projects that the initiative would develop. Rather, as in the speech regarding the construction of the overland route, President Xi only vaguely described its aims and purposes. In the speech, the Chinese leader called the people of the two nations to unite together, to “work hand in hand with one heart and one mind”¹²⁶ in order to further expand the bilateral relations, described as “able to create new miracles in the history of human development”.¹²⁷ Expanding the speech in order to include all the ASEAN countries, Xi Jinping underlined the possibility of further upgrading the relationship between the neighbouring countries, which “stands at a new historical starting point”¹²⁸. The purposes of this new phase of collaboration included the contribution to the prosperity and security of all the countries involved. Therefore, the creation of a “community of common destiny”¹²⁹, in other words a world defined by mutual collaboration, was described as necessary to improve the living conditions of the peoples of the ASEAN countries.

In this speech, Xi once again described the BRI as an open, inclusive, equity-based and reciprocally beneficial project, while China was depicted as a country ready to further open-up to the external world to enable foreign countries to benefit from its economic growth and as willing to contribute to the development of other nations, to achieve regional peace and stability. Still in 2013 at the China-ASEAN Expo, the Chinese Premier Li Keqiang echoed the world of President Xi Jinping by emphasizing the necessity of

¹²⁶ “*Zhongguo-dongmeng zhongxin*” 中国—东盟中心 (ASEAN-China Centre), (2013), “Speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Indonesian Parliament, URL: http://www.asean-china-center.org/english/2013-10/03/c_133062675.htm (accessed on June 20, 2022)

¹²⁷ “*Zhongguo-dongmeng zhongxin*” 中国—东盟中心 (ASEAN-China Centre), (2013), “Speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Indonesian Parliament, URL: http://www.asean-china-center.org/english/2013-10/03/c_133062675.htm (accessed on June 20, 2022)

¹²⁸ “*Zhongguo-dongmeng zhongxin*” 中国—东盟中心 (ASEAN-China Centre), (2013), “Speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Indonesian Parliament, URL: http://www.asean-china-center.org/english/2013-10/03/c_133062675.htm (accessed on June 20, 2022)

¹²⁹ “*Zhongguo-dongmeng zhongxin*” 中国—东盟中心 (ASEAN-China Centre), (2013), “Speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Indonesian Parliament, URL: http://www.asean-china-center.org/english/2013-10/03/c_133062675.htm (accessed on June 20, 2022)

creating an on-sea Silk Road to connect China to the ASEAN countries in order to promote regional development and ensure stability.¹³⁰

One of the main characteristics of the Chinese narrative about the Belt and Road Initiative is the continuous affirmation of the country's position in the development of the project; in the official speeches given by the leadership and in the documents that it has issued, especially in the beginning phase of the BRI, China's aim of constructing a harmonious, peaceful, and mutually beneficial initiative is constantly repeated. An example of the assertion of this objective can be seen in a speech given by the former Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui in March 2015 at the China Development Forum.¹³¹ In that occasion, Zhang defined the BRI as an open and comprehensive "economic cooperation initiative, not a tool of geo-strategy"¹³². Furthermore, the Vice Minister stated that China did not aim at changing the international order, but it aimed at safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of the countries involved in the project whilst promoting the establishment of a new form of international economic cooperation that presumed a peaceful international environment, extensive consultation between all the parties involved and the achievement of mutually beneficial results. The routes that form the BRI were defined by Zhang Yesui as "open avenues"¹³³ for the international community; therefore, China was described as enthusiastic to welcome foreign countries and organizations in the project. The idea that China did not intend to seek geopolitical

¹³⁰ The State Council (2015), Full text: Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, URL: http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm#:~:text=The%20Belt%20and%20Road%20Initiative%20is%20a%20way%20for%20win,and%20strengthening%20all%20around%20exchanges (accessed on June 4, 2022)

¹³¹ "Zhongguo renmin gongheguo zhu Mengmai zong lingshiguan" 中华人民共和国驻孟买总领事馆 (Consulate-general of the People's Republic of China in Mumbai), (2015), "Waijiao bu fu buzhang Zhang Yesui: 'Yidai yilu' bushi diyuan zhanlue de gongju" 外交部副部长张业遂: "一带一路"不是地缘战略的工具 (Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui: 'The Belt and Road' is not a tool of geostrategy), URL: <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgmb/chn/wjbxw/t1247440.htm> (accessed on June 22, 2022)

¹³² "Zhongguo renmin gongheguo zhu Mengmai zong lingshiguan" 中华人民共和国驻孟买总领事馆 (Consulate-general of the People's Republic of China in Mumbai), (2015), "Waijiao bu fu buzhang Zhang Yesui: 'Yidai yilu' bushi diyuan zhanlue de gongju" 外交部副部长张业遂: "一带一路"不是地缘战略的工具 (Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui: 'The Belt and Road' is not a tool of geostrategy), URL: <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgmb/chn/wjbxw/t1247440.htm> (accessed on June 22, 2022)

¹³³ "Zhonghua renmin gongheguo zhu nanfei gongheguo dashi guan" 中华人民共和国驻南非共和国大使馆 (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of South Africa), (2016), "Full text of keynote speech of China's top legislator at Belt and Road Summit in Hong Kong", URL: <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cezanew//eng/zgxw/t1364533.htm> (accessed on June 23, 2022)

advantages was also underlined by Yang Jiechi, the Chinese State Councillor, in a speech given to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 2015. In that occasion, Yang stated that China would not permit any type of monopoly or oppression in the implementation of the initiative.¹³⁴

In 2015, the official action plan known as Vision and Actions was published and the initiative entered the concrete implementation phase. For the first time, the Chinese government drafted and published the official guidelines needed to execute the BRI, described as the joint building of the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. In the official action plan, the Chinese leadership once again mentioned the mythical ancient Silk Road and called for the restoration of the “Silk Road Spirit”, described as a sentiment that, in the past, had guided the peoples of Asia, Europe and Africa for thousands of years. Although a precise definition was not provided, the spirit has to be connected to strong values such as inclusiveness, equity, and respect for foreign countries’ development path.¹³⁵ Those values represent the principles that the country wishes to respect in the implementation of the initiative. According to the BRI’s action plan, this spirit “has been passed from generation to generation, promoted the progress of human civilization, and contributed greatly to the prosperity and development of the countries along the Silk Road”¹³⁶. In the document, the Silk Road spirit is described as essential to manage the complicate situations at the regional and international level and as necessary to face and overcome the challenges that were generated by the slow-down in the global economy, international investments and trade that took place in the early 21st century.

In the Vision and Actions, the Chinese government clearly stated the BRI’s aims and purposes, namely the development of an inclusive, open, regional economic cooperation that has to benefit all the parties involved, while promoting common development and exchanges in various field. In order to achieve these goals, the document also described the main priorities of the initiative, which recall the ideas that Xi shared during his speech

¹³⁴ Blanchard Jean-Marc F., “Probing China’s Twenty-First-Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI): An Examination of MSRI Narratives, *Geopolitics*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2017, pp. 246-268, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2016.1267147> (accessed on June 28, 2022)

¹³⁵ Rolland Nadège, “China’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative’: Underwhelming or Game-Changer, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 1, 2017, pp. 127-142, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2017.1302743> (accessed on June 1, 2022)

¹³⁶ The State Council (2015), Full text: Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, URL: http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm#:~:text=The%20Belt%20and%20Road%20Initiative%20is%20a%20way%20for%20win,and%20strengthening%20all%20around%20exchanges (accessed on June 4, 2022)

in 2013 and include the promotion of facilities connectivity, policy coordination, unimpeded trade, financial integration and interpersonal, cultural, and academic exchanges. The document also explained the principles that guide the creation of the BRI: respecting other countries' sovereignty and territorial integrity, equity, mutual nonaggression, and non-interference in foreign affairs; furthermore, the initiative is described as "open to all countries, and international and regional organizations"¹³⁷, harmonious and as a cooperation that seeks to achieve benefits for all the countries. The document, therefore, once more clearly underlined that China does not represent a threat to external countries, nor does it seek to only achieve self-interests. Instead, through the BRI, the country wishes to share the results of its huge economic development and to help other countries grow and evolve. For the first time, the Chinese government proposed an action plan that had to be implemented in the context of the BRI to reach the initiative's priorities, which clearly described the land corridors that form the "belt" and the on-sea routes that form the "road".

The BRI, however, is not a well-defined concept and, therefore, includes several types of projects and processes. Soon after its announcement, the initiative, that President Xi defined the "project of the century"¹³⁸, was enlarged to include various fields, such as education. In 2016, only one year after the publication of the Vision and Actions, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China issued the "Education Action Plan" for the Belt and Road Initiative.¹³⁹ According to this document, collaboration in education in countries along the BRI could help the project achieve its aims, while providing also for the people and the talents needed in implementing the initiative. Collaboration in education, therefore, is seen both as a way to advance the development of interpersonal exchanges and to help foreign developing countries to improve their education systems, but also as an opportunity to train a higher number of people, who will be able to cooperate in the BRI in the future.

The action plan stated that "China is ready to work with the countries along the routes to expand people-to-people exchanges, strengthen cooperation in the cultivation of talent,

¹³⁷ The State Council (2015), "Full text: Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative", URL: http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm#:~:text=The%20Belt%20and%20Road%20Initiative%20is%20a%20way%20for%20win,and%20strengthening%20all%20around%20exchanges (accessed on June 4, 2022)

¹³⁸ Belt and Road Portal (2017), "Full text of President Xi's speech at opening of Belt and Road forum", URL: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/home/rolling/13299.htm> (accessed on June 22, 2022)

¹³⁹ Belt and Road Portal (2016), "Education Action Plan for the Belt and Road Initiative", URL: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/zchj/qwfb/30277.htm> (accessed on June 22, 2022)

and together create a bright future for education in the region.”¹⁴⁰ The main values that have to guide the implementation of the BRI were, once again, expressed in the education action plan; hence, the document called for a strengthening in openness and consultation, in the promotion of mutual understanding, and in the pursue of common interests. Recalling the Vision and Actions, the Education Action Plan proposed five main priorities, namely cooperation on education policy, the facilitation of channels for educational cooperation, cooperation to break the language barriers among the various countries involved, the encouragement of people-to-people exchanges and the promotion of a criteria for mutual recognition of academic qualifications. In order to achieve these goals, the Chinese government committed itself to providing a Silk Road Scholarship to foreign students, while it asked the governments of the countries involved and the Chinese education sector to increase the number of training programs and academic exchanges in order to “create a new chapter of beautiful life for all humanity”¹⁴¹.

As early as May 2017, the successes generated by the implementation of the initiative were described by President Xi in a speech given at the opening of the Belt and Road forum¹⁴², in which the Chinese leader asserted that there has been an improvement in policy and infrastructure, an increase in trade, an advance in financial stability and in people-to-people exchanges, which represent the five major priorities previously designed by the Chinese government. In this occasion, the Chinese leader called the countries involved to convert the Belt and Road into a “road for peace”, a “road of prosperity”, “a road of opening up”, “a road of innovation”, “a road connecting different civilizations”¹⁴³, and more importance was given to enhance cooperation in environmental protection. This latter aim has become increasingly more important in recent years; in May 2017, the Chinese government published “The Belt and Road Ecological and Environmental Cooperation Plan”¹⁴⁴, calling for cooperation in the building of a Green Silk Road, referring to the collaboration in “conserving eco-

¹⁴⁰ Belt and Road Portal (2016), “Education Action Plan for the Belt and Road Initiative”, URL: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/zchj/qwfb/30277.htm> (accessed on June 22, 2022)

¹⁴¹ Belt and Road Portal (2016), “Education Action Plan for the Belt and Road Initiative”, URL: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/zchj/qwfb/30277.htm> (accessed on June 22, 2022)

¹⁴² Belt and Road Portal (2017), “Full text of President Xi's speech at opening of Belt and Road forum”, URL: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/home/rolling/13299.htm> (accessed on June 22, 2022)

¹⁴³ Belt and Road Portal (2017), “Full text of President Xi's speech at opening of Belt and Road forum”, URL: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/home/rolling/13299.htm> (accessed on June 22, 2022)

¹⁴⁴ Belt and Road Portal (2017), “The Belt and Road Ecological and Environmental Cooperation Plan”, URL: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/zchj/qwfb/13392.htm> (accessed on June 23, 2022)

environment, protecting biodiversity and tackling climate change”¹⁴⁵. The document called for the integration of “ecological civilization and green development”¹⁴⁶ in the project, the implementation of eco-environmental protection by 2025 and the advancement in environmental protection with higher standards to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030; at the same time, while proposing collaboration in environmental projects, the Chinese government once again underlined the values that form the basis of the cooperation along the BRI, which are represented by openness, international development, and mutually beneficial collaboration.

In order to promote the green development in the project, the Chinese government also issued a “Guidance on Promoting Green Belt and Road”¹⁴⁷; in this official document the basic principles of the Green Belt and Road are explained, which include green development and environmental protection as the main priorities of the initiative. Furthermore, the cooperation has been expanded to the energy sector in order to enhance the distribution of energy resources and to improve energy safety. At the same time, China was described in the document as connected to the international environment and as committed to deepen its integration in the world energy system and as willing to accept more obligations and responsibility in the international arena.¹⁴⁸

One of the recurring themes in the description of the BRI made by the Chinese government representatives and policymakers in official documents and speeches is the continuous request for a peaceful environment in which to implement the project. In his speech at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation held in Beijing in 2017, President Xi talked about the necessity of implementing a harmonious coexistence in the modern world, which is characterized by a lack of peace, governance and evolution.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, according to the Chinese leadership, the road towards modern development has to be changed and China is ready to guide the countries of Asia, Europe and Africa

¹⁴⁵ Belt and Road Portal (2017), “The Belt and Road Ecological and Environmental Cooperation Plan”, URL: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/zchj/qwfb/13392.htm> (accessed on June 23, 2022)

¹⁴⁶ Belt and Road Portal (2017), “The Belt and Road Ecological and Environmental Cooperation Plan”, URL: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/zchj/qwfb/13392.htm> (accessed on June 23, 2022)

¹⁴⁷ Belt and Road Portal (2017), “Guidance on Promoting Green Belt and Road”, URL: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/zchj/qwfb/12479.htm> (accessed on June 24, 2022)

¹⁴⁸ Belt and Road Portal (2017), “Vision and Actions on Energy Cooperation in Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road”, URL: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/zchj/qwfb/13754.htm> (accessed on June 22, 2022)

¹⁴⁹ Belt and Road Portal (2017), “Full text of President Xi's speech at opening of Belt and Road forum”, URL: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/home/rolling/13299.htm> (accessed on June 22, 2022)

in a new model of development, characterized by inclusiveness and balance.¹⁵⁰ According to the Chinese leadership, the BRI represents the correct path towards world peace and international development;¹⁵¹ at the same time, it will allow the country to further open up towards the external world and to unite the Chinese Dream of the President Xi's era to the dream of foreign countries.¹⁵²

The steps taken in order to achieve the designed aims of the BRI are described by the Chinese leadership as efficient and successful. In a speech titled “Working Together to Deliver a Brighter Future For Belt and Road Cooperation”¹⁵³ delivered by Xi Jinping at the Opening Ceremony of the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2019 the initiative was said to have improved lives of peoples in the countries involved through the creation of opportunities for development, both in China and abroad; therefore, the Chinese leader invited all the participants to continue the implementation of the BRI and to promote a high-quality cooperation, taking an even more people-centred approach that could further improve the quality of people's livelihoods and the quality of development of the routes.

In the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025)¹⁵⁴ of the PRC, the Chinese government calls for the building of a new development model with innovation and high-quality at its core. The plan is made of a total of sixty-five chapter and the forty-first concerns the BRI,

¹⁵⁰ Belt and Road Portal (2017), “Full text of President Xi's speech at opening of Belt and Road forum”, URL: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/home/rolling/13299.htm> (accessed on June 22, 2022)

¹⁵¹ “*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo zhu nanfei gongheguo dashi guan*” 中华人民共和国驻南非共和国大使馆 (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of South Africa), (2016), “Full text of keynote speech of China's top legislator at Belt and Road Summit in Hong Kong”, URL: <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cezanew//eng/zgxw/t1364533.htm> (accessed on June 23, 2022)

¹⁵² “*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo zhu nanfei gongheguo dashi guan*” 中华人民共和国驻南非共和国大使馆 (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of South Africa), (2016), “Full text of keynote speech of China's top legislator at Belt and Road Summit in Hong Kong”, URL: <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cezanew//eng/zgxw/t1364533.htm> (accessed on June 23, 2022)

¹⁵³ The Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (2019), “Working Together to Deliver a Brighter Future For Belt and Road Cooperation”, URL: <http://www.beltandroadforum.org/english/n100/2019/0426/c22-1266.html> (accessed on June 25, 2022)

¹⁵⁴ The People's Government of Fujian Province (2021), “Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) for National Economic and Social Development and Vision 2035 of the People's Republic of China”, URL: https://www.fujian.gov.cn/english/news/202108/t20210809_5665713.htm (accessed on June 26, 2022)

which is described as an initiative that has “yielded fruitful results”¹⁵⁵, allowing China to further open-up to the external world. Furthermore, new types of issues, such as wildlife protection, climate change and prevention of desertification are mentioned in the plan, which formally announces the creation of a Green Belt and Road. Through the featuring of the BRI in the new plan, the Chinese leadership further underlined the importance of implementing the BRI as one of its major foreign policies.

The demand for high-quality development that the government added in the 14th Five-Year Plan has also been reflected in the plans for the implementation of the BRI. According to Xi Jinping, in the past few years, the progress of the initiative has been characterized by new conditions and circumstances ¹⁵⁶ that call for a better-quality development in various fields, one of them being the health sector. Recently, after the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, cooperation in the health field has become increasingly important in the Chinese narrative about the BRI. In a joint statement issued by BRI partners in 2020¹⁵⁷, several leaders of the countries involved in the initiative committed to building a Health Silk Road, an extension of the Belt and Road Initiative which aimed at increasing cooperation and exchanges among health professionals to combat the pandemic and at providing a more equal access to health products. According to the Chinese leadership, this new road has achieved remarkable results and the country has helped foreign countries in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic by sharing its experience and furnishing vaccines to less-developed nations.¹⁵⁸

Apart from the health field, another sector that has become increasingly more important in recent years is represented by advanced information technology, and the Chinese

¹⁵⁵ The People’s Government of Fujian Province (2021), “Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) for National Economic and Social Development and Vision 2035 of the People’s Republic of China”, URL: https://www.fujian.gov.cn/english/news/202108/t20210809_5665713.htm (accessed on June 26, 2022)

¹⁵⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (2021), “Full Text: Speech by Ambassador Li Junhua at the IV Edition of the Belt and Road Initiative”, URL: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbdt_665378/202112/t20211203_10462182.html (accessed on June 25, 2022)

¹⁵⁷ Belt and Road Portal (2020), “Joint Statement of the High-level Video Conference on Belt and Road International Cooperation: Combating COVID-19 with Solidarity”, URL: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/132547.htm> (accessed on June 25, 2022)

¹⁵⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (2021), “Remarks by State Councillor Wang Yi At the Meeting of the Advisory Council of The Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation 2021”, URL: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/202112/t20211218_10471345.html (accessed on June 25, 2022)

government has called for the development of a Digital Silk Road. According to the Chinese leadership, there is the need to ensure a more open and cooperative cyberspace, but also the need to formulate and implement stricter rules for the digital governance and to safeguard digital security.¹⁵⁹

According to the Chinese leadership, despite the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the construction of the BRI is still advancing, thus demonstrating that the project's foundations are solid and the prospects for future cooperation are very broad.¹⁶⁰ After the pandemic began in early 2020, the Chinese government promptly affirmed that the country would continue being committed to the project, which would still remain a policy priority.¹⁶¹ In February 2020, the official narrative asserted that the Covid-19 pandemic did not affect the project.¹⁶² However, due to the spread of the virus worldwide, the Chinese leadership soon had to admit that the pandemic could have a negative impact on the BRI.¹⁶³ In a speech given in June of 2020 by Wang Xiaolong, the director-general of the ministry's International Economic Affairs Department, the Chinese government stated that about 20% of the projects involved in the BRI have been severely damaged by the pandemic; however, no major project has been suspended or cancelled.¹⁶⁴ According to this speech given by Wang Xiaolong, the main causes that had an impact on the BRI are travel bans, restrictions in the transportation of goods and local measures

¹⁵⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (2021), "Full Text: Speech by Ambassador Li Junhua at the IV Edition of the Belt and Road Initiative", URL: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjw_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbd_665378/202112/t20211203_10462182.html (accessed on June 25, 2022)

¹⁶⁰ "Wajiao bu" 外交部 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), (2022), "Wang Yi: Jiang 'yidai yilu' dazhao cheng 'fazhan dai' he 'xingfu lu'" 王毅: 将“一带一路”打造成“发展带”和“幸福路” (Wang Yi: Make the Belt and Road Initiative a "Development Belt" and a "Happiness Road"), URL: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjwzhd/202203/t20220307_10648865.shtml (accessed on June 26, 2022)

¹⁶¹ Mouritz Frank, "Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic on China's Belt and Road Initiative", *Connections*, Vol. 19 No. 2, 2020, pp. 115-124, URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26937614> (accessed on July 15, 2022)

¹⁶² Mouritz Frank, "Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic on China's Belt and Road Initiative", *Connections*, Vol. 19 No. 2, 2020, pp. 115-124, URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26937614> (accessed on July 15, 2022)

¹⁶³ Mouritz Frank, "Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic on China's Belt and Road Initiative", *Connections*, Vol. 19 No. 2, 2020, pp. 115-124, URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26937614> (accessed on July 15, 2022)

¹⁶⁴ Reuters (2020), "China says one-fifth of Belt and Road projects 'seriously affected' by pandemic", URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-china-silkroad-idUSKBN23Q0I1> (accessed on June 26, 2022)

taken in various countries to fight the pandemic, including national lockdowns.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, still in 2020, after some of the lockdowns in China had ended, the government announced that Chinese companies were resuming most of their overseas projects.¹⁶⁶ However, the Chinese narrative has been contradicted by foreign reports that revealed the delays of various projects. For example, the Pakistani government had to admit that one of the most important projects of the BRI, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, was facing severe delays.¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the Chinese government is still highly committed to the project; in November 2020, Meng Wei, a representative of the National Development and Reform Commission, has insisted on affirming the continuation of the project and has highlighted three paths for the future development of the BRI: the Green Silk Road, the Health Silk Road and the Digital Silk Road.¹⁶⁸ To sum up, in the official discourse, the Chinese government has attached great importance to the project. Through the years, the BRI has been described by the Chinese leadership as a widely recognized initiative,¹⁶⁹ which has gained positive responses at the international level.¹⁷⁰ The Chinese narrative about the project claims that the progresses

¹⁶⁵ Reuters (2020), “China says one-fifth of Belt and Road projects 'seriously affected' by pandemic”, URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-china-silkroad-idUSKBN23Q0I1> (accessed on June 26, 2022)

¹⁶⁶ Mouritz Frank, “Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic on China’s Belt and Road Initiative”, *Connections*, Vol. 19 No. 2, 2020, pp. 115-124, URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26937614> (accessed on July 15, 2022)

¹⁶⁷ Mouritz Frank, “Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic on China’s Belt and Road Initiative”, *Connections*, Vol. 19 No. 2, 2020, pp. 115-124, URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26937614> (accessed on July 15, 2022)

¹⁶⁸ HKTDC Research, “Has Covid-19 prompted the Belt and Road Initiative to go green?” (2021), URL: <https://research.hktdc.com/en/article/NzE1MDI2NzIx> (accessed on July 15, 2022)

¹⁶⁹ Belt and Road Portal (2017), “Vision and Actions on Energy Cooperation in Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road”, URL: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/zchj/qwfb/13754.htm> (accessed on June 22, 2022)

¹⁷⁰ “*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo zhu nanfei gongheguo dashi guan*” 中华人民共和国驻南非共和国大使馆 (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of South Africa), (2016), “Full text of keynote speech of China's top legislator at Belt and Road Summit in Hong Kong”, URL: <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cezanew//eng/zgxw/t1364533.htm> (accessed on June 23, 2022)

made in the BRI have shown that the project represents opportunities to achieve a mutually beneficial development.¹⁷¹

3. 2 International literature regarding the Belt and Road Initiative

Since the Chinese President Xi Jinping mentioned for the first time the creation of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, the ambitious project has received growing attention from international media, institutions, researchers, and national governments.¹⁷² Therefore, in the years following its announcement, the BRI has been the subject of many studies in various areas and disciplines, such as business and economics, social science, and international relations.¹⁷³ Furthermore, since 2013, reports made by business consultants and investment banks have analysed the possible opportunities that the implementation of the project can create.¹⁷⁴ In the international arena, various aspects of the BRI have been discussed, but the majority of the considerations are about the political and economic characteristics of the project.¹⁷⁵ The bulk of the non-Chinese analyses are conducted in developed Western countries that possess good research capacities and interest in the implementation of the project.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ “Wajiao bu” 外交部 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), (2021), “Wang Yi: Shijian zaici zhenming, ‘yida yilu’ shi xiwang zhi lu, fazhan zhi lu, jiyu zhi lu, luse zhi lu” 王毅: 实践再次证明, “一带一路”是希望之路、发展之路、机遇之路、绿色之路 (Wang Yi: Practice has once again proved that the "Belt and Road" is a road of hope, a road of development, a road of opportunity and a green road), URL: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/zt_674979/dnzt_674981/qtzt/kjgzbdffyq_699171/202112/t20211217_10471278.shtml (accessed on June 26, 2022)

¹⁷² Cao Mingchun, Alon Ilan, “Intellectual Structure of the Belt and Road Initiative Research: A Scientometric Analysis and Suggestions for a Future Research Agenda”, *Sustainability*, MDPI. Vol. 12 No. 17, 2020, pp. 1-40, URL: <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/17/6901> (accessed on July 1, 2022)

¹⁷³ Cao Mingchun, Alon Ilan, “Intellectual Structure of the Belt and Road Initiative Research: A Scientometric Analysis and Suggestions for a Future Research Agenda”, *Sustainability*, MDPI. Vol. 12 No. 17, 2020, pp. 1-40, URL: <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/17/6901> (accessed on July 1, 2022)

¹⁷⁴ Rolland Nadège, “China’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative’: Underwhelming or Game-Changer”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 1, 2017, pp. 127-142, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2017.1302743> (accessed on June 1, 2022)

¹⁷⁵ Blome Constantine, Chan Hing Kai, Huang George Q., Melnyk Steven, Stevenson Mark, Thürer Matthias, Tomašević Ivan, “A systematic review of China’s belt and road initiative: implications for global supply chain management”, *International Journal of Production Research*, Vol. 58 No. 8, 2020, pp. 2436-2453, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207543.2019.1605225> (accessed on July 3, 2022)

¹⁷⁶ Teo Hoong Chen, Campos-Arceiz Ahimsa, Li Binbin V., Wu Mingquan, Lechner Alex Mark, “Building a green Belt and Road: A systematic review and comparative assessment of the Chinese and English-language literature”, *PLoS ONE*, Vol. 15 No. 9, 2020, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0239009> (accessed on July 4, 2022)

The motives that led China to implement the initiative are often debated in the Western literature, and they appear as different from the ones proposed by the Chinese leadership in the official narrative. If, on one side, the Chinese government constantly underlines the country's desires to share the results of its enormous economic growth, to provide aid to foreign countries and to obtain a mutually beneficial cooperation, the Western literature, instead, underlines different types of motives that pushed China to develop the initiative in order to achieve the country's self-interests.¹⁷⁷ For instance, it has been argued that China is trying to reshape the global governance and, therefore, the existing international order to increase its influence in foreign countries¹⁷⁸ and to create a Sino-centric hegemonic framework.¹⁷⁹ Policy analysts have also argued that China's main reason for the implementation of the plan is to generate economic earnings for the country, to dispose of a portion of the country's accumulated capital and to solve the overcapacity's issue in heavy industries, to increase exports and the internationalization of the local currency¹⁸⁰, the renminbi, and to promote the development of the Western regions.¹⁸¹ Due to these motives and to the lack of transparency and clarity in discussing the BRI by the Chinese leadership, some analysts have argued that the initiative will not produce many concrete results for foreign countries.¹⁸² Because of the initiative's dynamic nature, most

¹⁷⁷ Blome Constantine, Chan Hing Kai, Huang George Q., Melnyk Steven, Stevenson Mark, Thürer Matthias, Tomašević Ivan, "A systematic review of China's belt and road initiative: implications for global supply chain management", *International Journal of Production Research*, Vol. 58 No. 8, 2020, pp. 2436-2453, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207543.2019.1605225> (accessed on July 3, 2022)

¹⁷⁸ Cao Mingchun, Alon Ilan, "Intellectual Structure of the Belt and Road Initiative Research: A Scientometric Analysis and Suggestions for a Future Research Agenda", *Sustainability*, MDPI. Vol. 12 No. 17, 2020, pp. 1-40, URL: <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/17/6901> (accessed on July 1, 2022)

¹⁷⁹ Shahriar Saleh, "Literature Survey on the "Belt and Road" Initiative: A Bibliometric Analysis", in Visvizi Anna, Lytras Miltiadis, Zhang Xi, Zhao Jie (edited by), *Foreign Business in China and Opportunities for Technological Innovation and Sustainable Economics*, pp.79-115, 2019, URL: <https://www.igi-global.com/gateway/chapter/227133> (accessed on July 1, 2022)

¹⁸⁰ Rolland Nadège, "China's 'Belt and Road Initiative': Underwhelming or Game-Changer", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 1, 2017, pp. 127-142, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2017.1302743> (accessed on June 1, 2022)

¹⁸¹ Schulhof Vera, van Vuuren Detlef, Kirchherr Julian, "The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): What Will it Look Like in the Future?", *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, Vol. 175, 2022, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121306> (accessed on July 2, 2022)

¹⁸² Rolland Nadège, "China's 'Belt and Road Initiative': Underwhelming or Game-Changer", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 40 No. 1, 2017, pp. 127-142, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2017.1302743> (accessed on June 1, 2022)

of the Western literature does not explicitly state which part of the BRI is being analysed, but rather refers to the project as an abstract notion.¹⁸³

The Western literature tends to be more negative¹⁸⁴ and critical towards the BRI compared to the Chinese literature. Western analysts have focused on the political consequences of the initiative, which could include the increase in China's soft power, in its geographic interests and the advancing in its regional presence.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, the potential Chinese geostrategic or military drivers have been studied:¹⁸⁶ For example, regarding the development of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, Western security analysts have argued that China is attempting to implement the strategy known as “String of Pearls”, which refers to the creation of a string of naval bases in the northern Indian Ocean. Some Western analyses assert that the creation of dual-use ports in foreign countries such as Djibouti and Pakistan, used both for cargo ships and military ships, represents China's intentions to guarantee sea lines remain open and available to defeat potential threats¹⁸⁷; according to this hypothesis, the Chinese navy would use these naval bases to protect the country's trading routes, creating the possibility of controlling the Indian Ocean.¹⁸⁸

In the international literature, one aspect of the initiative that is considered as essential is represented by the building of structures: Western analysts have highlighted the importance of the construction of infrastructure, that can be both physical, such as ports

¹⁸³ Blome Constantine, Chan Hing Kai, Huang George Q., Melnyk Steven, Stevenson Mark, Thürer Matthias, Tomašević Ivan, “A systematic review of China's belt and road initiative: implications for global supply chain management”, *International Journal of Production Research*, Vol. 58 No. 8, 2020, pp. 2436-2453, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207543.2019.1605225> (accessed on July 3, 2022)

¹⁸⁴ Teo Hoong Chen, Campos-Arceiz Ahimsa, Li Binbin V., Wu Mingquan, Lechner Alex Mark, “Building a green Belt and Road: A systematic review and comparative assessment of the Chinese and English-language literature”, *PLoS ONE*, Vol. 15 No. 9, 2020, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0239009> (accessed on July 4, 2022)

¹⁸⁵ Blanchard Jean-Marc F., “Probing China's Twenty-First-Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI): An Examination of MSRI Narratives”, *Geopolitics*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2017, pp. 246-268, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2016.1267147> (accessed on June 28, 2022)

¹⁸⁶ Schulhof Vera, van Vuuren Detlef, Kirchherr Julian, “The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): What Will it Look Like in the Future?”, *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, Vol. 175, 2022, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121306> (accessed on July 2, 2022)

¹⁸⁷ Blanchard Jean-Marc F., “Probing China's Twenty-First-Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI): An Examination of MSRI Narratives”, *Geopolitics*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2017, pp. 246-268, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2016.1267147> (accessed on June 28, 2022)

¹⁸⁸ Cao Mingchun, Alon Ilan, “Intellectual Structure of the Belt and Road Initiative Research: A Scientometric Analysis and Suggestions for a Future Research Agenda”, *Sustainability*, MDPI. Vol. 12 No. 17, 2020, pp. 1-40, URL: <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/17/6901> (accessed on July 1, 2022)

or roads, and social, such as community services or human capital.¹⁸⁹ However, Western commentators have also criticized the potential risks caused by infrastructure investments in various countries. According to some analysts, due to the high number of participants involved, their different nationalities and interests, cultural differences and weak integration, these investments can bring political risks and risks in cost, demand and financial markets.¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, researchers are concerned about the unsustainable debt levels foreign countries occur in to sustain the development of infrastructures and doubt the possibility of borrowing countries of repaying the debts,¹⁹¹ falling in the debt trap that the Chinese government has been accused of carrying out. In addition, there has been an increasing concern in the Western literature because of the Chinese government's action plan and guidelines about the initiative lack of clarity and, since its beginning, some of the agreed projects have been stopped and not been completed.¹⁹²

Furthermore, another critical aspect that has received the attention of the Western world is the lack of a dispute-settlement mechanism to resolve the potential debates that could arise among the countries involved in the initiative. According to several studies, the creation of the BRI can face various legal issues, including challenges concerning territorial integrity, investment risk, maritime disputes, international trade.¹⁹³

However, the international literature has highlighted that, despite the lack of transparency, countries belonging in the European Union tend to hold a favourable view of the initiative; according to some studies, the BRI can bring both opportunities and challenges to these nations. The biggest opportunities are represented by the possible stimulus in economic

¹⁸⁹ Ermolaeva Liubov, Kalinin Alexey, Korovkin Vladimir, Nefedov Konstantin, Panibratov Andrei, Selivanovskikh Louisa, Zhang Yugui, "The belt and road initiative: a systematic literature review and future research agenda", *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 63 No. 1, 2022, pp. 82-115, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2020.1857288> (accessed on July 3, 2022)

¹⁹⁰ Thees Hannes, "Towards Local Sustainability of Mega Infrastructure: Reviewing Research on the New Silk Road", *Sustainability*, MDPI, Vol. 12 No. 14, 2020, URL: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su122410612> (accessed on July 2, 2022)

¹⁹¹ Bashir Muhamed Farhan, Ma Benjiang, Qin Yifang, Bashir Muhammad Adnan, "Evaluation of One Belt One Road publications: a bibliometric and literature review analysis", *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, Vol. 28, 2021, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-021-14621-y> (accessed on July 3, 2022)

¹⁹² Renwick Neil, Gu Jing, Gong Sen, "The impact of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investment in infrastructure on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals", *K4D Emerging Issues Report*, 2018, URL: <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/123456789/14097> (accessed on July 3, 2022)

¹⁹³ Cao Mingchun, Alon Ilan, "Intellectual Structure of the Belt and Road Initiative Research: A Scientometric Analysis and Suggestions for a Future Research Agenda", *Sustainability*, MDPI. Vol. 12 No. 17, 2020, pp. 1-40, URL: <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/17/6901> (accessed on July 1, 2022)

growth, the creation of more employment possibilities and the safeguarding of security in the region; instead, examples of challenges are the reshaping of the union's foreign relations, and the possible impact in the interactions between member states.¹⁹⁴

In the international literature, another type of BRI emerges compared to the Chinese official narrative. According to some foreign analyses, the mottos used by the Chinese government in its official discourses such as “win-win cooperation” and “community of common destiny” are not reflected in a concrete effort to realize them by the country; therefore, scholars believe that China should give more importance to the creation of mutual understanding and interpersonal exchanges between the countries that take part in the BRI.¹⁹⁵ Another aspect that has been discussed in the external world is represented by the environmental impacts caused by the implementation of the BRI and commentators have suggested to reduce the carbon emissions in order to make the project more environmentally friendly.¹⁹⁶ However, some scholars have agreed with the Chinese official narrative and have argued that governments are being more attentive regarding the environmental impacts of the initiative and China has given more importance to the environmental impact of the initiative and the country is making efforts to meet the environmental regulations of the EU by introducing technologies to safeguard the marine habitat.¹⁹⁷

Regarding the initiative's impact on bilateral relations, the foreign scholar's opinions are controversial: on one hand, the BRI is believed to being able to boost trade and encourage the development of industrialization in emergent nations, but, on the other hand, scholars believe the BRI could deepen trade imbalances in favour of China, which in turn could

¹⁹⁴ Cao Mingchun, Alon Ilan, “Intellectual Structure of the Belt and Road Initiative Research: A Scientometric Analysis and Suggestions for a Future Research Agenda”, *Sustainability*, MDPI, Vol. 12 No. 17, 2020, pp. 1-40, URL: <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/17/6901> (accessed on July 1, 2022)

¹⁹⁵ Cao Mingchun, Alon Ilan, “Intellectual Structure of the Belt and Road Initiative Research: A Scientometric Analysis and Suggestions for a Future Research Agenda”, *Sustainability*, MDPI, Vol. 12 No. 17, 2020, pp. 1-40, URL: <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/17/6901> (accessed on July 1, 2022)

¹⁹⁶ Schulhof Vera, van Vuuren Detlef, Kirchherr Julian, “The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): What Will it Look Like in the Future?”, *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, Vol. 175, 2022, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121306> (accessed on July 2, 2022)

¹⁹⁷ Thees Hannes, “Towards Local Sustainability of Mega Infrastructure: Reviewing Research on the New Silk Road”, *Sustainability*, MDPI, Vol. 12 No. 14, 2020, URL: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su122410612> (accessed on July 2, 2022)

increase its political and economic influence in foreign countries.¹⁹⁸ Another aspect of the BRI that has received attention from international scholars are the Chinese investments; scholars have found that Chinese OFDI's direction and size depend on the geographical distance and on the willingness of the foreign country to take part in the BRI ; furthermore, better-performing Chinese firms tend to invest in BRI countries, but their productivity is relatively low.¹⁹⁹ Chinese OFDI face a challenge that has been studied by Western scholars, namely that the lack of political stability in foreign countries, regional tensions and conflicts, institutional and cultural differences between partner countries. However, the BRI is believed to have the possibility of bringing numerous opportunities, such as financial integration, an increase in people-to-people exchanges, infrastructure development.²⁰⁰

In conclusion, the Chinese government has attached great importance to the BRI, which has obtained considerable public interest and attention in academic studies, both in China and in various foreign countries. However, by comparing the Chinese official narrative about the Belt and Road Initiative and the Western literature about the project, it is possible to see two quite different attitudes. On one hand, in official speeches and documents, the Chinese leadership describes the initiative as an open, inclusive and successful project capable of overcoming the potential challenges, with the final aim of bring benefits to all the parties involved. On the other hand, the international literature, while depicting the positive results the BRI could bring to the involved parties, tends to be more critical and to underline the potential risks the project could face in various fields.

¹⁹⁸ Ermolaeva Liubov, Kalinin Alexey, Korovkin Vladimir, Nefedov Konstantin, Panibratov Andrei, Selivanovskikh Louisa, Zhang Yugui, "The belt and road initiative: a systematic literature review and future research agenda", *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 63 No. 1, 2022, pp. 82-115, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2020.1857288> (accessed on July 3, 2022)

¹⁹⁹ Ermolaeva Liubov, Kalinin Alexey, Korovkin Vladimir, Nefedov Konstantin, Panibratov Andrei, Selivanovskikh Louisa, Zhang Yugui, "The belt and road initiative: a systematic literature review and future research agenda", *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 63 No. 1, 2022, pp. 82-115, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2020.1857288> (accessed on July 3, 2022)

²⁰⁰ Ermolaeva Liubov, Kalinin Alexey, Korovkin Vladimir, Nefedov Konstantin, Panibratov Andrei, Selivanovskikh Louisa, Zhang Yugui, "The belt and road initiative: a systematic literature review and future research agenda", *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 63 No. 1, 2022, pp. 82-115, URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2020.1857288> (accessed on July 3, 2022)

Chapter 4: The Belt and Road Initiative: a systematic literature review

4.1 Methods of the research

As previously stated, in the last few years, the Belt and Road Initiative has received broad attention from both the Chinese government, which has issued various official documents and has given numerous speeches about the initiative, and from the international literature, through the publication of several analysis and studies. Additionally, since its first introduction in 2013, the project has been discussed and investigated in depth in the Chinese literature produced by scholars, who have covered various segments and aspects of the BRI.

In order to thoroughly understand the Chinese academic world's attitudes and judgment of the project, an analysis of various scholarly articles has been conducted. Due to the large number of Chinese academic articles and papers available regarding the BRI, the method that appeared as the most suitable for the research was a systematic literature review. This kind of investigation constitutes of an organized analysis of a sample of selected materials that must possess specific characteristics, that must be defined before conducting the review and that can be useful to reach the research's objectives and aims. The systematic literature review represents a useful method of analysis to investigate, examine and critically summarize the relevant literature previously developed by other authors about a certain topic, obtaining an accurate interpretation and avoiding misreporting.

Therefore, to achieve an impartial and reliable assessment about the Chinese academic literature, a systematic literature review was carried out between February and April 2022. To reduce bias and to conduct a precise review, the methods used for both the collection of data and for the resulting analysis were defined in advance by creating a research protocol, which was consequently used as a guide throughout the entire process. The research protocol represents a detailed plan made of various steps to follow in order to study and analyse the research questions. Therefore, the creation of a specific methodology represented a crucial step of this analysis, which can be divided in three main phases:

1. The analysis began with the with the identification of the research's objective, including the aims of the review and the research questions. Furthermore, in this

stage of the review process, the methods for conducting the research process were identified and the eligibility criteria was outlined.

2. The research was conducted by identifying the papers that met the selection criteria that was previously established; the relevant literature was identified, read, appraised and summarized.
3. Lastly, the data extracted from the selected academic articles through the research process was analysed and interpreted. The recurring themes that emerged in the chosen literature were delineated and a discussion about them was conducted.

Regarding the first step of the outlined research protocol, the main goal of this systematic literature review is the identification of the principal areas and topics of the Belt and Road Initiative that have been covered in the Chinese academic literature. Furthermore, great attention is given to the potential critical aspects of the project described in the Chinese articles.

Before conducting the analysis, it was useful to clearly define the research questions that had to be answered. This study aims at responding to the following questions:

1. What are the main topics regarding the BRI analysed in the Chinese academic articles?
2. How have the topics analysed in the Chinese academic articles about the BRI changed through the years?
3. Do these Chinese academic articles present critical aspects about the BRI?
4. If they do, what are the main critics underlined in the academic articles? Have they changed through the years?

In addition, given the fact that the BRI has been discussed in a numerous number of articles, it was necessary to define a specific criterion for selecting the relevant academic papers for this literature review. Therefore, in the first stage of the systematic literature review, the research methods were developed to ensure that the selected academic articles could satisfy the requirements needed. The research methods include two different components: the search strategy and the selection criteria.²⁰¹

In order to identify the documents relevant to the research questions, the search strategy identifies the databases or other sources on which the research must be conducted, the

²⁰¹ MSKTC, “Guide for Developing a Protocol for Conducting Literature Reviews”, URL: <https://msktc.org/guide-developing-protocol-conducting-literature-reviews> (accessed on July 16, 2022)

keywords and other criteria to use during the analysis.²⁰² The search strategy of this systematic literature review included:

- Search database: when delineating the methods of the research, the first step taken was the adoption of a search database. The documents had to be published on *Zhongguo zhi wang* 中国知网, China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), one of the largest and most updated databases for Chinese journals in the world. Therefore, CNKI can be considered a reliable source of studies, which can provide a high number of BRI-related academic articles.
- Search criteria: due to the focus of this study, a classification filter was applied during the research on CNKI. In order to be selected, the academic articles could belong to the following sections present on the searched database: “Architecture/ Energy / Traffic/ Electromechanics, etc.”, “Agriculture”, “Medicine and Public Health”, “Politics/ Military Affairs/Law”, “Education and Social Sciences”, “Electronic Technology & Information Science”, “Economics and Management”. Therefore, being less relevant to the research questions “Mathematics/ Physics/ Mechanics/ Astronomy”, “Chemistry/Metallurgy/Mine Industry”, “Literature/ History/ Philosophy” sections present in the CNKI database were excluded. The decision to limit the research to these subject areas was made because of their suitability to this review’s scope.
- Keywords: given the fact that often specific words or expressions were not present or different words were used to identify the BRI in the academic articles, in order to obtain the majority of academic articles available, various terms regarding the BRI were used in the research process to find the appropriate articles. Therefore, the next step of the review was the identification of the keywords that would be used to search the articles. The academic articles had to feature both as the subject and in the title, keyword and abstract of the paper one of the following searching words: *Yidai yilu* 一带一路, literally meaning “One Belt, One Road”, the Chinese official name of the Belt and Road Initiative, *Xin sichou zhi lu* 新丝绸之路, the New Silk Road, *Luse sichou zhi lu* 绿色丝绸之路, Green Silk Road, *Jiankang si*

²⁰² MSKTC, “Guide for Developing a Protocol for Conducting Literature Reviews”, URL: <https://msktc.org/guide-developing-protocol-conducting-literature-reviews> (accessed on July 16, 2022)

lu 健康丝路, Health Silk Road, *Shuzi sichou zhi lu* 数字丝绸之路, Digital Silk Road.

Consequently, the selection criteria were identified. The development of the selection criteria aims at establishing certain characteristics that the documents used in the review must possess. Selection criteria are made of inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria, both used to determine the articles that must be included in the review.²⁰³ Therefore, these criteria have to be defined before the research process, in order to quickly eliminate those document that do not present the needed characteristics. These attributes may include the type of document, the language used, the date of publication and other characteristics.

The selection criteria of this study were made of the following key components:

- Language: during the research process, a language filter was applied. Due to the aims of this systematic literature review, only articles written in Chinese were selected.
- Publication date: regarding the dates of publication, because the proposal of the BRI by the Chinese President Xi Jinping dates back to 2013 and, therefore, no relevant article written before this date exists, the research contains academic articles ranging from that year until April 2022, given the fact that the research process finished at the end of that month and, consequently, articles published after that date could not be analysed. Therefore, the temporal boundaries of the research did not exclude any year in which the initiative was implemented.
- Type of publication: to guarantee the quality of the research, only articles published on journals were selected, excluding other types of publications, such as books or chapters of books, thesis and dissertations, conference proceedings, monographic serials.

4.2 The research process and information gathering

After identifying the research methods, during the second step of the review process, a search was conducted on the CNKI database in order to identify and select the academic

²⁰³ MSKTC, “Guide for Developing a Protocol for Conducting Literature Reviews”, URL: <https://msktc.org/guide-developing-protocol-conducting-literature-reviews> (accessed on July 16, 2022)

articles that fulfilled the above-mentioned characteristics. Given that the BRI has obtained great attention from the Chinese academic world, a considerable number of articles about the initiative was published on CNKI. During the research process, the CNKI database produced an initial sample of potentially relevant articles formed by more than 6,000 papers. However, after applying the mentioned criteria and eliminating the papers that were taken more than once due to the different searched words, the number of articles was reduced. In addition, articles that were not pertaining to the research questions or papers that were not implicitly focusing on the BRI and, therefore, out of this research's scope were manually excluded during the literature scanning. For example, academic articles concerning foreign countries' perceptions of the project, in which the BRI only had a minor role in the analysis, or papers that did not discuss the initiative, but that only mentioned it were excluded due to their non-pertinence to the previously mentioned objectives. Furthermore, due to the numerous amounts of articles present in the CNKI database, the research was conducted by firstly analysing the most cited papers in the complete period of time, between 2013 and 2022. At the same time, in order to obtain a sample of articles that could include all the years included in the research, the most cited articles per year were analysed.

Consequently, the titles and abstracts of the articles were primarily examined in order to verify whether they could be coherent to the topic that is being reviewed and to check the presence of words or phrases connected to the research's scope and questions. Because some articles' abstracts and titles already proved to be non-pertinent to the review, this analysis proved to be helpful to instantly eliminate these articles. During this part of the analysis, some papers, which at first were considered appropriate for the research based on their titles and abstracts, had to be excluded because they were not accessible on the CNKI database. Furthermore, some articles with titles and abstracts considered appropriate were excluded after the entire text was examined because it was not relevant to the research questions.

After this analysis, a final sample made of 200 academic articles was selected. These academic articles were integrally read and analysed to determine the subjects of the papers; subsequently, the outcome of the analysis was chartered to create a database. As shown in Appendix 1, the information collected for each article in this initial chart included: the year of publication, the author or authors, the article's title, the name of the source in which it was published and the number of citations the article received until April 2022. Furthermore, the main topics analysed in each paper were added to the chart and, in order

to examine the negative characteristics of the BRI that were analysed in the Chinese academic literature, these critical aspects were also mapped.

In conclusion, in the third phase of the review, a descriptive analysis of the information gathered during the analysis was carried out to answer the research questions.

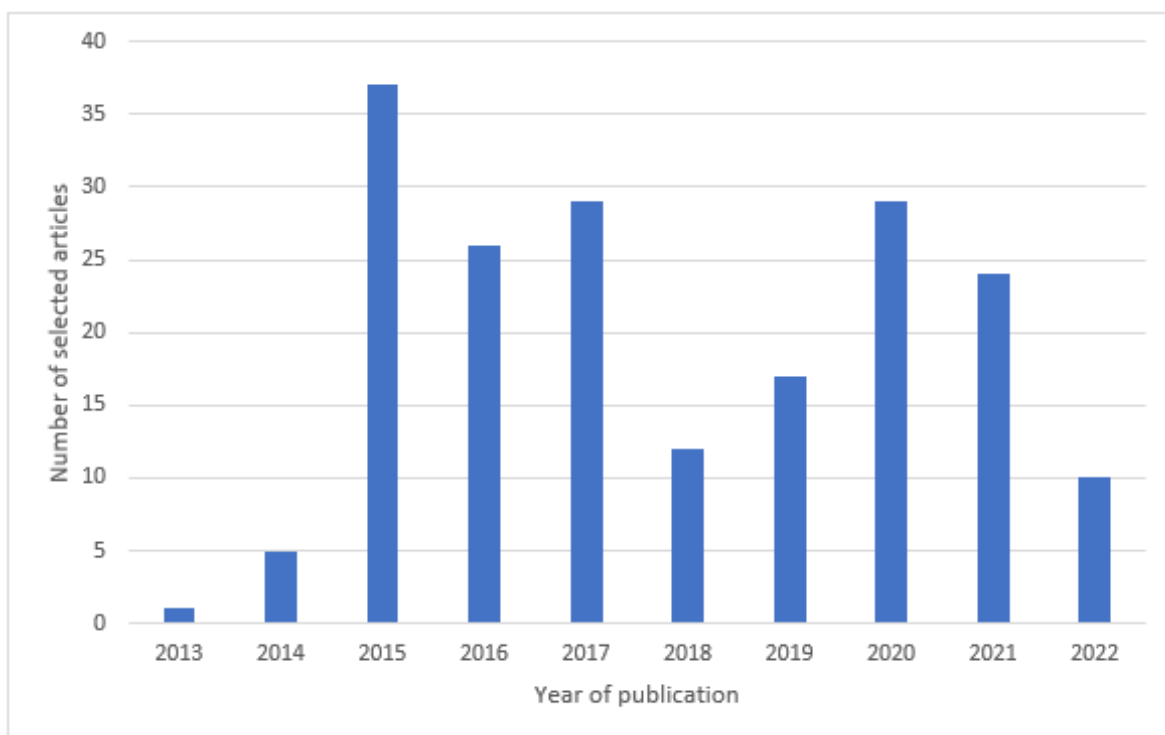
4.3 General characteristics of the selected articles

Before addressing the research questions, some of the general characteristics of the selected academic articles are introduced.

4.3.1 Year of publication

Given that the project was launched almost a decade ago, in order to better comprehend whether the Chinese academic literature about the Belt and Road Initiative has changed through the years, this study's sample includes several articles for every year in the selected time span. As shown in Graph 4.1, the number of available papers published on CNKI and included in the systematic literature review, has hugely increased from 2015, two years after its announcement. It is interesting to notice that in that year the Chinese government formulated and published the initiative's action plan; therefore, the implementation of the BRI began. The number of articles selected in the following years has been quite stable, with a particular focus on the years characterized by the burst of the Covid-19 pandemic, in order to better comprehend how this event has been analysed in the Chinese academic literature. Clearly, the number of articles available in the year 2022 is not completely reliable because the research process ended in April 2022.

GRAPH 4.1: YEAR OF PUBLICATION OF ARTICLES INCLUDED IN THE SAMPLE



Source: Author’s elaboration

4.3.2 Number of citations

The number of citations that each article accumulated until April 2022 was added to the chart in order to measure the relative importance and impact of a paper by evaluating the number of times it has been cited in other works. The most cited articles of this research derive from various sources, such as *Guoji maoyi wenti* 国际贸易问题 (International trade issues), *Guoji wenti yanjiu* 国际问题研究 (International studies) and *Zhongguo liutong jingji* 中国流通经济 (China’s Economic Circulation). From this initial chart present in Appendix 1, it can be observed that the most cited article about the BRI analysed collected a total number of 677 citations until April 2022; the article, called “*Yidai yilu*” *guojia de maoyi bianli hua shuiping cesuan yu maoyi qianli yanjiu* “一带一路”国家的贸易便利化水平测算与贸易潜力研究 (Calculation of the level of trade facilitation and research of trade potential of countries along the “Belt and Road”) was published in 2015 on *Guoji maoyi wenti* 国际贸易问题 (International trade issues). Most of the articles that collected the major number of citations through the years were published between 2015 and 2017; therefore, the BRI started to attract more attention

from the academic world since 2015, when the official action plan Vision and Actions was published and two years after its first announcement; instead, since 2018, the number of citations of the analysed works has considerably decreased. Most of the analysed articles that were published more recently have received less attention and some of the ones published in the last couple of years have not yet been cited. However, it is important to consider that the small number of citations that these articles have received can also be a consequence of their recent publication.

4.3.3 Selected articles' sources of publication

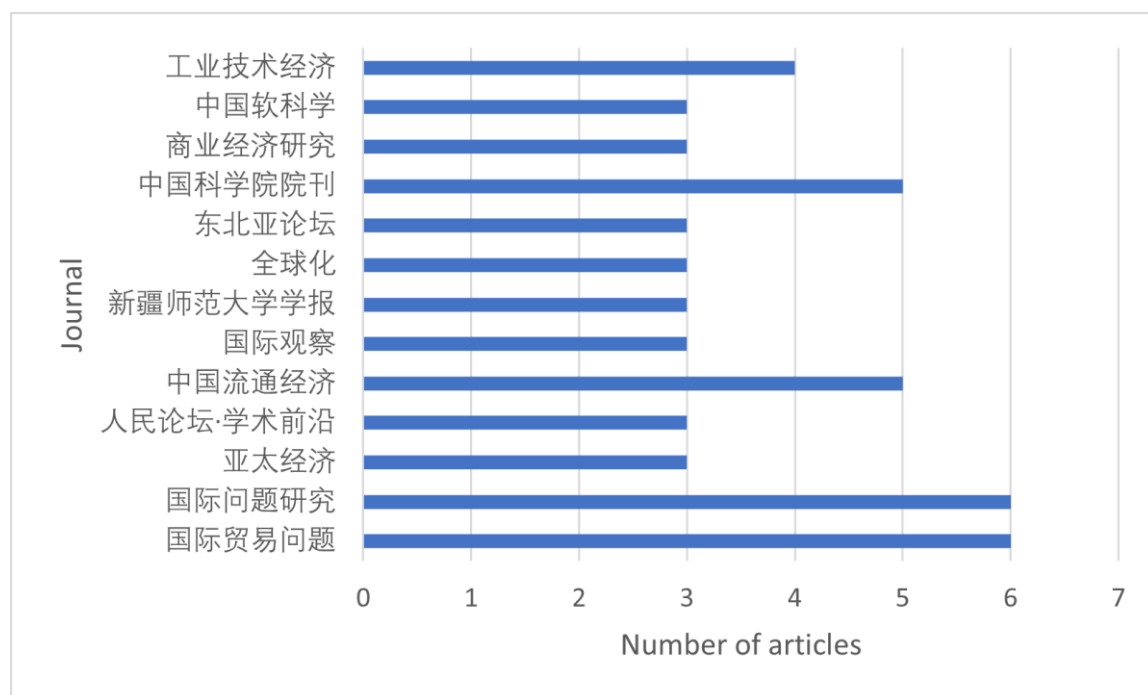
Regarding the sources, all the selected articles were published on scientific journals. During the research, it was possible to identify 140 distinct academic journals that had issued the 200 articles analysed; many of these journals are universities' periodicals, such as *Yunnan shifan daxue xuebao* 云南师范大学学报 (Journal of Yunnan Normal University), or *Zhongyang minzu daxue xuebao* 中央民族大学学报 (Journal of Minzu University of China). It is important to note that the Chinese government has a powerful influence on the country's institutions and media; therefore, it also oversees the academic journals and the publications that have been analysed in this review. For instance, among the ones that issued more of the analysed papers, *Guoji maoyi wenti* 国际贸易问题 (International Trade Issue) published six of the examined articles; this academic journal is published under the supervision of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China²⁰⁴; therefore, it is not exempt of restrictions on the articles it publishes. Similarly, *Guoji guan cha* 国际观察 (International Observation), which issued three of the analysed articles, is an academic journal sponsored by the Shanghai International Studies University and supervised by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China.²⁰⁵ In Graph 4.2, it is possible to examine the journals that have published a higher number of the selected academic articles; note that, due to the huge amount of journals,

²⁰⁴ *Guoji maoyi wenti* 国际贸易问题 (International Trade Issue), *Baidu Baike* 百度百科 (Baidu Encyclopaedia), URL: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%9B%BD%E9%99%85%E8%B4%B8%E6%98%93%E9%97%AE%E9%A2%98/4334622> (accessed on July 9, 2022)

²⁰⁵ *Guoji guan cha* 国际观察 (International Observations), *Baidu Baike* 百度百科 (Baidu Encyclopaedia), URL: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%9B%BD%E9%99%85%E8%A7%82%E5%AF%9F/799476> (accessed on July 9, 2022)

only the ones that have published at least three of the selected articles related to the BRI have been represented.

GRAPH 4.2: PUBLICATION JOURNALS (ONLY JOURNALS WITH AT LEAST 3 BRI ARTICLES ARE PRESENTED)



Source: Author's elaboration

4.4 Main topics discussed in the Chinese academic articles

The first step taken during the analysis of the two hundred selected Chinese academic articles published on the CNKI database was the identification of the topics discussed in each paper. Through this examination, seven main topics were identified, namely international trade and foreign direct investments (FDI), cultural and people-to-people exchanges, infrastructures' construction, the development of the tourism industry, the Green Silk Road, the Digital Silk Road and the Health Silk Road. Following the identification of these topics, the articles have been charted in order to understand how often these found themes were examined in the selected articles and whether there has been a change in the number of times that they were analysed.

Overall, the Chinese academic articles have shown great interest and support towards the Belt and Road Initiative, which is thought to have the possibility of enhancing the

connections between China and the external world and to bring great possibilities of development, both for China and for foreign countries.

Most of the analysed articles have discussed the BRI's characteristics and its consequences from a national and international point of view; however, some of these papers have focused on specific areas and have described the development of the project in certain cities, provinces or regions and in various Special Economic Zones (SEZs) situated along the road. As previously discussed, the creation and use of these zones dates to the Deng Xiaoping era and had an important role in China's industrialization process; in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative, several SEZs have been proposed for enhancing more investments and economic cooperation, both in China and abroad. In the analysed articles, particular locations and some SEZs have been mentioned, as shown in Appendix 1. These papers have shown confidence towards the implementation of the BRI in the areas that have been discussed. Among the various areas and places that have been discussed, some examples include:

- The Hangzhou Cross-Border E-Commerce Comprehensive Pilot Zone Area, mentioned in the articles by Liu and Zhang (2016)²⁰⁶ and by Wang et al. (2015)²⁰⁷. Cross-border e-commerce refers to international commercial transactions that take on the Internet; therefore, the creation of this pilot zone aimed at increasing foreign trade using favourable policies in various sectors, such as taxes, logistics and custom clearance. According to the 2016 article by Liu and Zhang, in order to improve the development of cross-border e-commerce, shipping must be done

²⁰⁶ Liu Xiaojun, Zhang Bin, *Woguo yu "Yidai yilu" yanxian guojia kua jing dian shang wuliu de xiezuozuo fazhan* 我国与“一带一路”沿线国家跨境电商物流的协作发展 (The Study of Collaborative Development of Cross-border E-commerce Logistics in Countries along the Belt and Road), China Business and Market, 2016, URL: <https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2016&filename=ZGLT201605016&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=1B-zgUFt80rjLWJz287V61HZpDL0C29qEFvApWmtMwoVaiJ4aWz0ncneX-y1jyOC> (accessed on April 3, 2022)

²⁰⁷ Wang et al., *"Yidai yilu" zhanlue shishi yu guoji jinrong zhichi zhanlue gouxiang* “一带一路”战略实施与国际金融支持战略构想 ("One Belt One Road" Strategy Implementation and International Financial Support Strategy Concept), Intertrade, 2015, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2015&filename=GJMY201504008&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=Cn19GQtr0gm-BB_j_oZCthD4OHJwAs3KYd0_f7T4Vejb1VF53dLy1Uu1NpFsynP (accessed on April 19, 2022)

through various modes of transportation and specific warehouses must be developed.

- The Guangdong province, which has been analysed by Zhang (2015)²⁰⁸, Cao, Wu and Li (2021)²⁰⁹, Pei and Yu (2015)²¹⁰ and He (2022)²¹¹. These articles have examined the implementation of the BRI in the Guangdong province, where a Free Trade Area was developed. According to these articles, owing to the new project, the province can further increase its trading relations with foreign countries.
- Foreign countries, such as Cambodia. Qin and Wei (2018)²¹² have discussed the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative in the Sihanoukville Special

²⁰⁸ Zhang Liangwei, “*Yidai yilu*” *zhanlu xia de guoji maoyi yu guoji wuliu xietong fenxi* “一带一路”战略下的国际贸易与国际物流协同分析 (Synergy Analysis of International Trade and International Logistics under “One Belt, One Road” Strategy: Case Study from Guangdong Province), Finance & Economics, 2015, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2015&filename=CJKX201507010&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=Sqlz2fYF-ke64734VcvtojdtGNuosuDn7WbQQr4wxzUJdo3f_EutV9vF9TsTX3wN (accessed on April 20, 2022)

²⁰⁹ Cao Yinhua, Wu Wenjie, Li Ao “*Yidai yilu*” *zhanlue xia de guoji maoyi yu guoji wuliu xietong fenxi* “一带一路”倡议下广东省国际贸易与国际物流协同发展研究 (Research on Coordinated Development of International Trade and International Logistics in Guangdong Province under the Belt and Road Initiative), China Journal of Commerce, 2021, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2021&filename=ZGSM202101042&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=bq8-7dx9q9KBCU7JpM2H9FntiiMZ5aj1WHt2khU_JiawonIFZWTQmmaTHtSGUs32 (accessed on March 30, 2022)

²¹⁰ Pei Changhong, Yu Yan “*Yidai yilu*” *jianshe yu woguo kuoda kaifang* “一带一路”建设与中国扩大开放 (“One Belt and One Road” Construction and the Further Opening-up of China), International Economics and Trade Research, 2015, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2015&filename=GJTS201510001&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=L5OI9xAA8UWi0U5fllr3uTVAvA12nndCtz4vC3BShPaGZ7c6iNKvDCutl2gtI0o_ (accessed on April 3, 2022)

²¹¹ He Limei, “*Yidai yilu*” *beijing xia waishang zhijie touzi dui Guangdong chanye jiegou shengji de yingxiang yanjiu* “一带一路”背景下外商直接投资对广东产业结构升级的影响研究 (Research on the impact of foreign direct investment on the upgrading of Guangdong's industrial structure under the "One Belt and One Road"), China Collective Economy, 2022, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2022&filename=ZJTG202201011&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=INC_VMuNLrfuePGapJzVwWHfXexgcFLAsPF_NtFUV3IpGG-t1VzKvk5QVK_ve8k (accessed on March 28, 2022)

²¹² Qin Yaqing, Wei Ling, *Xinxing quanqiu zhili guan yu “Yidai yilu” hezuo shijian* 新型全球治理观与“一带一路”合作实践 (A new concept of global governance and the practice of "One Belt, One Road" cooperation), Foreign Affairs Review, 2018, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2018&filename=WJXY201802001&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=7ZvgyLchwFG5p1gzIGIkEg1HIJuwguwPLcDwj4jPScMDahqRMT_aEmHB6pgKRuDL (accessed on April 22, 2022)

Economic Zone in Cambodia, built by Chinese and Cambodian **private** enterprises. In the same manner as others SEZs, it aims at creating an overall better environment for international investments.

Both the articles that referred to a specific area and the ones that referred to the BRI in general were classified based on the main topics presented. In Table 1, the above-mentioned main topics of each paper were chartered and the selected academic articles were divided in four different sections. The scholarly papers in the first section were published between 2013 and 2015; during the first year, given the fact that the Belt and Road Initiative was firstly proposed in September 2013, the number of published articles is not very considerable and, according to the selection criteria, only one article issued in 2013 was identified. The number of published articles in the two following years has increased and, therefore, also the number of selected papers has increased. The articles in the second sections were published on CNKI between 2016 and 2017; the number of the selected papers has hugely grown during these years, which represent the beginning of the implementation phase of the project, after the publication of the Vision and Actions. In the third sections, the academic articles were issued between 2018 and 2019; the number of selected articles belonging to these years is consistent. The last section includes articles published between 2020 and 2022, the choice to put together these articles was determined by the fact that all these articles were published during the Covid-10 pandemic, and therefore all of them assess the consequences of the pandemic and the possible future perspective for the BRI. In order to chart the selected academic articles, due to the numerous amounts of papers, the authors' names have been used, accompanied by the year in which each article was published. For further information about the articles, check the table available in Appendix 1, in which, apart from the names and years of publication, further information is available. In the following Table 4.1, the names highlighted in bold represent the authors of those articles that have examined more than one topic; therefore, those names can be found various times in the table.

TABLE 4.1: MAIN TOPICS PRESENTED IN THE SELECTED ARTICLES

	Trade and FDI	Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	Infrastructures' construction	Tourism development	Green Silk Road	Digital Silk Road	Health Silk Road
2013-2015	Kong, Dong (2015); Yuan (2014); Jin (2015); Zhang, Li (2015); Tan (2015); Ruan (2014); Guan (2014); Liao (2015); Zhang L. (2015); Zhou (2015); Chu, Gao (2015); Sheng, Yu, Yue (2015); He et al. (2015); Wang, Li	Zhao (2015); He, Zhang (2013); Shi, Tang (2014); Ming (2015); Wang, Zheng (2015); Sheng, Yu, Yue (2015); He et al. (2015); Tian, Cao (2015); Zheng (2015); Hua (2015); Zhang X. (2015)	Wang et al. (2015); Zhang M. (2015); Zhao, Sun, Zhang (2015); Wang G. (2015); Ba, Zhu (2015); Zhao, Sun, Zhang (2015); Dai, Xie (2015); Cai (2015); Zhang X. (2015); Liu Y. (2015)	Wang, Zheng (2015); Sheng, Yu, Yue (2015); Zheng (2015); Fu, Li (2015); Liu L. (2015)	Wang, Zheng (2015); Liu L. (2015)	Suo, Dong (2015)	

<p>(2015); Yang, Du (2015); Wang W. (2015); Wang et al. (2015); Hu (2015); Pei, Yu (2015); Wang M. (2015); Zhao, Sun, Zhang (2015); Song (2015); Wang G. (2015); Ma (2015); Ba, Zhu (2015); Di (2015); Suo, Dong (2015); Zhou (2014); Zhang X. (2015); Liu L. (2015)</p>							
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2016-2017	<p>Sun, Zhang, Liu (2017); Zhang (2017); Liu, Zhang (2016); Zhang (2017); Liu, Zhang (2016); Liu, Gao (2016); Yu, Gu (2016); Sun, Liu (2016); Li et al. (2017); Meng Qi (2016); Han, Jiang (2017); Sun, Yang (2016); Zhang, Fan (2016); Wei (2017); Liu, Ge, Zhao (2017); Ni, Wang, Jing (2016);</p>	<p>Kui (2016); Xie (2016); Li S. (2016); Xing (2016); Zheng, Liu (2016); Wang, Wang (2016); Zhang, Ke (2016); He, Zheng (2017); Xu (2017); Ji, Xu, Wang (2017); Li, Zheng, Ma (2017); Yang, Gan, Shen (2017); Qian (2017); Xiang (2017); Sun (2017)</p>	<p>Zhang (2017); Liu, Zhang (2016); Yu, Gu (2016); Chang (2016); Zheng (2016); Chen, Wang (2017)</p>	<p>Guo, Xiao (2016); Dong et al. (2016); Huang H. (2016); Zou (2017); Bai, Aimaitijiang, Deng (2017); Qian (2017)</p>	<p>Hu (2016); Dong et al. (2016); Cheng et al. (2016); He, Zheng (2017); Sun (2017)</p>	<p>Guo, Xiao (2016); Xiang (2017);</p>	<p>Kong (2017); Sun (2017)</p>
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	<p>Zhou (2016); Chang (2016); Huang, Starostin (2016); Zhao et al. (2016); Fang (2016); Li S. (2016); He (2016); Huang Y. (2016); Du (2016); Meng Qingqiang (2016); Sun, Li (2016); Cheng et al. (2016); Chu (2016); Zhang (2016); Lan, Jiang (2016); Zhao, Li, Yao (2016); Liu Z.</p>						
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	(2016); Yang, Gao (2017); Liu W. (2017); Feng, Jiang (2017); Li M. (2017); Song (2017); Liao, Li, Cheng (2017); Chen, Jiang, Wang (2017); Si, Zhou (2017); Sun, Suo, Zheng (2017); Cheng (2017); Yang, Gan, Shen (2017); Zhang, Zhang (2017)						
2018- 2019	Jiang (2018);	Qin, Wei (2018); Li	Qin, Wei (2018); Sun, Su		Liu, Xin (2018);	Huang (2019);	Ao, Sun

Chen, Liu (2018); Qin, Wei (2018); He, Xu (2018); Di, You (2018); Liu, Xin (2018); Li, Xu (2018); Peng, Lin (2018); Sun, Su (2018); Lang (2018); Wang, Dan, Wang (2018); Liu, Li (2018); Li D. (2019) ; Wang, Tan (2019); Fan, Wang, Li (2019); Bie, Qi (2019); An, Xin (2019);	D. (2019) ; Yu (2019)	(2018); Wang, Sun (2019)		Wang, Yan (2019); The Joint Research Group of the "Green Belt & Road" Project of ICBC and Tsinghua Universit y (2019)	Chai, Dong (2019)	(2019); Li H. (2019)
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	Zhang (2019); Wang, Yan (2019); Liu et al. (2019); Wang, Si, Zeng (2019); Chai, Dong (2019); Wen, Hu, Cheng (2019)						
2020- 2022	Xing, Shi, Lu (2020); Wu, Wu (2020); Ni (2020); Guo (2020); Zhi (2020); Li, Li (2020); Wang, Zhang (2020); Dai, Wang (2020); Wang, Cheng,	Wang, Cheng, Liu (2020); Dai, Chen (2020); Jiang, Wu (2020); Wang, Li (2020); Zeng (2020); Liu W. (2021); Zheng (2021); Ding (2021); Zheng, Lin	Ni (2020); Zheng, Lin (2022); Cong, Li (2022)	Ding (2021); Wang, Liu, Guo (2021)	Wang, Zhang (2020); The Study Group of the Belt and Road Green Index of ICBC (2020); Zhou, Zhao, Yang (2020); Jiang,	Jiang, Wu (2020); Ou, Ren (2020); Zhou (2020); Ren T. (2020); Wang, Li (2020); Ren Y. (2020); Xiao,	Shi, Ma (2020); Jiang, Wu (2020); Ou, Ren (2020); Zhou (2020); Ji (2020); Wen (2020); Lan, Huang (2020);

	<p>Liu (2020); Zhou (2020); Zhang, Yan, Tang (2020); Ji (2020); Wen (2020); Xu (2020); Zhou, Jiang (2020); Li (2020); Xiao, Song (2021); Peng, Lin (2021); Duan et al. (2021); Zhou et al. (2021); Fang, Song (2021); Li, Shen (2021); Shang, Zhao (2021); Cao, Wu,</p>	<p>(2022); Wang, Liu, Guo (2021); Zeng, Luo (2022)</p>			<p>Wu (2020); Zhou (2020); Xiao (2020); Lan, Huang (2020); Xiao, Song (2021); Yu, Wang (2021); Guo, Zhang (2021); Sun, Zhang (2021); Chen (2021); Yang Y. (2022); Zheng, Lin (2022); Du, Ma (2022); Yang Z. Cong, Li</p>	<p>Song (2021); Ji (2020); Ye (2021); Yang T. (2021); Liu, Zhu (2021); Chen (2021); Wang, Liu, Guo (2021); Chen, Wang, Liu, Cheng (2021); Zheng, Lin (2022); Yang Z. (2022)</p>	<p>Qiu, Jiang (2020); Xiao, Song (2021); Chen (2021); Wang, Liu, Guo (2021); Cong, Li (2022); Zeng, Luo (2022); Guo (2022)</p>
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Li (2021); Ding (2021); Liu, Zhu (2021); Wang, Liu, Guo (2021); Hu (2021); Cao, Hu (2021); Chen, Yi (2021); Liu B. (2021); Chen, Liu, Cheng (2021); Zheng, Lin (2022); Wang (2022); He (2022); Xiong, Lin (2022)					(2022); Guo (2022)		
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Source: Author's elaboration

As shown in Table 4.1, the Chinese authors' interests about the Belt and Road Initiative have changed through the years since its implementation. During the review, it was possible to notice that the sector that has been more stable in the analysis conducted by Chinese scholars through the years has been Trade and FDI. This does not represent a

surprise, given that among the aims of the project, as described by the Chinese leadership, there is the desire to help foreign countries economically develop and the ambition to reach mutually beneficial results; therefore, it appears as necessary to financially aid these less developed foreign nations and to establish connections and exchanges that can benefit all the parties involved. Another sector of the BRI that has been fairly analysed during the years regards the creation of people-to-people, cultural and academic exchanges, which represent also a goal set by the Chinese leadership in official documents and speeches. Instead, a sector that has received less attention in recent years compared to the previous ones concerns the building of infrastructures; this also represents one of the main goals that the Chinese government has established and it has guided the implementation of the project. On the contrary, three sectors that have seen a substantial growth, especially after the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, are represented by the Green Silk Road, the Digital Silk Road, and the Health Silk Road. As previously discussed and as also affirmed by the Chinese government, due to the consequences of the pandemic, these three sectors represent a future path for the development of the BRI. Another sector that has been analysed by Chinese scholar, but that has received less attention compared to the other sections of the BRI is represented by the development of the tourism industry; in fact, as a consequence of a greater connection between the places and people in the regions involved, the project is believed to have the possibility of developing and improving the tourism in these areas.

In order to better comprehend how these topics have been examined in the selected scholarly articles, a brief presentation of each of them will be provided.

4.4.1 Trade and FDI

The topic that has been most comprehensively analysed in the selected academic articles is represented by international trade between China and the countries involved in the initiative and the Chinese FDI in foreign countries, which have been examined in most of the chosen papers. Regarding the type of analysis conducted in these scholarly papers that studied international trade and FDI, the majority of the articles used quantitative methods to conceptually examine the potential benefits that the Belt and Road Initiative could bring to the improvement of trade relations and investments in foreign countries. During the analysis, a recurrent theme that has emerged has been the possibility, brought by the BRI, of speeding up the flow of investments and of trade, benefiting the countries

involved. Overall, the implementation of the BRI is considered as favourable for the further development of the economic exchanges. For instance, according to the article “*Yidai yilu*” *zhanlue mianlin de zhang'ai yu duice* “一带一路” 战略面临的障碍与对策 (Strategy of “One Belt and One Road” Confronted with Barriers and Countermeasures) published in 2015 by He et al.²¹³, Chinese companies can benefit from the initiative; the project is depicted as being a possibility for Chinese enterprises to accelerate the pace of going abroad and, therefore, participating in both international competition and cooperation. Furthermore, the BRI has been described as an integral part of China’s economic reform, capable of continuing the Reform and Opening Up project and of promoting the expansion of the Chinese interests abroad, including trade and FDI,²¹⁴ and of enlarging the possibilities of economic cooperation between China and foreign countries also in recent years, despite the challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic.²¹⁵

4.4.2 Cultural and People-to-people exchanges

Another topic that has received great academic attention in the articles that have been analysed is represented by the advancing and promotion of non-official contacts between the countries involved. The creation of cultural and people-to-people exchanges has been examined in about one fourth of the selected papers. As analysed in the previous chapters, the enhancement of personal exchanges represents one of the main goals set by the

²¹³ He et al., “*Yidai yilu*” *zhanlue mianlin de zhang'ai yu duice* “一带一路” 战略面临的障碍与对策 (Strategy of “One Belt and One Road” Confronted with Barriers and Countermeasures), Journal of Xinjiang Normal University (Edition of Philosophy and Social Sciences), 2015, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2015&filename=XJSF201503005&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=digDT8RFmb5MxqGboQ_0-cKD5Gk0y0Qcc_aqmk33NOltu7M4or7rXe-6QR3kjOEV (accessed on March 18, 2022)

²¹⁴ Lang Shuai, “*Yidai yilu*” *jianshe yu Zhongguo haiwai liyi weihu: nandin, yaodian he zhongdian* “一带一路” 建设与中国海外利益维护:难点、要点和重点 (“The Belt and Road” Construction and China’s Overseas Interest Protection: Difficulties, Key-points and Priorities), Theory Monthly, 2018, URL: <https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2018&filename=LLYK201806028&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=lcQh-1QM4XOUfTCX7a2VB42NMQZtSm9gRUJhRDpCXNZp0nRa27WTjFUewd4lbe9> (accessed on March 18, 2022)

²¹⁵ Wang Yixian, Zhong’ou, “*Yidai yilu*” *jianshe hezuo lujing tan yi*” 中欧 “一带一路” 建设合作路径探赜 (A Deepening Study on the Cooperation Path of Sino-European “Belt and Road” Construction), Journal of Henan Institute of Science and Technology, 2022, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2022&filename=ZJXY202203006&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=G_LsW5LU3YkRZyrfnBOd61luVEC AacunKcMpyTQTxzOlNE25s5ZzXiqK5m8G5x_i (accessed on April 11, 2022)

Chinese leadership in the creation of the initiative. This aim of the project has been widely discussed in the selected scholarly papers, which have shown a positive attitude towards the possibility brought by the BRI of creating or increasing the exchanges between both the peoples of the nations involved in the project and between cultural associations and universities. During the analysis, it has emerged that Chinese scholars believe that the Belt and Road Initiative is able of building friendly exchanges, solidarity and mutual trust between the peoples of the countries involved; this collaboration between the populations is seen as essential also to reach the economic objectives.²¹⁶ Furthermore, during the examination of the selected papers, it has been possible to notice that, even if the measures taken in different countries to prevent the Covid-19 pandemic have brought a slowdown to international people-to-people exchanges and cooperation, Chinese scholars believe that the personal connections under the BRI have the possibility of expanding during the pandemic. In fact, in the article titled *Xiguan feiyan yiqing beijing xia de "Yidai yilu" minxin xiangtong jianshe* 新冠肺炎疫情背景下的“一带一路”民心相通建设 (Increasing the People's Connectivity for the "Belt and Road" Initiative in the Context of the Covid-19 Epidemic) by Jiang Li and Wu Zhicheng published in 2020 on Frontiers,²¹⁷ the authors have argued that, despite the profound impact that the pandemic brought to the construction of the BRI, progresses in people-to-people exchanges have taken place. According to Jiang and Wu, the pandemic allowed the peoples of the countries involved in the initiative to comprehend that the whole world is now facing the same problem; therefore, underling the ideas brought by the Chinese leadership of “community of common destiny”²¹⁸ and mutual cooperation. Furthermore, the authors assert that, in

²¹⁶ Yuan Xintao, “*Yidai yilu*” *jianshe de guojia zhanlue fenxi* “一带一路”建设的国家战略分析 (Analysis of the national strategy of "One Belt, One Road" construction), Theory Monthly, 2014, URL:

<https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2015&filename=LLYK201411002&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=YphhptdbGdNTw5KFEGJuFA-mrOVpy7EtG1VnPiiJMEVmitgdHH2UYE2-A-Jgvpxt> (accessed on March 15, 2022)

²¹⁷ Jiang Li, Wu Zhicheng, *Xiguan feiyan yiqing beijing xia de "Yidai yilu" minxin xiangtong jianshe* 新冠肺炎疫情背景下的“一带一路”民心相通建设 (Increasing the People's Connectivity for the "Belt and Road" Initiative in the Context of the Covid-19 Epidemic), Frontier, 2020, URL:

https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2021&filename=RMXS202021012&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=El0Ru0ZYww_5GqmeCrMrSWTLZD-mf0gI8mQ5QfWnvdNDJB0oEPtt_kmVavVgYlc (accessed on March 13, 2022)

²¹⁸ “*Zhongguo-dongmeng zhongxin*” 中国—东盟中心 (ASEAN-China Centre), (2013), “Speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Indonesian Parliament, URL: http://www.asean-china-center.org/english/2013-10/03/c_133062675.htm (accessed on June 20, 2022)

order to contrast the potential negative impact generated by the pandemic and the negative attitudes that people in foreign countries may have towards China and the BRI, the Chinese government should carry out more in-depth people-to-people cooperation and should strengthen exchanges between social organizations, political parties and media.

4.4.3 Infrastructures' construction

As mentioned by the Chinese President Xi Jinping in the speeches given to introduce the Belt and Road Initiative and as stated in the action plan known as the Vision and Actions, one of the main priorities of the implementation of the project is represented by the development and improvement of the cross-border transportation infrastructure between China and the foreign countries involved in the initiative. This goal is present in the academic articles that have been analysed during this research, but, through the various years that have been examined, the Chinese scholars have shown less interest towards this objective, which has been analysed in about one tenth of the articles. The successful development of various infrastructures needed to continue to deepen and promote the interconnection between the countries involved has been underlined in the analysed articles, including railways, ports and bridges, but also cross-border optical cables, oil and gas pipelines.

For instance, in *Hou yiqing shidai "yidai yilu" hezuo fazhan yanjiu* 后疫情时代“一带一路”合作发展研究 (Studying the cooperation and development of the Belt and Road Initiative in the postpandemic times) written by Zhou Jing and published on Academic Exchanges in 2020²¹⁹, the author highlights the fruitful building of infrastructures in the railway system that connects China to Europe; in fact, since the BRI was firstly proposed in 2013, the number of trains connecting these two poles has hugely increased.

Furthermore, in the selected articles, it has been highlighted that, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, some large-scale infrastructures constructions have been postponed or have

²¹⁸ The State Council (2015), Full text: Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, URL: http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm#:~:text=The%20Belt%20and%20Road%20Initiative%20is%20a%20way%20for%20win,and%20strenghening%20all%20around%20exchanges (accessed on June 4, 2022)

²¹⁹ Zhou Jing, *Hou yiqing shidai "yidai yilu" hezuo fazhan yanjiu* 后疫情时代“一带一路”合作发展研究 (Studying the Cooperation and Development of B & R Initiative in the Post-Epidemic Times), Academic Exchange, 2020, URL: <https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2020&filename=XSJL202008010&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=4poJaY1bgdbcl9cF0eqXg4LgRNSFIua9wGKBMFJNg1oNeBAXNTsPN9ZFLyzDQwgL> (accessed on March 14, 2022)

been suspended; however, it has also been underlined that the development of new infrastructures is still advancing.²²⁰

4.4.4 Tourism development

Although it did not receive the same attention as the sectors of the BRI discussed previously, the development of the tourism industry has been analysed in the academic articles that have been selected for this review. In particular, the development of connections and collaboration, both economic and interpersonal, between China and foreign countries is considered as a possibility for these areas to increase their tourism potential.

In particular, the “China Tourism Special Zone” in the Hainan province was analysed by Fu Ye-qin and Li Yong in the article “*Yidai yilu*” *zhanlue yu Hainan “Zhongguo luyou tequ” fazhan* “一带一路”战略与海南“中国旅游特区”发展²²¹ (Development of “China Tourism Special Zone” in Hainan Province for Responding to “One Belt and One Road” Initiative) published in 2015 on Tropical Geography. Hainan’s “China Tourism Special Zone” was proposed in the context of the BRI and its leading industry is represented by the tourism one. In the same manner as other Special Economic Zones, the development of a Tourism Special Zone in the Hainan province denotes the possibility for the companies present in the area of utilizing strategic preferential policies; the final goal, in this case, is the improvement of the levels of tourism management and service quality. According to this scholarly paper, the Hainan province could benefit from the Belt and Road Initiative to improve its tourism industry by improving the level of opening up to

²²⁰ Hu Zaiyong, *Xinguan feiyan yiqing dui “Yidai yilu” jianshe de yingxiang fenxi* 新冠肺炎疫情对“一带一路”建设的影响分析 (Analysis of the impact of the New Coronary Pneumonia outbreak on the "One Belt, One Road" construction), Times of Economy & Trade, 2021, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2021&filename=SDMJ202111008&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=5EnvavSR8UtqzWjyxbjicV_uG2TfVXfRQ-6xouz9KzYD9DTHe_Z8tpm4szYYRZwN (accessed on March 18, 2022)

²²¹ Fu Ye-qin, Li Yong, “*Yidai yilu*” *zhanlue yu Hainan “Zhongguo luyou tequ” fazhan* “一带一路”战略与海南“中国旅游特区”发展 (Development of “China Tourism Special Zone” in Hainan Province for Responding to “One Belt and One Road” Initiative), Tropical Geography, 2015, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2015&filename=RDDD201505010&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=y-_jqvVjx11iLBY6LZJQqApsUzNlxVCD11Na8LTaKAwwnWKA7a2k7VGNIC0BhGhm (accessed on April 20, 2022)

the external world, expanding the international cooperation and supporting Hainan tourism enterprises to go abroad and participate in the international competition.

In another analysed article titled “*Yidai yilu*” *beijing xia zhongyue kua jing minzu wenhua luyou hezuo kaifa wenti yanjiu* “一带一路”背景下中越跨境民族文化旅游合作开发问题研究 (Research on the cross-border ethnic cultural tourism cooperation between China and Vietnam under the background of the “Belt and Road Initiative”)²²² written by Qian Xueli, the “China-Vietnam International Tourism Cooperation Zone”, built at the border of these two countries was analysed.

The two nations involved in this project had already cooperated in the past and the implementation of the BRI was able to further increase this collaboration; in particular, in this article, the cooperation in cross-border tourism was examined. China and Vietnam share cultural characteristics, which have become a base for the cooperation in the tourism industry, enhancing the promotion of cooperation and exchanges between the two countries in the tourism industry.

4.4.5 Green Silk Road

During the research and analysis of the selected articles, the Green Silk Road was one of the main themes that emerged. Unlike the previous ones, which in the period examined had not changed in the number of analysis or had diminished, this topic has been discussed more often in recent years. In particular, the Green Silk Road has been examined in twenty-eight of the selected academic articles, and the majority of them was published in the years characterized by the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, between 2020 and 2022.

As previously discussed, since 2017, also the Chinese government has given increasingly more importance to the development of the Green Silk Road, which denotes the effort of the Chinese leadership of reducing the environmental impacts of the economic actions taken in the countries along the Belt and Road. Therefore, the reduction of pollution and carbon emission and the protection of the biodiversity are included in the Green Silk Road.

²²² Qian Xueli, “*Yidai yilu*” *beijing xia zhongyue kua jing minzu wenhua luyou hezuo kaifa wenti yanjiu* “一带一路”背景下中越跨境民族文化旅游合作开发问题研究 (Research on the Cooperative of Cross Border Ethnic Cultural Tourism between China and Vietnam Under the Background of “the Belt and Road Initiatives”), Guizhou Ethnic Studies, 2017, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2017&filename=GZNY201703040&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=0MYNoyp3XiqIJ9Y_5NNAuXroBGPqRbyethD_IL6LBUdH3Wp9WWjBDSE_7-ezPsS1 (accessed on April 19, 2022)

The Chinese leadership has begun to attach a greater importance to environmental protection in the context of the BRI after the outbreak of the pandemic and this trend was followed also in the selected academic articles. In a numerous amount of the examined scholarly papers, the development of the Green Silk Road is seen as necessary in the post-pandemic world and the Chinese government, therefore, is encouraged to undertake international cooperation in the related fields. The main cause of the rise in the attention given to the Green Silk Road since 2020 has been highlighted as a greater awareness in the need of creating a harmonious coexistence of men and nature, necessary to avoid the development of other pandemics or natural disasters.²²³

Therefore, the Covid-19 pandemic has further highlighted the need of creating a sustainable, green development in the countries involved in the BRI. Furthermore, the Green Silk Road is depicted as necessary in order to combat climate change and its impacts and China is described as willing to play an increasingly important role in fighting this global issue.²²⁴

4.4.6 Digital Silk Road

Apart from the Green Silk Road, another theme that has received an increasing amount of attention, both from the Chinese government and from Chinese scholars, is represented by the Digital Silk Road. It has been examined in twenty-one of the papers of this review and most of these documents was published between 2020 and 2022, after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

When discussing the development of the Digital Silk Road, a numerous amount of the articles analysed have underlined that this new sector of the BRI has proved to be

²²³ Zhou Jing, *Hou yiqing shidai "yidai yilu" hezuo fazhan yanjiu* 后疫情时代“一带一路”合作发展研究 (Studying the Cooperation and Development of B & R Initiative in the Post-Epidemic Times), Academic Exchange, 2020, URL: <https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2020&filename=XSJL202008010&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=4poJaY1bgdbc19cF0eqXg4LgRNSFlua9wGKBMFJNg1oNeBAXNTsPN9ZFLyzDQwgL> (accessed on March 14, 2022)

²²⁴ He Maochun, Zheng Weiwei, *"Yidai yilu" beijing xia zhongyue kua jing minzu wenhua luyou hezuo kaifa wenti yanjiu* “一带一路”战略构想从模糊走向清晰 ——绿色、健康、智力、和平丝绸之路理论内涵及实现路径 (Prospect Conception of “the Belt and Road Initiative” from Obscurity to Distinctness—the Theoretic Connotation and Approach of Green, Healthy, Intellectual and Peaceful Silk Road), *Journal of Xinjiang Normal University*(Edition of Philosophy and Social Sciences, 2017, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2017&filename=XJSF201706008&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=z83uOUEqMB8ilDmBvuMyXmq3GsAqZbVlZnrqzQ5LokuoI-KprTNMq3br2FKJ_P-- (accessed on March 15, 2022)

necessary when the measures taken in order to fight the pandemic have put a halt to the movement of people and goods. Therefore, the aims of the creation of the Digital Silk Road are represented by the advancement and the improvement in digital economy, cross border e-commerce, digital entertainment and tourism.

In addition, other important elements of the digital sector are represented by education²²⁵ and telemedicine, which refers to the use of digital technologies to curing patients and helping epidemic prevention.²²⁶ The digitalization of both of these sectors have proved to be necessary during the pandemic, because of the lockdowns implemented both in China and in foreign countries that caused the limitations of the flow of people.

4.4.7 Health Silk Road

In the articles analysed and in the Chinese official narrative, the Health Silk Road has gained an increasing importance in the last years. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the Health Silk Road represents an extension of the BRI that aims at improving the access to the health sector in the countries involved in the project and increasing the cooperation among health professionals, needed to fasten the spread of information and, therefore, preventing and controlling the diffusion of contagious diseases. Like the Green and Digital sectors, the Health Silk Road has proved to be essential after the burst of the Covid-19 pandemic; therefore, most of the selected academic papers that examine this component of the BRI were published in recent years, between 2020 and 2022. Similarly, since the burst of the pandemic, the Chinese leadership has given greater importance to the Health Silk Road, which was already a part of the BRI.

²²⁵ Jiang Li, Wu Zhicheng, *Xinguan feiyan yiqing beijing xia de "Yidai yilu" minxin xiangtong jianshe* 新冠肺炎疫情背景下的“一带一路”民心相通建设 (Increasing the People's Connectivity for the "Belt and Road" Initiative in the Context of the Covid-19 Epidemic), *Frontier*, 2020, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2021&filename=RMXS202021012&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=El0Ru0ZYww_5GqmeCrMrSWTLZD-mfogI8mQ5QfWnvbdNDJB0oEPtt_kmVavVgYlc (accessed on March 13, 2022)

²²⁶ Ji Feifeng, *Xinguan yiqing chongji xia "Yidai yilu" jianshe de wei yu ji* 新冠疫情冲击下“一带一路”建设的危与机 (The Crisis and Opportunity of the B & R Construction under the Impact of COVID-19), *International Financing*, 2020, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2020&filename=GJRZ202005009&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=ufUT_oYqmGLRjs3G4jS4gXvptjSjrG6wHZw50fvLUB12uESMhJwqynM_V0d1tjBY (accessed on March 18, 2022)

In the analysed articles, when examining the sanitary cooperation, a positive image of the country appears. China is often appraised for the medical and health assistance it provided to the foreign countries involved in the BRI during the pandemic, through the information, sanitary materials and medical personnel needed to prevent and treat the COVID-19 illness sent off to foreign countries to fight the pandemic, in the vaccine research and furniture to other nations.²²⁷

This positive attitude towards the Chinese methods of contrasting the pandemic are reflected also in the foreign countries' gratitude towards China, expressed by governments, people, and media of various external nations.²²⁸

4.5 Chinese academic articles' critical themes

When developing the research questions for this systematic literature review, great attention was given to the potential critical themes that could be discussed in the selected academic articles. The main aim of the examination of the critical aspects was the aspiration to comprehend whether the Chinese scholarly world was suspicious and sceptical towards the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative or if it fully supported the project; furthermore, particular attention was given to the identification of these critical aspects to comprehend the frequency of their presence in the discussions of the examined papers.

The relevant information for each one of the academic articles can be found in the Appendix 1; in the table present in the appendix, it is possible to fully gather the relevant information about each paper and, in the last column, the presence of critical themes and

²²⁷ Xiao Xi, Song Guoxin, *Xinguan feiyan yiqing changtai hua xia de "Yidai yilu" hezuo: tiaozhan, jiyu yu jin lu* 新冠肺炎疫情常态化下的“一带一路”合作: 挑战、机遇与进路 (Belt and Road Cooperation under the Normalization of the COVID-19 Epidemic: Challenges, Opportunities and Approaches, Study & Exploration, 2021, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2022&filename=XXTS202112005&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=U3B4VMNpJJooXsoEFYQt05QGigO_OMyh0NFINZURPzakxsKDICv0XbJ53rc3Sdhk (accessed on March 14, 2022)

²²⁸ Ou Ya, Ren Yuanzhen, *Xinguan feiyan yiqing xia de "Yidai yilu": guoji yiqing yu yingdui celue* 新冠肺炎疫情下的“一带一路”: 国际舆情与应对策略 (The Belt and Road Initiative after the outbreak of COVID-19: international public opinion and response strategies), Global Communication, 2020, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2020&filename=GJCB202004002&uniplatform=OVERSEAS_EN&v=ERESDZLrElk15pKb1Kr7c9jX4iFu5-GofdCgUH0VkrwY0OMqhVomMT6FB9QfOAT7 (accessed on March 13, 2022)

their identification. Therefore, articles were firstly clustered depending on whether critical aspects of the BRI were discussed, or if only positive themes were analysed.

TABLE 4.2. ARTICLES' GROUPING BASED ON CRITICAL THEMES

	Articles that do not present critical themes	Articles that present critical themes
2013-2015	Kong, Dong (2015); Yuan (2014); Jin (2015); Zhang, Li (2015); Zhao (2015); He, Zhang (2013); Ming (2015); Zhang L. (2015); Chu, Gao (2015); Sheng, Yu, Yue (2015); Yang, Du (2015); Pei, Yi (2015); Shi, Tang (2014); Song (2015); Wang G. (2015); Fu, Li (2015); Hua (2015); Dai, Xie (2015); Cai (2015); Zhou (2014); Liu L. (2015)	Tan (2015); Wang, Zheng (2015); Zhou (2015); Liao (2015); He et al. (2015); Wang, Li (2015); Wang W. (2015); Wang et al. (2015); Zhang M. (2015); Tian, Cao (2015); Hu (2015); Wang M. (2015); Zhao, Sun, Zhang (2015); Ruan (2014); Zheng (2015); Guan (2014); Ma (2015); Ba, Zhu (2015); Di (2015); Liu Y. (2015); Suo, Dong (2015); Zhang X. (2015)
2016-2017	Sun, Zhang, Liu (2017); Liu, Zhang (2016); Liu, Gao (2016); Kui (2016); Sun, Liu (2016); Li et al. (2017); Meng (2016); Sun, Yang (2016); Wei (2017); Xie (2016); Zhang, Fan (2016); Ni, Wang, Jing (2016); He (2016); Huang (2016); Sun, Li (2016); Dong et al. (2016), Chu (2016); Huang Y. (2016); Zheng (2016); Wang, Wang (2016); Zhang (2016); Lan, Jiang (2016); Zhang, Ke (2016); Zhao, Li, Yao (2016); Feng, Jiang (2017); Li M. (2017); Song (2017); Zou (2017);	Zhang (2017); Yu, Gu (2016); Han, Jiang (2017); Liu, Ge, Zhao (2017); Zhou (2016); Chang (2016); Huang, Starostin (2016); Zhao et al. (2016); Fang (2016); Li S.(2016); Du (2016); Gao, Xiao (2016); Hu (2016); Meng (2016); Cheng et al. (2016); Xing (2016); Zheng, Liu (2016); Liu Z. (2016); He, Zheng (2017); Yang, Gao (2017); Liu W. (2017); Chen, Yanping, Wang (2017); Xu (2017); Kong (2017); Sun, Suo, Zheng (2017); Xiang (2017)

	Liao, Li, Cheng (2017); Li et al. (2017)M Bai, Aimaitijiang, Deng (2017); Ji, Xu, Wang (2017); Si, Zhou (2017); Li, Zheng, Ma (2017); Cheng (2017); Yang, Gan, Shen (2017); Zhang, Zhang (2017); Qian (2017); Sun (2017)	
2018-2019	Jiang (2018); Chen, Liu (2018); Di, You (2018); Liu, Xin (2018); Li, Xu (2018); Peng, Lin (2018); Sun, Su (2018); Lang (2018); Liu, Li (2018); Li D. (2019); Wang, Tan (2019); Ao, Sun (2019); Yu (2019); Fan, Wang, Li (2019); Bie, Qi (2019); An, Xin (2019); Wang, Yan (2019); The Joint Research Group of the "Green Belt & Road" Project of ,ICBC and Tsinghua University (2019); Wang, Sun (2019); Chai, Dong (2019); Li H. (2019); Wen, Hu, Cheng (2019)	Qin, Wei (2018); He, Xu (2018); Wang, Dan, Wang (2018); Zhang (2019); Liu et al. (2019); Huang (2019); Wang, Si, Zeng (2019)
2020-2022	Shi, Ma (2020); Wu, Wu (2020); Guo (2020); Zhi (2020); The Study Group of the Belt and Road Green Index of ICBC (2020); Dai, Wang (2020); Zhou, Zhao, Yang (2020); Dai, Chen (2020); Zhou (2020); Zhang, Yan, Tang (2020); Ji (2020); Ren (2020); Wen (2020); Xu (2020);	Xing, Shi, Lu (2020); Ni (2020); Li, Li (2020); Wang, Zhang (2020); Wang, Cheng, Liu (2020); Jiang, Wu (2020); Ou, Ren (2020); Zhou, Jiang (2020); Li (2020); Xiao, Song (2021); Yu, Wang (2021); Peng, Lin (2021); Zhou et al. (2021); Fang, Song (2021); Ye (2021); Zheng (2021); Shang, Zhao (2021); Cao,

	Wang, Li (2020); Xiao (2020); Ren (2020); Zeng (2020); Lan, Huang (2020); Qiu, Jiang (2020); Liu W. (2021); Duan et al. (2021); Guo, Zhang (2021); Li, Shen (2021); Sun, Zhang (2021); Cao, Wu, Li (2021); Ding (2021); Yang T. (2021); Liu, Zhu (2021); Chen (2021); Wang, Liu, Guo (2021); Hu (2021); Yang Z. (2022); Zheng, Lin (2022); Du, Ma (2022); He (2022); Yang Y. (2022); Xiong, Lin (2022); Zeng, Luo (2022); Guo (2022)	Hu (2021); Chen, Yi (2021); Liu B. (2021); Chen, Liu, Cheng (2021); Wang (2022); Cong, Li (2022)
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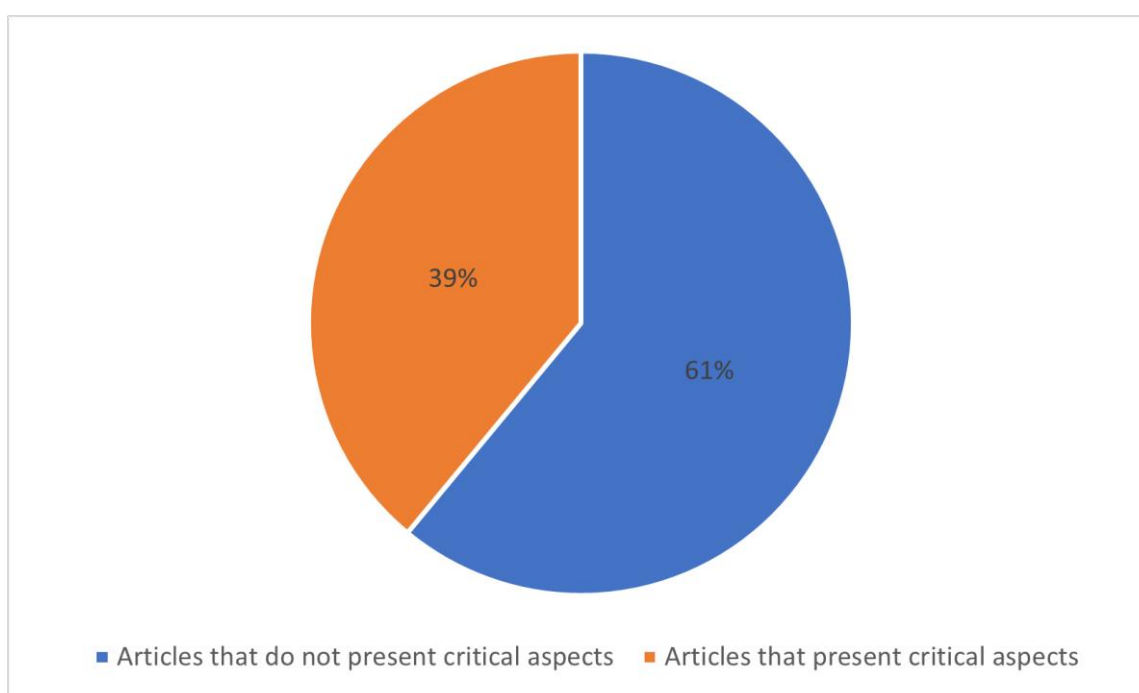
Source: Author's elaboration

In Table 4.2, it is possible to examine the selected academic articles grouped in two different categories: articles that present critical themes and articles that do not present critical themes. As in Table 4.1, each article is identified by the name of the author or authors and the year of publication; furthermore, the articles were firstly divided in the same four groups used in the previous table, depending on the year of publication. As shown in Table 4.2, apart from the articles published between 2013 and 2015, the number of selected documents that do not show any critic towards the BRI is higher than those that do present negative aspects of the project. In particular, the articles published in the first temporal group that present critics are twenty-two, compared to the twenty-one that only present positive aspect. In the 2016-2017 group, the articles belonging to the critical category are twenty-six, opposed to thirty-nine positive articles. This ratio changes to seven versus twenty-two in the articles published between 2018 and 2019 and then to twenty-three versus forty between 2020 and 2022. Therefore, the articles that were selected for this systematic literature review tend to be more critical in the early stages of the implementation of the project; the number of articles that show then diminishes in the

following years compared to the articles that show a more positive attitude towards the BRI.

Overall, as shown in Graph 4.3, out of the two-hundred analysed papers, the number of articles that do not present any critical aspect of the BRI is higher than those that do present critics towards the project. The first group is made of 122 academic papers, accounting for about 61% of the total, while the second one is made of 78 scholarly articles, that represent about 39% of the total.

GRAPH 4.3: DIVISION OF THE ANALYSED ACADEMIC ARTICLES BASED ON THE PRESENCE OF CRITICAL ASPECTS OF THE BRI



Source: Author's elaboration

Therefore, it is clear that in the majority of the selected academic papers that compose the sample used for this review, Chinese scholars tend to approve the implementation of the project and no critical aspect is underlined or discussed. The authors of the papers show a different approach compared to the international scholars, who have often and heavily criticized various segments of the BRI and seem to be more similar to the Chinese government in the discussion of the initiative, meaning that all the favourable outcomes are discussed more frequently.

TABLE 4.3. CRITICAL ASPECTS OF THE BRI PRESENTED IN THE SELECED ACADEMIC ARTICLES

	Risks caused by cultural differences	Geopolitical risks	Chinese companies lack information about foreign countries	Chinese companies lack experience	Environmental issues	Negative attitudes in foreign countries	Inadequate foreign countries development
2013-2015	Wang, Zheng (2015); Liao (2015); Tian, Cao (2015); Zheng (2015)	Tan (2015); Wang, Zheng (2015); Zhou (2015); Wang, Li (2015); Wang W. (2015); Wang et al. (2015); Tian, Cao (2015); Hu (2015); Wang M. (2015); Zhao, Sun, Zhang (2015); Ruan (2014); Zheng (2015); Ba,	Tan (2015); Zhou (2015); Liao (2015); Guan (2014); Ma (2015); Di (2015); Suo, Dong (2015)	He et al. (2015); Wang et al. (2015)	Wang, Zheng (2015); Ma (2015); Liu Y. (2015)	Zhang M. (2015); Tian, Cao (2015)	Liu Y. (2015)

		Zhu (2015); Di (2015); Zhang X. (2015)					
2016-2017	Zhang (2017); Han, Jiang (2017); Liu, Ge, Zhao (2017); Li S. (2016); Xing (2016); Yang, Gao (2017); Chen, Jiang, Wang (2017); Kong (2017); Xiang (2017)	Zhang (2017); Yu, Gu (2016); Han, Jiang (2017); Liu, Ge, Zhao (2017); Zhou (2016); Zhao et al. (2016); Fang (2016); Li S. (2016); Du (2016); Meng (2016); Xing (2016); Zheng, Liu (2016); Liu Z. (2016); Yang, Gao (2017); Kong (2017); Sun, Suo, Zheng (2017)	Liu, Ge, Zhao (2017); Li S. (2016)	Chen, Jiang, Wang (2017)	Guo, Xiao (2016); Hu (2016); Cheng et al. (2016); Liu Z. (2016); He, Zheng (2017); Liu W. (2017); Xu (2017)	Du (2016)	Chang (2016); Xiang (2017)

2018-2019	Liu et al. (2019)	Qin, Wei (2018); He, Xu (2018); Wang, Dan, Wang (2018); Zhang (2019); Liu et al. (2019); Wang, Si, Zeng (2019)		Zhang (2019)			Huang (2019)
2020-2022	Xing, Shi, Lu (2020); Wang, Cheng, Liu (2020); Zhou, Jiang (2020); Peng, Lin (2021); Zhou et al. (2021); Fang, Song (2021); Zheng (2021);	Ni (2020); Li, Li (2020); Wang, Cheng, Liu (2020); Zhou, Jiang (2020); Fang, Song (2021); Ye (2021); Shang, Zhao (2021); Cao, Hu (2021); Liu B. (2021); Cong, Li (2022)	Zheng (2021)	Wang, Zhang (2020); Chen, Yi (2021)	Wang, Zhang (2020); Yu, Wang (2021)	Jiang, Wu (2020); Ou, Ren (2020); Xiao, Song (2021); Wang Y. (2021)	Ni (2020); Li (2020); Chen, Liu, Cheng (2021)

	Cao, Hu (2021); Chen, Yi (2021)						
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Source: Author’s elaboration

From the above Table 4.3, it is possible to analyse the critical themes that were identified in the selected article. The table is made of different sections, in which the articles have been divided based on the date of publication. As for the already examined Tables 1 and 2, the articles were divided into four main temporal sections, namely articles published between 2013 and 2015, between 2016 and 2017, between 2018 and 2019 and from 2020 to 2022. Each article is identified by the name of the author and the year of publication. Furthermore, given that a numerous amount of articles mentioned more than one critical aspect of the BRI, in Table 4.3, these papers are written in bold.

As shown in Table 4.3, seven main criticisms were directed towards the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative. The authors of the selected academic articles have shown some doubts regarding the development of the project because of various reasons, namely the cultural differences between the countries involved in the initiative, to the geopolitical risks caused by the unstable countries, the lack of information or experience of Chinese companies, the negative attitudes of populations and governments of foreign countries and lastly the underdevelopment of foreign countries.

Examining the critical aspects that have been underlined in the selected articles, it is clear that the Chinese authors do not show any doubt or criticism towards the project of the Belt and Road, but rather criticize the inadequacy of the Chinese enterprises that have to take part in the BRI, the insufficient development or the unreliability of the countries involved. In any case, the analysed papers do not express harsh criticisms towards the project, but only highlight the elements that could cause risks to its implementation. However, during the examination of these papers, it has emerged that, even when mentioning critical characteristics that could put at risk the success of the project, the authors seem to always show support and optimism towards the future development of the initiative. The lack of harsh criticism present in the examined articles can be considered quite predictable because of the importance attributed to the Belt and Road Initiative by the Chinese government, which controls the flow of information in the media

through the implementation of one of restricting media environments of the world.²²⁹ Therefore, the lack of direct criticism towards the BRI is not surprising, while the presence in the selected articles of condemnation or disapproval about the whole initiative and of discussions about the potential mistakes committed by the Chinese leadership in the implementation of the initiative would be unimaginable.

In order to better comprehend these critical topics, a brief presentation is given for each of them.

4.5.1 Risks caused by cultural differences

Because of the international scope and extension of the project, it is not surprising to discover that among the critical aspects of the BRI analysed in the selected academic articles, one of the topics that emerges is formed by the potential risks that cultural difference between the various countries could create. Most of the countries involved in the Belt and Road are developing countries and possess different historical, ethnical and religious backgrounds, which could create risks to Chinese investments abroad and to the development of the initiative. Furthermore, given that Chinese companies have mainly worked in the atheistic environment of China, it may be difficult for them to adapt to local regions and cultures due to a lack of religious sensitivity. Therefore, the advice of conducting training to cultural differences is given to Chinese enterprises.²³⁰

4.5.2 Geopolitical risks

Among the critical aspects regarding the BRI that have been discussed in the articles selected for this systematic literature review, one of the most cited problems is represented by the geopolitical risks that could arise in the implementation of the project. Out of the seventy-eight articles that give out criticisms about certain characteristics of the project, the great majority, made of forty-seven papers, mentions the risks generated

²²⁹ Xu Beina, Albert Eleanor, "Media Censorship in China", Council on Foreign Relations, 2017, URL: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/media-censorship-china> (accessed on July 21, 2022)

²³⁰ Zhou Wei, Jiang Hongfei, "*Yidai yilu*" *duiwai zhijie touzi de fengxian shibie ji guibi* "一带一路"对外直接投资的风险识别及规避 (Risk Identification and Avoidance of Outward Direct Investment in "One Belt, One Road", Statistics & Decision, 2020, URL: <https://cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2020&filename=TJJC202016028&v=u1MJH%25mmd2F%25mmd2FUEDvSIubOdmuLvpu5oa3n2SdTO4j9ULRyzFt8JvTZcJAU59PQ0LSKN2Nv2SdTO4j9ULRyzFt8JvTZcJAU59PQ0LSKN2Nv&aqs=chrome..69i57j69i58.552j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8> (accessed on March 18, 2022)

by the potential presence of wars, political uncertainty and tensions present in the involved countries. The presence of this type of discussion has been quite stable through the years analysed and the pandemic did not affect it. This type of risks is generated by the instability in the countries involved in the initiative and articles underline the need for peace and security along the road during the implementation of the project. Therefore, during the analysis, a possible solution to these risks was put forward, calling for the promotion of the project by China with a peaceful attitude, while advocating cultural tolerance and mutual learning to solve the potential clashes between civilizations.²³¹

4.5.3 Chinese companies lack information about foreign countries

When identifying the critical aspects of the BRI, great importance is given to the role of the Chinese enterprises going abroad in the context of the initiative. Chinese companies have begun to go global in the early 2000s, when the Chinese government implemented the Going Out Policy and, since then, there has been a rapid growth in foreign investments by Chinese enterprises. According to the analysed articles, the Belt and Road Initiative represents an important opportunity for these companies to accelerate the speed of going abroad.

However, it has been argued that Chinese enterprises may encounter various problems in the internationalization process. One of these problems is represented by the Chinese enterprises' lack of knowledge about foreign countries; this issue has been discussed in ten of the selected papers, most of which were published in the early stages of the project. According to these articles, Chinese companies do not carry out sufficient foreign country research before undertaking the going abroad process; therefore, this lack of specific research leads to inadequate information and comprehension of the countries that causes

²³¹ He Maochun, Zheng Weiwei, “*Yidai yilu*” *beijing xia zhongyue kua jing minzu wenhua luyou hezuo kaifa wenti yanjiu* “一带一路”战略构想从模糊走向清晰 ——绿色、健康、智力、和平丝绸之路理论内涵及实现路径 (Prospect Conception of “the Belt and Road Initiative” from Obscurity to Distinctness—the Theoretic Connotation and Approach of Green, Healthy, Intellectual and Peaceful Silk Road), *Journal of Xinjiang Normal University*(Edition of Philosophy and Social Sciences, 2017, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2017&filename=XJSF201706008&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=z83uOUEqMB8ilDmBvuMyXmq3GsAqZbVlZnrqzQ5LOkuoI-KprTNMq3br2FKJ_P-- (accessed on March 15, 2022)

the enterprises to not being able to fully integrate with the targeted countries' culture, customs, and political systems.²³²

4.5.4 Chinese companies lack experience

Apart from not conducting enough country research, the Chinese enterprises going abroad are criticized because of their lack of experience in the internationalization process, which causes them to commit avoidable mistakes.

According to the 2015 article by He et al.²³³, Chinese companies lack core characteristics of the internationalization process in certain fields; for instance, their level of competitiveness has to be upgraded. The Chinese government was called to assist the Chinese companies in going abroad, helping them to assess and reduce the potential risks.²³⁴

4.5.5 Environmental issues

During the analysis of the articles, another critical aspect that has emerged is represented by the potential environmental impacts of the projects implemented under the Belt and

²³² Liao Meng, "Yidai yilu" jianshe beijing xia woguo qiye "zou chuqu" de jiyu yu tiaozhan "一带一路"建设背景下我国企业"走出去"的机遇与挑战 (Opportunities and challenges for Chinese enterprises in "going global" under the background of the "One Belt, One Road" construction, Economic Review, 2015, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2015&filename=JJZH201509008&uniplatform=OVERSEAS_EN&v=NMHbrgAUVPi0rjnaqaxWDNgApwJG1lJxZeCmDOVDsn0LGHLKkYhBS_HJsjt44UWM (accessed on March 15, 2022)

²³³ He et al., "Yidai yilu" zhanlue mianlin de zhang'ai yu duice "一带一路"战略面临的障碍与对策 (Strategy of "One Belt and One Road" Confronted with Barriers and Countermeasures), Journal of Xinjiang Normal University (Edition of Philosophy and Social Sciences), 2015, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2015&filename=XJSF201503005&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=digDT8RFmb5MxqGb oQ_0-cKD5Gk0y0Qcc_aqmk33NOltu7M4or7rXe-6QR3kjOEV (accessed on March 18, 2022)

²³⁴ He Maochun, Zheng Weiwei, "Yidai yilu" beijing xia zhongyue kua jing minzu wenhua luyou hezuo kaifa wenti yanjiu "一带一路"战略构想从模糊走向清晰——绿色、健康、智力、和平丝绸之路理论内涵及实现路径 (Prospect Conception of "the Belt and Road Initiative" from Obscurity to Distinctness—the Theoretic Connotation and Approach of Green, Healthy, Intellectual and Peaceful Silk Road), Journal of Xinjiang Normal University (Edition of Philosophy and Social Sciences), 2017, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2017&filename=XJSF201706008&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=z83uOUEqMB8ilDmBvuMyXmq3GsAqZbVlZnrqzQ5LOkuoI-KprTNMq3br2FKJ_P-- (accessed on March 15, 2022)

Road Initiative. This theme was examined in twelve of the selected papers and the majority of these articles was published between 2016 and 2017, while the topic completely disappeared in the papers published between 2018 and 2019 to then emerge once again in 2020. Apart from the doubts related to the project, the ecological and environmental problems present in some countries along the Belt and Road. Therefore, the development of the Green Silk Road is depicted as essential to improve the ecological environment of these countries.²³⁵

4.5.6 Negative attitudes in foreign countries

During the assessment of the critical aspects, it has emerged that seven of the analysed articles discussed the problematics that could emerge because of the negative opinion that some of the foreign countries involved in the BRI hold against China. In particular, the papers that have discussed this topic have increased in the articles published after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, it has been argued that the pandemic has boosted the anti-globalization trend and, because the contagious disease originated in China, several countries have shown a resentment towards the PRC and a negative perception towards the initiative.²³⁶ Furthermore, it has been highlighted that some foreign governments and media have used the problems related to the pandemic to criticize the Chinese political system and the government's structure. This criticism has

²³⁵ He Maochun, Zheng Weiwei, "Yidai yilu" beijing xia zhongyue kua jing minzu wenhua luyou hezuo kaifa wenti yanjiu "一带一路"战略构想从模糊走向清晰——绿色、健康、智力、和平丝绸之路理论内涵及实现路径 (Prospect Conception of "the Belt and Road Initiative" from Obscurity to Distinctness—the Theoretic Connotation and Approach of Green, Healthy, Intellectual and Peaceful Silk Road), Journal of Xinjiang Normal University (Edition of Philosophy and Social Sciences, 2017, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2017&filename=XJSF201706008&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=z83uOUEqMB8ilDmBvuMyXmq3GsAqZbVIZnrqzQ5LOkuoI-KprTNMq3br2FKJ_P-- (accessed on March 15, 2022)

²³⁶ Jiang Li, Wu Zhicheng, *Xinguan feiyan yiqing beijing xia de "Yidai yilu" minxin xiangtong jianshe* 新冠肺炎疫情背景下的“一带一路”民心相通建设 (Increasing the People's Connectivity for the "Belt and Road" Initiative in the Context of the Covid-19 Epidemic), Frontier, 2020, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2021&filename=RMXS202021012&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=El0Ru0ZYww_5GqmeCrMrSWTLZD-mfogI8mQ5QfWnvbdNDJB0oEPtt_kmVavVgYlc (accessed on March 13, 2022)

also expanded to the BRI and foreign countries have questioned the development model of the project, suspecting it is too dependent on China.²³⁷

In addition, some Western countries are accused taking advantage of the rising debt pressure towards China in numerous countries along the BRI to reinforce the “debt-trap theory”; therefore, by accusing China of being an unreliable and irresponsible creditor, these countries have influenced the perception of the Chinese nations both in the Western world and in the countries taking part in the BRI.²³⁸ According to the article by Li Shengli²³⁹ published in 2016, Western countries are also responsible for the so-called “China Threat Theory”, a term that has been used in the last decades to indicate that China’s development will not be peaceful, as the country seeks to change the current world order. Therefore, Li argues that this theory damaged China’s national image in neighbouring countries and affected the creation and development of relations with the countries along the Belt and Road.

4.5.7 Inadequate foreign country development

According to the examined articles, the success of the implementation of the BRI is affected also by the level of development of the foreign countries involved. Seven of the analysed articles have expressed this criticism and affirmed that many of the countries

²³⁷ Ou Ya, Ren Yuanzhen, *Xinguan feiyan yiqing xia de “Yidai yilu”*: *guoji yiqing yu yingdui celue* 新冠肺炎疫情下的“一带一路”:国际舆情与应对策略 (The Belt and Road Initiative after the outbreak of COVID-19: international public opinion and response strategies), Global Communication, 2020, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2020&filename=GJCB202004002&uniplatform=OVERSEAS_EN&v=ERESDZLrElk15pKblKr7c9jX4iFu5-GofdCgUH0VkrwY0OMqhVomMT6FB9QfOAT7 (accessed on March 13, 2022)

²³⁸ Jiang Li, Wu Zhicheng, *Xinguan feiyan yiqing beijing xia de “Yidai yilu” minxin xiangtong jianshe* 新冠肺炎疫情背景下的“一带一路”民心相通建设 (Increasing the People’s Connectivity for the “Belt and Road” Initiative in the Context of the Covid-19 Epidemic), Frontier, 2020, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2021&filename=RMXS202021012&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=El0Ru0ZYww_5GqmeCrMrSWTLZD-mfogI8mQ5QfWnvbdNDJB0oEPtt_kmVavVgYlc (accessed on March 13, 2022)

²³⁹ Li Shengli, “Yidai yilu” zhanlu yu zhoubian diyuan chong su “一带一路” 战略与周边地缘重塑 (The Strategy of the Belt and Road Initiatives and the Reshaping of the Peripheral Geopolitics), Journal of International Relations, 2016, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2016&filename=GGXY201601015&uniplatform=OVERSEAS_EN&v=4bdU0bB_GvgJRQkopCZp312wbvrHbSRa053Shpz5EeOL1O94RIWPVuBcYa8Cbv_u (accessed on April 19, 2022)

along the Belt and Road are not yet fully developed, possess complicated political environments and unstable legal systems. These characteristics may influence the Chinese investments in related countries and the overall successful progress of the BRI.²⁴⁰

4.6 Final considerations about the systematic literature review

In conclusion, during this systematic literature review, a positive attitude towards the Belt and Road Initiative has emerged. Chinese scholars tend to focus their attention on particular aspects of the project and to highlight the benefits that the implementation of the initiative can bring to both China and to foreign countries. In contrast to the international literature, which has mainly criticized the lack of clarity regarding the project by the Chinese government and the potential risks that could develop from the BRI, the Chinese academic literature has shown a favourable response towards the BRI. In particular, the Chinese authors have highlighted the benefits that it could bring to the parties involved and, overall, the analysed articles have reflected the Chinese official narrative regarding the initiative provided by the government. When examining critical aspects of the BRI, the Chinese authors have not directly criticized the initiative or its implementation, but they have focused their attention on external aspects which may damage the project. However, during the examination of the selected articles, it has emerged that, even when mentioning these problems, the authors have shown a positive attitude and seemed optimistic about the future success of the project and about the results that it will bring to both China and to the international community.

²⁴⁰ Shang Tao, Zhao Yujin, “*Yidai yilu*” *yanxian guojia ying shang huanjing dui Zhongguo duiwai zhijie touzi de yingxiang yanjiu* “一带一路”沿线国家营商环境对中国对外直接投资的影响研究 (A Research on Effects of Business Environment of Countries along “The Belt and Road Regions” on China’s OFDI), *Journal of Shanxi Normal University (Social Science Edition)*, 2021, URL: https://oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2021&filename=SXSK202101008&uniplatform=OVERSEAS_EN&v=-R0wdAE_ArUI2YxGRJ6zcvpgAlkBL5pI4KM-xdMrlv6aBkMyWSNO0hEzvDcs_jhi (accessed on June 1, 2022)

Conclusions

During the development of this thesis, great attention was given to present a complete image of the Belt and Road Initiative, starting from the historical background in which the project was created and ending with the Chinese scholars' perceptions and ideas. Therefore, the Chinese economic evolution from the Maoist years towards the current situation under the guidance of Xi Jinping has been analysed to comprehend the motives that led the country to the implementation of the project. Furthermore, in order to thoroughly understand the project, its historical inspiration, spatial configuration and objectives have been presented. In particular, the drivers that led the Chinese leadership to the creation of the BRI have been discussed. It has been interesting to notice that these motives have also been analysed in the international academic literature about the initiative but differ from the ones that have been presented by the Chinese narrative. In fact, the official discourse about the project has repeatedly highlighted the advantages that the implementation of the project can bring to all the countries involved, while the international narrative has been more critical and it has underlined how the benefits that the Chinese government wishes to achieve from the project are mainly directed to China itself.

In order to obtain a clear understanding of the BRI, a systematic literature research was conducted to analyse the Chinese academic debate about the project and how it has changed through the years. During the examination of the selected papers, considerable attention was given to identifying the changes that have occurred in the Chinese perceptions of the initiative and, in particular, how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the approaches towards the project. When reading the articles, it was possible to notice that a high number of these papers reflected the Chinese government's imaginary about the BRI and showed a positive attitude towards it. Given the great importance attached to the project by the Chinese leadership and the control that the government has over the country's institutions and media, the depiction of a successful project was not surprising. However, in order to understand if the Chinese scholars presented critics towards the BRI, a further analysis of the potential negative aspects discussed in the articles was conducted. During this examination, the themes that have emerged did not represent critics towards the Chinese leadership or towards the BRI itself, but rather towards the foreign countries involved or towards the unexperienced enterprises. Furthermore, it was interesting to notice that, even when discussing these critical aspects, the authors always showed

optimism towards the project and towards its final success. Overall, the BRI was described as a successful initiative, capable of overcoming the potential difficulties that it may encounter. For instance, regarding the future that awaits the project because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese academic literature, following the path delineated by the leadership, highlighted new routes that must be taken to guarantee a fruitful future for the project, namely the Green, Digital and Health Silk Roads. Therefore, even though the future is still not certain, it was possible to notice a confidence regarding the project's possibility of adapting and evolving under new circumstances.

Moreover, given the fact that the articles that have been analysed were published between 2013 and 2022, it was possible to notice that the topics and aspects of the BRI analysed changed overtime. In fact, while the number of articles that examined trade and FDI or cultural and people-to-people exchanges has remained quite stable, a topic that has received less attention from the Chinese academic world in recent years is the development of new infrastructures. On the other side, there has been an enormous growth, especially after the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, in the articles that analysed the Green Silk Road, the Digital Silk Road, and the Health Silk Road. These sectors, as also the Chinese leadership stated, can be considered as new paths for the future development of the BRI.

In conclusion, the development of this thesis has been particularly interesting because it was possible to understand the BRI from a Chinese perspective, which has been highly optimistic and holds a general positive attitude towards the future development of the project.

Appendix

Appendix 1

Analysis of the selected articles

N.	Year of publication	Author(s)	Article's Title	Source	N. citations	Main topic(s)	Critical topic (s)
1.	2015	Kong Qingfeng, Dong Hongwei	“一带一路”国家的贸易便利化水平测算与贸易潜力研究	国际贸易问题	677	Trade and FDI	
2.	2014	Yuan Xintao	“一带一路”建设的国家战略分析	理论月刊	632	Trade and FDI	
3.	2015	Jin Ling	“一带一路”：中国的马歇尔计划？	国际问题研究	377	Trade and FDI	
4.	2015	Zhang Xiaojing, Li Liang	“一带一路”与中国出口贸易：	亚太经济	256	Trade and FDI	

			基于贸易便利化视角				
5.	2017	Sun Churen, Zhang Nan, Liu Yaying	“一带一路”倡议与中国对沿线国家的贸易增长	国际贸易问题	254	Trade and FDI	
6.	2015	Zhao Shiju	“一带一路”建设的语言需求及服务对策	云南师范大学学报 (哲学社会科学版)	213	Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	
7.	2013	He Maochun, Zhang Jibing	新丝绸之路经济带的国家战略分析——中国的历史机遇、潜在挑战与应对策略	人民论坛·学术前沿	193	Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	

8.	2017	Zhang Shucun	“一带一路”战略下优化中国对外直接投资布局的思路与对策	管理世界	193	- Trade and FDI - Infrastructure construction	- Risks caused by cultural differences -Geopolitical risks
9.	2015	Tan Chang	“一带一路”战略下中国企业海外投资风险及对策	中国流通经济	193	Trade and FDI	- Chinese companies lack information about foreign countries - Geopolitical risks
10.	2016	Liu Xiaojun, Zhang Bin	我国与“一带一路”沿线国家跨境电商物流的协作发展	中国流通经济	166	- Trade and FDI - Infrastructure construction - Hangzhou Cross-border E-commerce Comprehensive Pilot Zone Area	
11.	2016	Liu Rui, Gao Feng	“一带一路”战略的区位路径选	社会科学	162	Trade and FDI	

			择与化解传统产业产能过剩				
12.	2016	Yu Jinping, Gu Wei	“一带一路”建设的利益、风险与策略	云南师范大学学报(哲学社会科学版)	147	- Trade and FDI - Infrastructure construction	Geopolitical risks
13.	2016	Kui Binxian	“一带一路”背景下文化传播与交流合作战略及其对策	浙江学刊	144	Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	
14.	2016	Sun Jinyan, Liu Haiyun	“一带一路”战略背景下中国贸易潜力的实证研究	当代财经	141	Trade and FDI	
15.	2015	Ming Hao	“一带一路”与“人类命	中央民族大学学报	136	Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	

			运共同 体”	(哲学 社会科学 版)			
16.	2017	Li Jing, Chen Ni, Wan Guanghua, Chen Shu	“一带一 路”沿线 国家货 物贸易 的竞争 互补关 系及动 态变化 ——基 于网络 分析方 法	管理世 界	134	Trade and FDI	
17.	2016	Meng Qi	基于“一 带一路” 的制造 业全球 价值链 构建	财经科 学	131	Trade and FDI	
18.	2015	Zhang Liangwei	“一带一 路”战略 下的国 际贸易 与国际 物流协 同分析	财经科 学	128	- Trade and FDI - Guangdong Free Trade Zone	

19.	2017	Han Mingchun, Jiang Congcong	政治风险、文化距离和双边关系对中国对外直接投资的影响 —— 基于“一带一路”沿线主要国家的研究	广东财经大学学报	126	Trade and FDI	- Geopolitical risks - Risks caused by cultural differences
20.	2016	Sun Jin, Yang Yingjun	中国与“一带一路”主要国家贸易成本的测度与影响因素研究	国际贸易问题	119	Trade and FDI	
21.	2015	Wang Yiwei, Zheng Dong	“一带一路”战略的道德风险与	东北亚论坛	115	- Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	- Geopolitical risks - Environmental issues

			应对措施			- Green Silk Road - Tourism development	- Risks caused by cultural differences
22.	2015	Zhou Fangyin	“一带一路”面临的风险挑战及其应对	国际观察	115	Trade and FDI	- Geopolitical risks - Chinese companies lack information about foreign countries
23.	2017	Wei Peiqiong	“一带一路”战略红利下跨境电商发展对策	中国流通经济	113	Trade and FDI	
24.	2016	Xie Mengjun	文化能否引致出口：“一带一路”的经验数据	国际贸易问题	108	Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	
25.	2015	Liao Meng	“一带一路”建设背景下我国企业“走出去”的机	经济纵横	161	Trade and FDI	- Chinese companies lack information about foreign countries

			遇与挑战				- Risks caused by cultural differences
26.	2015	Chu Yin, Gao Yuan	中国“一带一路”战略定位的三个问题	国际经济评论	224	Trade and FDI	
27.	2015	Sheng Yi, Yu Haiyan, Yue Chaomin	关于“一带一路”战略内涵、特性及战略重点综述	经济体制改革	146	- Tourism development - Trade and FDI - Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	
28.	2015	He Maochun, Zhang Jibing, Zhang Yapeng, Tian Bin	“一带一路”战略面临的障碍与对策	《新疆师范大学学报》(哲学社会科学版)	227	- Trade and FDI - Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	Chinese companies lack experience
29.	2016	Zhang Jianping, Fan Ziyan	“一带一路”国家贸易投资便利化状况	国家行政学院学报	108	- Trade and FDI - Shanghai Free Trade Zone	

			及 相 关 措 施 需 求				
30.	2015	Wang Yongzhong, Li Xichen	中 国 对 一 带 一 路 沿 线 国 家 投 资 风 险 评 估	开 放 导 报	104	Trade and FDI	Geopolitical risks
31.	2015	Yang Yanqing, Du Haipeng	人 民 币 汇 率 变 动 对 我 国 出 口 贸 易 的 影 响	经 济 学 家	101	Trade and FDI	
32.	2015	Wang Weixing	全 球 视 野 下 的 一 带 一 路 风 险 与 挑 战	人 民 论 坛 · 学 术 前 沿	99	Trade and FDI	Geopolitical risks
33.	2015	Wang Min , Chai Qingshan , Wang Yong , Liu Ruina , Zhou Qiaoyun ,	“一 带 一 路” 战 略 实 施 与 国 际 金 融 支 持 战 略 构 想	国 际 贸 易	89	- Trade and FDI - Infrastructure development - Shanghai Free Trade Zone -- Hangzhou Cross-border E-commerce	- Geopolitical risk - Chinese companies lack experience

		Jia Yuzhe , Zhang Lili				Comprehensiv e Pilot Zone Area	
34.	2015	Zhang Ming	直面“一 带一路” 的六大 风险	国际经 济评论	88	Infrastructure development	- Negative attitudes in foreign countries
35.	2015	Tian Huimin, Cao Honghui	“一带一 路”的动 因与挑 战	全球化	52	Cultural and people-to- people exchanges	- Risks caused by cultural differences - Negative attitudes in foreign countries - Geopolitical risks
36.	2015	Hu Jian	“一带一 路”战略 构想与 欧亚大 陆秩序 的重塑	当代世 界与社 会主义	49	Trade and FDI	Geopolitical risks
37.	2017	Liu Xiaofeng, Ge Yuejing, Zhao Yabo	国家距 离与中 国企业 在“一带 一路”投	经济地 理	97	Trade and FDI	- Geopolitical risks - Chinese companies lack information

			资 区 位 选 择				about foreign countries - Risks caused by cultural differences
38.	2015	Pei Changhong, YuYan	“一带一 路”建设 与我国 扩大开 放	国际贸 经探索	95	- Trade and FDI - Shanghai Free Trade Pilot Zone - Tianjin Pilot Free Trade Zone -Guangdong Pilot Free Trade Zone	
39.	2015	Wang Mingguo	“一带一 路”倡议 的国际 制度基 础	东北亚 论坛	97	Trade and FDI	Geopolitical risks
40.	2015	Zhao Tianrui, Sun Chengwu, Zhang Fuguo	“一带一 路”战略 背景下的 区域 经济发 展机遇 与挑战	经济问 题	74	-Trade and FDI -Infrastructure development	Geopolitical risks
41.	2014	Shi Fuping, Tang Dan-ni	发挥上 海在“一	上海文 化	10	- Cultural and people-to-	

			带一路”建设中的文化先发效应			people exchanges - Shanghai Pilot Free Trade Zone	
42.	2014	Ruan Zongze	中国需要构建怎样的周边	国际问题研究	48	Trade and FDI	Geopolitical risks
43.	2015	Song Guoyou	“一带一路”战略构想与中国外交新发展	国际观察	102	Trade and FDI	
44.	2015	Zheng Shipeng	一带一路建设中文化交流机制的构建	学术交流	101	- Cultural and people-to-people exchanges - Tourism development	- Geopolitical risks - Risks caused by cultural differences
45.	2014	Guan Lihao	“一带一路”思路下对经济转型模式的思考	企业改革与管理	13	Trade and FDI	Chinese companies lack information about foreign countries

46.	2015	Wang Guogang	“一带一路”：基于中华传统文化的国际化国际经济理念创新	国际金融研究	88	- Trade and FDI - Infrastructure development	
47.	2015	Ma Yun	“一带一路”建设中的风险管控问题	政治经济学评论	88	Trade and FDI	- Geopolitical risks - Environmental issues
48.	2015	Fu Yeqin, Li Yong	“一带一路”战略与海南“中国旅游特区”发展	热带地理	41	- Tourism development - Hainan Special Economic Zone	
49.	2015	Hua Jian	“一带一路”战略与我国文化产业的空间新布局	福建论坛	33	Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	

50.	2015	Ba Dianjun, Zhu Zhenkai	论“一带一路”战略内涵、风险及前景——以国际关系为视角	湖北社会科学	33	- Trade and FDI - Infrastructure construction	Geopolitical risks
51.	2015	Di Kun	“一带一路”建设的战略思考	国际观察	74	Trade and FDI	- Chinese companies lack information about foreign countries - Geopolitical risks
52.	2015	Liu Yong	“一带一路”战略下旅游产业整体竞争力的提升路径	鄂州大学学报	27	Tourism development	- Inadequate foreign countries development - Environmental issues
53.	2015	Dai Yalan, Xie Sixin	“一带一路”背景下物流一体化	铁路采购与物流	26	Infrastructure development	

			发展战 略研究				
54.	2015	Cai Shuangcheng	“一带一 路”战略 下中国 物流业 发展探 讨	物流技 术	26	Infrastructure development	
55.	2016	Ni Sha, Wang Yongxing, Jing Weimin	中国对 “一带一 路”沿线 国家直 接投资 的引力 分析	现代财 经	91	Trade and FDI	
56.	2016	Zhou Ping	“一带一 路”面临 的地缘 政治风 险及其 管控	探索与 争鸣	88	Trade and FDI	Geopolitical risks
57.	2016	Chang Yanan	一带一 路背景 下基础 设施 P P P 项	科技进 步与对 策	88	- Trade and FDI - Infrastructure development	Inadequate foreign countries development

			目风险 分担研 究				
58.	2016	Huang He, Starostin Nikita	中国企 业海外 投资的 政治风 险及其 管控— —以“一 带一路” 沿线国 家为例	深圳大 学学报 (人文 社会科 学版)	86	Trade and FDI	Geopolitical risks
59.	2016	Zhao Minyan, Dong Suo Cheng, Wang Zhe, Cheng Hao, Qin Fangming, Li Yu, Li Zehong, Li Fei	“一带一 路”沿线 国家安 全形势 评估及 对策	中国科 学院院 刊	81	Trade and FDI	Geopolitical risks
60.	2016	Fang Yini	“一带一 路”战略 下中国 企业对 海外直	现代经 济探讨	72	Trade and FDI	Geopolitical risks

			接投资 国的风 险评估				
61.	2016	Li Shengli	“一带一 路”战略 与周边 地缘重 塑	国际关 系研究	39	- Cultural and people-to- people exchanges - Trade and FDI	- Geopolitical risks - Chinese companies lack information about foreign countries - Risks caused by cultural differences
62.	2016	He Zhipeng	“一带一 路”与国 际制度 的中国 贡献	学习与 探索	31	Trade and FDI	
63.	2016	Huang Yi	“一带一 路”背景 下我国 对外农 产品贸 易研究	当代经 济研究	27	Trade and FDI	
64.	2016	Du Xiuhong	中国与 “一带一	现代管 理科学	27	Trade and FDI	- Geopolitical risks

			路”沿线国家的贸易关系及政策建议				- Negative attitudes in foreign countries
65.	2016	Guo Huadong, Xiao Han	“一带一路”的空间观测与“数字丝路”构建	中国科学院院刊	23	- Digital Silk Road - Tourism development	Environmental issues
66.	2016	Hu Haiyan	绿色丝绸之路经济带建设在中亚的实践与政策探析	华东师范大学学报(哲学社会科学版)	7	Green Silk Road	Environmental issues
67.	2016	Meng Qingqiang	中国对“一带一路”沿线国家直接投资动机的实证研究	工业经济论坛	72	Trade and FDI	Geopolitical risks

68.	2016	Sun Hui, Li Jianjun	“一带一路”国际物流绩效对中国中间产品出口影响分析	社会科学 学研究	59	Trade and FDI	
69.	2016	Dong Suocheng, Zhao Minyan, Guo Peng, Shi Guangyu, Li Yu, Li Zehong, Wang Junni, Zhu Shaoqing	“一带一路”生态旅游发展模式与对策	中国科 学院院 刊	59	- Tourism Development - Green Silk Road	
70.	2016	Cheng Cuiyun, Dong Zhanfeng, Ge Chazhong, Wang Jinnan, Yan Xiaodong,	“一带一路”绿色发展的战略实施框架	中国环 境管理	59	- Green Silk Road - Trade and FDI	Environment al issues
71.	2016	Chu Xueli	金融互联互通支持中小企业	中国流 通经济	58	Trade and FDI	

			跨境电商发展探索——基于我国与一带一路沿线国家和地区经济发展的思考				
72.	2016	Xing Liju	推进“一带一路”人文交流：困难与应对	国际问题研究	56	- Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	- Risks caused by cultural differences -Geopolitical risks
73.	2016	Zheng Gang, Liu Jinsheng	“一带一路”战略中教育交流与合作的困境及对策	比较教育研究	55	Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	Geopolitical risks
74.	2016	Huang Hui	一带一路背景下沿海康养旅	中南林业科技大学	33	Tourism development	

			游产业 研究	学报 (社会 科学 版)			
75.	2016	Zheng Lijuan	我国“一 带一路” 沿途港 口城市 区域物 流竞争 力聚类 分析	商业经 济研究	27	-Infrastructures development - Tianjin Free Trade Zone	
76.	2016	Wang Yi, Wang Zhongchang	“一带一 路”战略 下职业 教育对 外开放 的思路 架构	中国职 业技术 教育	27	Cultural and people-to- people exchanges	
77.	2016	Zhang Yajing	“一带一 路”背景 下电子 商务发 展创新 模式研 究	商业经 济研究	26	Trade and FDI	

78.	2016	Lan Qingxin, Jiang Feng	“一带一路”与以中国为核心的国际价值链体系构建	人文杂志	25	Trade and FDI	
79.	2016	Zhang Mingqian, Ke Li	“一带一路”跨国专利合作网络及影响因素研究	中国软科学	25	Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	
80.	2016	Zhao Zhenyu, Li Xingcai, Yao Mengmeng	“一带一路”沿线国家基础设施现状及市场机会研究	建筑经济	25	Trade and FDI	
81.	2016	Liu Zhen	“一带一路”倡议推进中国企业法律风险与	湖北大学学报 (哲学社会科学版)	25	Trade and FDI	- Geopolitical risks - Environmental issues

			对 策 研 究				
82.	2017	He Maochun, Zheng Weiwei	“一带一 路”战略 构想从 模糊走 向清晰 ——绿 色、健 康、智 力、和 平丝绸 之路理 论内涵 及实现 路径	《新疆 师范大 学学 报》 (哲学 社会科 学版)	35	- Green Silk Road -Cultural and people-to- people exchanges	- Environment al issues
83.	2018	Jiang Guanhong	中国企 业对“一 带一路” 沿线国 家市场 的进入 策略	中国工 业经济	88	Trade and FDI	
84.	2017	Yang Yaping, Gao Yue	“一带一 路”沿线 国家的 投资选	经济学 动态	93	Trade and FDI	- Geopolitical risks - Risks caused by

			址 —— 制度距 离与海 外华人 网络的 视角				cultural differences
85.	2017	Liu Weidong	“一带一 路”：引 领包容 性全球 化	中国科 学院院 刊	85	Trade and FDI	Environment al issues
86.	2017	Feng Zongxian, Jiang Weijie	基于产 业内贸 易视角 的“一带 一路”国 家战略 研究	国际贸 易问题	71	Trade and FDI	
87.	2017	Li Meng	中国自 贸区服 务与“一 带一路” 的内在 关系及 战略对 接	经济学 家	67	- Trade and FDI - Henan, Shaanxi, Fujian, Shanghai Free Trade Zone	

88.	2017	Song Yongchao	“一带一路”战略下中国对外直接投资贸易效应研究	技术经济与管理研究	66	Trade and FDI	
89.	2017	Zou Yongguang	“一带一路”中国主要节点城市旅游的经济联系 —— 空间结构与合作格局	经济管理	65	Tourism development	
90.	2017	Liao Zefang, Li Ting, Cheng Yunjie	中国与“一带一路”沿线国家贸易畅通障碍及潜力分析	上海经济研究	55	Trade and FDI	
91.	2017	Li Jianjun, Su Minyuan,	“一带一路”战略	商业经济	33	Trade and FDI	

		Yang Yu, Yang Fang	下黑 龙江 省中 俄跨 境电 子商 务发 展研 究				
92.	2017	Chen Jiyong, Jiang Yanping, Wang Baoshuang	“一带 一路” 战略 与中 国参 与国 际产 能合 作	学习 与 实践	27	- Trade and FDI - Infrastructure construction	- Chinese companies lack experiences - Risks caused by cultural differences
93.	2017	Xu Xian	“一带 一路” 防灾 减灾 合作 ：挑 战与 应对	国际 问题 研究	27	Cultural and people-to- people exchanges	Environment al issues
94.	2017	Bai Yang, Aimaitjiang Abuduhalike, Deng Feng	我国“ 一带 一路” 交通 基础 设施 对旅 游专 业化 的空 间效 应	中国 流 通经 济	27	Tourism development	

95.	2017	Kong Weiming	“一带一路”战略背景下教育面临的机遇和挑战——从医学教育角度谈起	未来与发展	26	Health Road	Silk	- Geopolitical risks - Risks caused by cultural differences
96.	2017	Ji Hongjiang, Xu Shaohua, Wang Ying	“一带一路”战略下的教育国际交流与合作研究述评	昆明理工大学学报(社会科学版)	26	Cultural and people-to-people exchanges		
97.	2017	Si Zengchuo, Zhou Kun	中国与“一带一路”沿线国家的产业贸易关系研究	北京工商大学学报(社会科学版)	26	Trade and FDI		
98.	2017	Sun Qixiang, Suo Lingyan, Zheng Wei	“一带一路”与新型全球化：风	中共中央党校学报	25	Trade and FDI		Geopolitical risks

			险及应对				
99.	2017	Li Shengbing, Zheng Yuanhao, Ma Zaoming	“一带一路”背景下中国与东盟高等教育合作的策略选择	华南师范大学学报(社会科学版)	25	Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	
100.	2017	Cheng Liang	“一带一路”背景下我国中小企业市场营销创新战略研究	特区经济	24	Trade and FDI	
101.	2017	Yang Bao, Gan Zilu, Shen Zhen	“一带一路”战略与会计人才培养路径创新	管理工程师	24	-Cultural and people-to-people exchanges - Trade and FDI	
102.	2017	Zhang Tongchao, Zhang Junbiao	中国与“一带一路”沿线	食药菌	24	Trade and FDI	

			国家食用菌贸易状况分析				
103.	2017	Qian Xueli	“一带一路”背景下中越跨境民族文化旅游合作开发问题研究	贵州民族研究	24	-Tourism development - Cultural and people-to-people exchanges -China-Vietnam International Tourism Cooperation Zone	
104.	2017	Xiang Kun	从数字经济视角看数字丝绸之路建设的内涵、结构和发展路径	西部论坛	19	- Digital Silk Road - Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	- Risks caused by cultural differences - Inadequate foreign countries development
105.	2018	Chen Jiyong, Liu Yishuang	“一带一路”沿线国家贸易便利	世界经济研究	122	Trade and FDI	

			化对中国贸易潜力的影响				
106.	2018	Qin Yaqing, Wei Ling	新型全球治理观与“一带一路”合作实践	外交评论	86	- Trade and FDI - Cultural and people-to-people exchanges - Infrastructure development - Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone in Cambodia	Geopolitical risks
107.	2018	He Yaping, Xu Kangning	“一带一路”沿线国家的经济制度对中国 OFDI 的影响研究	国际贸易问题	82	Trade and FDI	Geopolitical risks
108.	2018	Di Yuna, You Linqing	中国对一带一路国家的投资	中国软科学	63	Trade and FDI	

			动因、 距离因 素与区 位选择				
109.	2018	Liu Zuankuo, Xin Li	“一带一 路”建设 对沿线 中国重 点省域 绿色全 要素生 产率的 影响	中国人 口·资 源与环 境	52	- Green Silk Road - Trade and FDI	
110.	2018	Li Xiaozhong, Xu Huijian	中国对 一带一 路沿线 国家直 接投资 贸易效 应研究	国际经 济合作	40	Trade and FDI	
111.	2018	Peng Dongdong, Lin Hong	不同投 资动因 下东道 国制度 质量与 中国对 外直接 投资	亚太经 济	47	Trade and FDI	

			—— 基于“一带一路” 沿线国家数据 的实证				
112.	2018	Sun Yuqin, Su Xiaoli	“一带一路”倡议 下中东 欧贸易 便利化 对中国 与欧盟 出口影 响的比 较	上海对 外经贸 大学学 报	38	- Trade and FDI - Infrastructure development	
113.	2018	Lang Shuai	“一 带一 路”建设 与中 国海 外利 益维 护： 难点 、要 点和 重点	理论月 刊	4	- Trade and FDI	
114.	2018	Wang Zhengwen, Dan Juewan, Wang Zihan	国家风 险、出 口贸易 与对外	保险研 究	32	Trade and FDI	Geopolitical risks

			直接投资互动关系研究——以中国-“一带一路”国家为例				
115.	2018	Liu Wei, Li Ran	中国对“一带一路”沿线国家直接投资的出口贸易效应研究	价格月刊	26	Trade and FDI	
116.	2017	Sun Zhuangzi	“一带一路”合作空间拓展的着力点探究	新疆师范大学学报 (哲学社会科学版)	27	- Green Silk Road - Health Silk Road - Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	
117.	2019	Li Dan	“一带一路”:构建人类命运共同体	南开学报 (哲学社会)	33	- Trade and FDI - Cultural and people-to-	

			体的实 践探索	科 学 版)		people exchanges	
118.	2019	Wang Weiwei, Tan Yonglin	贸易便 利化水 平对“一 带一路” 沿线国 家双边 贸易的 影响分 析	经济问 题	48	Trade and FDI	
119.	2019	Ao Shuanghong, Sun Chan	“一带一 路”背景 下中国 参与全 球卫生 治理机 制研究	法 学 论坛	42	Health Silk Road	
120.	2019	Yu Wanhua	试论“一 带一路” 视域下 中华民 族文化 认同的 实现	汉字文 化	41	Cultural and people-to- people exchanges	
121.	2019	Fan Qiufang, Wang Man, Li Su	“一带一 路”沿线 国家贸	工业技 术经济	33	Trade and FDI	

			易便利化水平对中国出口贸易影响研究				
122.	2019	Bie Shijie, Qi Chunjie	中国与“一带一路”国家农产品贸易的竞争性与互补性研究	中国农业资源与区划	26	Trade and FDI	
123.	2019	An Xiaoning, Xin Ling	中国与东南亚农产品贸易现状与潜力分析* —— 基于“一带一路”倡议	中国农业资源与区划	25	Trade and FDI	
124.	2019	Zhang Yuque	一带一路背景下企业海外并	现代管理科学	25	Trade and FDI	- Chinese companies lack experience

			购财务协同效应定量分析				- Geopolitical risks
125.	2019	Wang Wen, Yan Fanxin	“一带一路”与中国对外投资的绿色化进程	中国人民大学学报	25	- Trade and FDI -Green Silk Road	
126.	2019	Liu Qingqing, Yan Xiaoxing, Lu Ruijie, Huang Fang, Zhang Xiaoxue	中国家具企业国际化与“一带一路”关系	家具	20	Trade and FDI	- Geopolitical risks - Risks caused by cultural differences
127.	2019	Huang Yupei	中非共建“数字丝绸之路”：机遇、挑战与路径选择	国际问题研究	20	Digital Silk Road	Foreign countries inadequate development
128.	2019	The Joint Research Group of the "Green Belt & Road"	推动绿色“一带一路”发展的绿	金融论坛	16	Green Silk Road	

		Project of ,ICBC and Tsinghua University	色金融政策研究				
129.	2019	Wang Hongzhi, Sun Jinjun	一带一路倡议下中欧班列国际物流运输平台的构建	对外经贸实务	18	Infrastructure development	
130.	2019	Wang Fenglong, Si Yuefang, Zeng Gang	地缘战略视角下“一带一路”倡议对中国对外直接投资的影响研究	人文地理	19	Trade and FDI	Geopolitical risks
131.	2019	Chai Li, Dong Chen	“一带一路”沿线亚洲国家贸易便利化对中国跨境电商出口	商业经济研究	20	-Trade and FDI - Digital Silk Road	

			规模的 影响				
132.	2020	Shi Benye, Ma Xiaoli	后疫情 时代的 全球治 理体系 重构与 中国角 色	东北亚 论坛	13	Health Silk Road	
133.	2020	Xing Guangyuan, Shi Jinzhao, Lu Cheng;	“一带一 路”倡议 下中国 跨境电 商的政 策演进 与发展 态势	西安交 通大学 学报 (社会 科学 版)	15	Trade and FDI	Risks caused by cultural differences
134.	2020	Wu Dan, Wu Ye	贸易便 利化对 中国从 “一带一 路”国家 进口的 影响—— 基于贸易 引力模	工业技 术经济	15	Trade and FDI	

			型的实证分析				
135.	2020	Ni Zhiliang	“一带一路”、税收营商环境与中国OFDI	工业技术经济	11	- Trade and FDI - Infrastructure construction	- Inadequate foreign countries development - Geopolitical risks
136.	2020	Guo Chaoxian, Liu Fang	“一带一路”产能合作新进展与高质量发展研究	经济与管理	11	Trade and FDI	
137.	2020	Zhi Hui	“一带一路”沿线国家贸易便利化对我国出口影响研究	经济纵横	11	Trade and FDI	
138.	2020	Li Bin, Li Yufang	中国企业“一带一路”背景下的跨国并	国际商贸	10	Trade and FDI	Geopolitical risks

			购绩效研究				
139.	2020	Wang Yuesheng, Zhang Yufei	民营企业助推“一带一路”高质量发展：优势、挑战与对策	新视野	10	- Trade and FDI - Green Silk Road	- Chinese companies lack experience - Environmental issues
140.	2020	The Study Group of the Belt and Road Green Index of ICBC	“一带一路”绿色金融（投资）指数研究	金融论坛	9	Green Silk Road	
141.	2020	Dai Xiang, Wang Ruxue	“一带一路”建设与中国对外直接投资：促进抑或抑制？	当代经济研究	9	Trade and FDI	
142.	2020	Zhou Jiewen, Zhao Yue, Yang Tai	“一带一路”沿线	统计与决策	9	Green Silk Road	

			省份绿色经济效率时空差异研究				
143.	2020	Wang Xia, Cheng Lei, Liu Tian	文化差异、制度质量对中国对“一带一路”沿线国家直接投资的影响	投资研究	9	- Cultural and people-to-people exchanges - Trade and FDI	- Geopolitical risks - Risks caused by cultural differences
144.	2020	Dai Yan, Chen Jiawei	“一带一路”背景下中华优秀传统文化传承的现实境遇与教育应对	贵州师范大学学报	8	Culture and people-to-people exchanges	
145.	2020	Jiang Li, Wu Zhicheng	新冠肺炎疫情背景下	人民论坛·学术前沿	2	- Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	Negative attitudes in foreign countries

			的“一带一路”民心相通建设			- Health Silk Road - Digital Silk Road - Green Silk Road	
146.	2020	Ou Ya, Ren Yuanzhen	新冠肺炎疫情下的“一带一路”：国际舆情与应对策略	国际传播	1	- Health Silk Road - Digital Silk Road	Negative attitudes in foreign countries
147.	2020	Zhou Jing	后疫情时代“一带一路”合作发展研究	学术交流	1	- Trade and FDI - Health Silk Road - Green Silk Road - Digital Silk Road	
148.	2020	Zhang Hui, Yan Qiang-ming, Tang Yu-xuan	“一带一路”建设推动形成全面开放新格局	北京交通大学学报(社会科学版)	2	- Trade and FDI	
149.	2020	Ji Feifeng	新冠疫情冲击	国际融资	2	- Trade and FDI	

			下“一带一路”建设的危与机			- Health Silk Road - Digital Silk Road	
150.	2020	Ren Tianwei	数字丝绸之路：数字国际合作路径与理念创新探析	公共外交利刊	2	Digital Silk Road	
151.	2020	Wen Hao	以“一带一路”建设促进国内国际双循环格局的对策思考	经济导刊	2	- Trade and FDI - Health Silk Road	
152.	2020	Xu Yixin	“一带一路”倡议下大连提升服务业国际竞争力对策研究	对外经贸	0	- Trade and FDI - Dalian's service industry	

153.	2020	Wang Dake, Li Benqian	上海参与“一带一路”国际文化合作与交流的现状、问题与对策	上海城市管理	1	- Cultural and people-to-people exchanges - Digital Silk Road	
154.	2020	Zhou Wei, Jiang Hongfei	“一带一路”对外直接投资的风险识别及规避	统计与决策	3	- Trade and FDI	- Geopolitical risks - Risks caused by cultural differences
155.	2020	Xiao Lanlan	中国能源安全与绿色“一带一路”建设	阅江学刊	4	- Green Silk Road	
156.	2020	Ren Yuna	中国—东盟共建数字丝绸之路：现状、动力与挑战 ——	全球化	3	Digital Silk Road	

			— 基于数字经济的视角				
157.	2020	Zeng Yanping	中国与“一带一路”沿线国家文化贸易总体格局与互补性研究	上海对外经贸大学学报	13	Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	
158.	2020	Li Yan	贸易便利化对我国经济增长的影响研究	技术经济与管理研究	8	Trade and FDI	Inadequate foreign countries development
159.	2020	Lan Qingxin, Huang Jinghan	“一带一路”沿线国家绿色发展水平评价研究	财经问题研究	7	- Green Silk Road - Health Silk Road	
160.	2020	Qiu Zenghui, Jiang Yi	全球卫生治理视域下	俄罗斯东欧中亚研究	0	Health Silk Road	

			中亚国家的健康状况及与中国的合作				
161.	2021	Xiao Xi, Song Guo-xin	新冠肺炎疫情常态化下的“一带一路”合作：挑战、机遇与进路	学习与探索	0	- Health Silk Road - Digital Silk Road - Green Silk Road - Trade and FDI	Negative attitudes in foreign countries
162.	2021	Yu Hongyuan, Wang Wanfa	绿色“一带一路”建设：进展、挑战与深化路径	国际问题研究	7	Green Silk Road	Environmental issues
163.	2021	Liu Wenbo	新时代提升中国“一带一路”倡议国际塑造力	丝路百科	37	Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	

			的进展与路径				
164.	2021	Peng Dondong, Lin Jue	“一带一路”沿线自由贸易协定深度提升是否促进了区域价值链合作?	财经研究	11	Trade and FDI	Risks caused by cultural differences
165.	2021	Duan Litao, Li Sirui, Li Jialin, Lu Benfu	政府创新激励干预下的分析师关注与企业研发投入——以“中国制造2025”与“一带一路”为例的实证研究	工业技术经济	5	Trade and FDI	

166.	2021	Zhou Qing, Wu Tongzhen, Yang Wei, Fang Gang	面向“一带一路”的企业技术标准联盟模式研究	管理评论	5	Trade and FDI	Risks caused by cultural differences
167.	2021	Fang Hui, Song Yujie	中国对“一带一路”沿线直接投资会降低企业经营风险吗	现代经济探讨	4	Trade and FDI	- Geopolitical risks - Risks caused by cultural differences
168.	2021	Guo Jianquan, Zhang Mengke	“一带一路”背景下绿色物流与环境及经济增长的关系	沈阳工业大学学报(社会科学版)	3	Green Silk Road	
169.	2021	Li Xiaozhong, Shen Dongfang	中国对“一带一路”沿线国家机电产品	国际经济合作	2	Trade and FDI	

			出口效率与出口增长效应研究				
170.	2021	Ye Shengxuan	美国智库对“数字丝绸之路”倡议的认知及启示	情报杂志	2	Digital Silk Road	Geopolitical risks
171.	2021	Zheng Qian	我国企业参与“一带一路”建设中面临的人力资源管理问题及对策探讨	企业改革与管理	2	- Cultural and people-to-people exchanges	- Risks caused by cultural differences - Chinese companies lack information about foreign countries
172.	2021	Shang Tao, Zhao Yu-jin	“一带一路”沿线国家营商环境对中国	山西师大学报(社会科学版)	3	Trade and FDI	Geopolitical risks

			对外直接投资的影响研究				
173.	2021	Sun Xin, Zhang Wenzhong	“一带一路”绿色债券市场：困境与对策	会计之友	4	Green Silk Road	
174.	2021	Cao Yinhua, Wu Wenjie, Li Ao	“一带一路”倡议下广东省国际贸易与国际物流协同发展研究	中国商论	0	- Trade and FDI - Guangdong Province	
175.	2021	Ding Yi	河北融入“一带一路”建设发展战略研究	科技资讯	0	- Cultural and people-to-people exchanges - Trade and FDI - Tourism development	
176.	2021	Yang Tianshou	数字经济赋能	商展经济	0	Digital Silk Road	

			“一带一路”高质量发展				
177.	2021	Liu Yuanyuan, Zhu Simin	数字丝绸之路建设赋能“一带一路”沿线国家经贸合作	中国远洋海运	1	- Digital Silk Road - Trade and FDI	
178.	2021	Chen Jian	“一带一路”高质量发展的理论逻辑与实践方案	财经问题研究	2	- Green Silk Road - Digital Silk Road - Health Silk Road	
179.	2021	Wang Wen, Liu Ying, Guo Fangzhou	后疫情时代的“一带一路”建设与展望	扬州大学学报 (人文社会科学版)	0	- Trade and FDI - Health Silk Road - Cultural and people-to-people exchanges - Digital Silk Road - Tourism development	

180.	2021	Hu Zaiyong	新冠肺炎疫情对“一带一路”建设的影响分析	时代经贸	0	Trade and FDI	
181.	2021	Cao Yajun, Hu Ting	“一带一路”倡议对我国OFDI的影响效应——投资流出和风险偏好研究	中国软科学	4	Trade and FDI	- Risks caused by cultural differences - Geopolitical risks
182.	2021	Chen Yan, Yi Lu	民营中小企业参与“一带一路”产业合作战略研究	北方经贸	2	Trade and FDI	- Chinese companies lack experience - Geopolitical risks
183.	2021	Liu Bing	高质量共建“一带一路”实践中的风险	中国商论	2	- Trade and FDI	Geopolitical risks

			防范和 政策建 议				
184.	2021	Chen Fujiong, Liu Ye, Cheng Dazhong	跨境电 商助推 “数字丝 绸之路” 建设的 机遇、 挑战与 策略	新疆社 科论坛	0	- Digital Silk Road - Trade and FDI	Inadequate foreign country development
185.	2022	Wang Yixian	中欧“一 带一路” 建设合 作路径 探颐	河 南 科 技 学 院 学 报	0	Trade and FDI	Negative attitudes in foreign countries
186.	2022	Yang Yan	绿色债 券推动 绿色“一 带一路” 发展的 模式与 路径探 索	对外经 贸实务	0	Green Silk Road	
187.	2022	Zheng Xueping, Lin Yueqin	“一带一 路”倡议 促进人 类命运	亚太经 济	0	Cultural and people-to- people exchanges	

			共同体 建构研 究			- Infrastructure development - Trade and FDI - Digital Silk Road - Green Silk Road	
188.	2022	Du Li, Ma Yaoyao	一带一 路”沿线 国家的 绿色发 展绩效 及驱动 因素研 究	四川大 学学报 (哲学 社会科 学版)	0	Green Silk Road	
189.	2022	He Limei	“一带一 路”背景 下外商 直接投 资对广 东产业 结构升 级的影 响研究	中国集 体经济	0	- Trade and FDI - Guangdong Province	
190.	2022	Yang Zewei	推动共 建“一带 一路”高 质量发	武汉 科技 大学 学报	0	- Digital Silk Road - Green Silk Road	

			展的国 际法解 读	(社 会 科 学 版)			
191.	2022	Cong Xiaonan, Li Guocheng	全 球 变 局 背 景 下 的 “一 带 一 路” 建 设 : 进 展 、 挑 战 与 应 对 措 施	全 球 化	0	- Infrastructure development - Green Silk Road - Health Silk Road	Geopolitical risks
192.	2022	Xiong Bin, Lin Shihong	数 字 贸 易 网 络 结 构 及 影 响 因 素 —— 基 于 “一 带 一 路” 沿 线 国 家 (地 区) 双 边 贸 易 数 据 的 研 究	科 技 和 产 业	0	Trade and FDI	
193.	2022	Zeng Xianghong, Luo Jin	“健康丝 绸之路” 构建的	浙 江 大 学 学 报	0	- Health Silk Road - Cultural and people-to-	

			“政府— 社会”复 合路径	(人文 社会科 学版)		people exchanges	
194.	2019	Li Huipin	医疗合 作健康 丝路通 民心	一带一 路报道	0	Health Silk Road	
195.	2015	Suo Jiulin, Dong Suocheng	关于加 快制定 并推进 “‘丝绸之 路经济 带’ 建设科 技支撑 行动计 划”的建 议	中国科 学院院 刊	9	- Trade and FDI - Digital Silk Road	Chinese companies lack information about foreign countries
196.	2019	Wen Shuhui, Hu Qiong, Cheng Xiannan	“一带一 路”国家 金融发 展、制 度环境 与中国 OFDI	华东经 济管理	26	Trade and FDI	
197.	2022	Guo Yan	深化一 带一路 建设，	中国对 外贸易	0	- Digital Silk Road - Health Silk Road	

			开拓数字丝路、绿色丝路			- Green Silk Road	
198.	2014	Zhou Junsheng	“一带一路”:新思路,新机遇	金融博览(财富)	28	Trade and FDI	
199.	2015	Zhang Xinyu	“一带一路”战略下中国新疆与哈萨克斯坦跨边界次区域经济合作	长春金融专科学校学报	28	- Trade and FDI - Cultural and people-to-people exchanges - Infrastructure development	Geopolitical risks
200.	2015	Liu Linxiu	“一带一路”背景下新疆面临的机遇和挑战	经济论坛	28	- Infrastructure construction - Trade and FDI - Green Silk Road	

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