

# The Belt and Road Initiative

Francisco José B. S. Leandro ·  
Paulo Afonso B. Duarte  
Editors

# The Belt and Road Initiative

*An Old Archetype of a New Development Model*

palgrave  
macmillan

*Editors*

Francisco José B. S. Leandro  
City University of Macau  
Macau SAR, China

Paulo Afonso B. Duarte  
Research Centre in Political Science  
University of Minho  
Braga, Portugal

ISBN 978-981-15-2563-6      ISBN 978-981-15-2564-3 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-2564-3>

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Cover image: Architect Francisco Ricarte, March 2019

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**Cover photo:**

Hong Kong/Zhuhai/Macau Bridge, inaugurated in 2018, is the longest bridge ever built in the world. Therefore, it stands as an example of People's Republic of China's effort and determination not only in improving its communication network within the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong province, but also in further enhancing the connectivity with regions beyond the bridge physical's reach, namely on Southwest Asia, as major airport hubs and seaports are located within the Pearl River Delta region.

Thus, the cover photo is an expression of China's 'communication dynamics' and highlights the role such infrastructure plays in 'The Belt and Road Initiative' strategy.

## FOREWORD: CONNECTIVITY WITH CONSENT

In Brussels too, China's *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) is on everybody's lips. On 27 September 2019, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and outgoing Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker opened the first EU-Asia Connectivity Forum by signing a partnership on sustainable connectivity. This is a signal to China and to the countries of Eurasia: BRI is not the only game in town. The European Union has in fact been investing in connectivity for a long time.

Connectivity is the latest buzzword in Brussels. Like most buzzwords, it is a catchy term for what is an age-old practice. The strategic importance of connectivity is nothing new. Why did the Romans build all those roads? States and empires have always tried to secure access to markets, to create political conditions favourable to their interests along the way and, of course, to ensure that they could quickly deploy their armies to wherever they were needed.

In the nineteenth century, the combination of great power rivalry and new technologies led to a frenzy of activity. Cape to Cairo! Berlin to Baghdad! The great powers attempted to construct roads and railroads to connect their colonies and to safeguard lines of communication with their allies. Britain eventually managed to create one contiguous 'red zone' of British-controlled territory on the map from north to South Africa. The railway to Baghdad underpinned Imperial Germany's influence in the Ottoman Empire.

Asia was no exception. Navies needed coaling stations, and states acquired bases along the sea lines of communication. In Manchuria, control of the railroads became the focal point for the geopolitical competition between the Russian and Japanese empires. The battle for the railroad hub of Mukden (now Shenyang), during the 1904–1905 Russo-Japanese War, was the greatest land battle ever fought second only to the First World War. Russia specifically set the gauge of its railways so as not to be invaded. Afterwards, Japanese-controlled Manchuria was like a railroad company with its own army (the Kwantung Army). Connectivity has always been competitive. What is new, is that conquest and colonization no longer work as a means of ensuring connectivity. If anything, the Russian conquest of the Crimea has decreased its connectivity; rather than an asset, it is a drag on the Russian economy. Today, connectivity can only be established with the consent of the states through which one passes and that host the terminus. Indeed, when connectivity becomes too competitive, it becomes counterproductive. Forcing a state to choose between two mutually exclusive connectivity schemes can tear it apart, as the Ukraine crisis demonstrates, and can lead to dangerously high tensions between the great powers. Both the EU and China should take care therefore not to be seen as squeezing the countries located between them.

The EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy and the BRI can be complementary—as long as China does not force any country to join the BRI, and as long as China does not force those who have joined to sever relations with the European Union. The EU’s aim certainly is not to push China out. It can hardly tell other countries to limit their links with China, while the European Union itself wants ever more trade and investment from and in China.

Instead, the European Union seeks to put its own attractive trade and investment offer on the table, incentivising the countries of Eurasia to maintain an open economy and a level playing field for all foreign actors. The objective is to ensure that countries that matter for the EU’s connectivity do not put all their eggs in one Chinese (or Russian) basket and wake up one day to find that they have sold out their sovereignty. Connectivity should not lead to conquest by other means.

The first EU-Asia Connectivity Forum, which like China’s BRI Forum is to become an annual event, was a success. The key countries of Eurasia were all represented at the senior political level, not an easy thing to pull off for an initiative that really only started a few months ago.

Now comes the really difficult part: identifying productive investment opportunities that benefit the European interest and mobilising the resources to grasp them. Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, announced that her commission would be a ‘geopolitical commission’: this is what it’s all about.

Sven Biscop  
Ghent Institute of International Studies  
Ghent University  
Ghent, Belgium

**Sven Biscop** is currently the Director of the ‘Europe in the World’ programme at the Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations in Brussels, which he joined in 2002, and Professor at the Ghent Institute for International Studies (GIIS) at Ghent University.

# INTRODUCTION

The main driver behind this book is the analysis of the developments associated with the Belt and Road Initiative (B&RI), five years after Xi Jinping announced both the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the 21st Maritime Silk Road (21MSR). Together, these two dimensions constitute the B&RI, providing the so-called Chinese ‘project of the century’ with regional, inter-regional and global dimensions. This volume aims at assessing the impact of the B&RI in all these dimensions and levels. This is a current and promising theme, not only in the short and medium terms, but also on a broader timescale, reflecting Chinese strategic thinking itself, since Chinese philosophy and culture are oriented towards long-term and intergenerational perspectives. Likewise, both the title of this publication (*The Belt and Road Initiative: An Old Archetype of a New Development Model*) and the way it has been organized result from the empirical perception that China asserts a conservative attitude towards foreign affairs, redesigned in multiple dimensions, to create a perception of domestic unity and global prestige. In this vein of thought, the B&RI is already influencing and will continue to influence, directly or indirectly, the current economic and political order.

It has been five years since Xi Jinping’s speech at Nazarbayev University in Astana, where the Chinese President unveiled the B&RI’s purposes to the world. A five-year time frame is neither too long nor too short for a comprehensive, enlightening, critical and even fair assessment, given



that the implementation of large economic, political, military or institutional projects (such as the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank) require some time. Along this line of reasoning, the editors wish to emphasize, as does Enrique Galan in his contribution, that one of the main cornerstones of all programmes of infrastructures development always depends on financing. In other words, assessing the impact and implementation of the B&RI in spheres ranging from the economic to the political and social domains requires a broader time frame than just three or four years. Certainly, many projects within the framework of the B&RI will arise, even if some of the dates are as yet undetermined. Other projects that already started in 2013 may require a longer period to reach completion. Because it does not make sense to postpone ad aeternum an evaluation of what has already been achieved and of the impact at the regional and global level, the five years, following the presentation of the B&RI in 2013, are in our opinion, extremely relevant.

The year 2019 marks the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (hereafter China), the 20th anniversary of the retrocession of Macau and the 22nd anniversary of the retrocession of Hong Kong. This is an extraordinary moment to reflect upon the comprehensive and challenging initiative embodied by the B&RI, an initiative that will certainly result in a (re)structuring of the global geo-economy and geopolitics. This alone justifies the importance and relevance of the theme addressed in this book. Recalling the work of President Hu Jintao, the Chinese proposal aims at nurturing a community of common destiny along the B&RI. In short, through the B&RI, China's vision is that its gains are those of the other countries and vice versa.

Shedding light on the B&RI requires us to set the proper perspective. The B&RI is defined as a global infrastructural access strategy (Leandro 2018, p. 94) contributing to the creation of a network of economic flows and the shortening of the distance between industrial production centres, raw materials exporting zones and relevant markets, based on five pillars: policy coordination, facilities connectivity, facilitation of unimpeded trade, financial integration and developing people-to-people bonds. We understand the B&RI as a Chinese-led intergenerational strategy, involving cross-sectorial elements and departing from domestic functional economic rearrangements, to encompass far-reaching economic, social, cultural and political scopes. Regionalization, economic corridors, transit corridors, special economic zones, production centres and markets will certainly lead to a higher degree of interdependency. The B&RI uses multilateralism

to promote a closer interaction between economic zones, stronger bilateral economic engagements, innovative conflict dispute resolutions and evolution of international law. Furthermore, the B&RI advances a new model of trade and economic cooperation and a new level of unprecedented global economic openness.

It is important to point out the originality of this book compared to the existing studies and monographs about the B&RI. First, the added value of this book is that it brings together and reconciles the sometimes contradictory perspectives found in the literature about the B&RI. This book is based on a need to build a new narrative of complementary connectivity between the European Union and Eurasia, between the North Atlantic and Asia-Pacific regions.

Second, this book is exclusive in its hybrid and holistic approach, offering readers a balanced, intertwined and multi-level and transcontinental perspective. Some studies focus on the B&RI land dimension, to the detriment of its, equally or even more important, maritime essence, since the overwhelming majority of international trade is carried out by sea. All credit to the monographs that discuss the maritime dimension of the B&RI, although many restrict their discussion to the Indian Ocean and, to some extent, to the Mediterranean Sea. The B&RI's spatial scope requires an extended analysis of the Pacific and the Atlantic regions. In this analysis, the editors value different perspectives focusing on Latin America states, small island states, such as Cape Verde, and key geopolitical states such as Turkey and Germany.

Finally, the wide and diversified educational and professional backgrounds of the contributors to this book bring additional value. This book diversifies and supplements more narrow or sectorial contributions to the B&RI studies. Indeed, the bone marrow of the book has been designed to be conceptually multi-domain, geopolitically covering the European Union, as the representative of the North Atlantic area Central and Eastern Europe', Afghanistan, Turkey and Russia. Sports, international public goods, the cultural guanxi and environmental sustainability are certainly among the topics making significant contributions to a multi-domain analysis.

As a result, the book is organized into three parts.

Part I—Presents and discusses the concept of the Belt and Road Initiative. This part contains nine chapters.

Chapter 1 opens with a smart framework discussing China's grand strategy 'with Chinese characteristics'. **Tanguy Swielande** and **Dorothee Vandamme** unequivocally assert that China projects an image of a country with the objective and power resources of a great power that is ready and willing to take the lead in international affairs. They argue that China mobilizes and operationalizes all the dimensions of power to implement its grand strategy and achieve its aim. In their analysis, the centrality of the Chinese leadership and the year 2049 will be the determinants of China's search to be a great power with a wide range of instruments and means of power at its disposal. These authors recognize that B&RI is also about geopolitics and spheres of influence, one of the main objectives being to reinforce China's presence on the Rimland, and they acknowledge the fact that the more followers there are sharing a common social identity with China, the more the balance of power will tilt in Beijing's favour.

In Chapter 2, **Cátia Miriam Costa** adopts an international communication theory approach to the B&RI, while interestingly claiming that discourse is one of the B&RI tools for a global narrative, emphasizing that the Chinese value of non-intervention is one of the pillars of the principles of peaceful coexistence. China's most important international actions are humanitarian in nature, carried out under the United Nations umbrella, avoiding any direct intervention in the domestic policy of other countries. This attitude gives way for China to develop a role as a mediator in international crises or conflicts. The main topic of Chinese international discourse is always about the peaceful resolution of international conflicts and respect for domestic policies. **Cátia Miriam Costa** further asserts that China needed a robust international discourse to attract different countries to the project. Therefore, China also depends on the coverage that the international media give to the B&RI. The idea of successively announcing the project in official visits provides evidence that the Chinese government counts on the international media to spread the B&RI narrative to a broader international audience. This strategy is often used in international communication in order to promote the

projects or the will of states. According to **Costa**, one of China's main challenges is the communication of the concept of *guanxi* which is not clear to the Western world. Thus, according to the author, if China wants to propose a *guanxi* mode of conducting international politics, the international community must first understand the principles of harmony, voluntarism, win-win relations, mutual trust, equality and connectivity for development. All in all, China has to adapt the discourse to a global audience.

In Chapter 3, **Amit Gupta** revisits the vital topic of the United States vs. China rivalry, discussing the elevation of China's relative standing in the international order and diminishing American global influence. The author believes that China's phenomenal economic growth over the last three decades has enabled it to create an economic interdependence with some of America's closest allies and, thus, has created a situation where these nations are increasingly hedging their bets in terms of whom to support in the Sino-US rivalry. In addition, **Amit Gupta** examines Chinese soft power, asserting that the Chinese have also explicitly recognized that they have to build the credibility of the B&RI through the use of soft power. And in this context, the Chinese have sought to create stronger people-to-people bonds through greater cooperation in the spheres of science, education and health. In the final part of this chapter, the author suggests that the B&RI is the first step towards integrating large parts of the world into a Chinese-constructed international economic order.

In Chapter 4, **Carlos Rodrigues** and **Emanuel Junior** continue the soft power discussion, but this time from another stimulating and peculiar perspective: football. The authors are of the opinion that the B&RI is currently the most ambitious strategy pursued by the Chinese government and that China is also looking at other scenarios in international geopolitics. The discussion presented adopts the 'people-to-people exchange' perspective and recognizes that sport is one (among others) of the targeted fields. Clearly, the authors stress that China intends to have one of the world's largest national sports economies. **Rodrigues** and **Junior** combine sport, infrastructure, tourism, public diplomacy and soft power to conclude that through the 'Football Plan' and the 'Sports Tourism B&RI Plan', China seeks not only to develop its sports industry, but also to establish diplomatic and trade relations, to promote exchange and exchange of knowledge, to bring the country closer to other nations,

thus strengthening its economy and its leadership role in international geopolitics.

In Chapter 5, **Li Xing** and **Zheng Xiaowen** present a thought-provoking B&RI analysis, through the international public goods approach which implicitly helps to project China as an emerging responsible ‘global normative power’. The authors assert that the undersupply of international public goods, including backward infrastructures and low economic development levels, in the Eurasian region has raised both awareness and concern. B&RI, as a new international development project, can in the short term create jobs and improve infrastructure and in the long run stimulate the vitality of the economy. With its openness and inclusiveness, the B&RI will definitely expand the benefits across national boundaries. **Xing** and **Xiaowen** recognize that China’s capital and trade expansion in the developing countries of the Global South represents two sides of the same coin, with one side showing great opportunities in terms of infrastructure connectivity and political and economic room for manoeuvre and upward mobility and another side exhibiting challenges in terms of debt burden and unequal trade relationship.

In Chapter 6, **Enrique Galán** makes a decisive contribution to understand the sources and the tools available for the financing of the B&RI and the expected impact in promoting economic development, connectivity and trade in Asia. The author reminds us that Chinese banks held more than USD 22.6 billion in deposits in 2016 (Statista 2018) and foreign exchange reserves in China exceeded USD 3.1 trillion in August 2018, nearly 9% of the world’s total (Trading Economics, 2018). Liquidity is therefore rapidly available for the financing of B&RI projects. In addition, **Galán** stresses that the financing of the B&RI is based on two main sources, namely: (i) the main funding, estimated around USD 900 billion and (ii) the Silk Road Fund (SRF), estimated at around USD 40 billion. The author conclusively and decisively states that most of the risks identified are less severe than some critics suggest, that these risks are being mitigated, and that the inevitably increasing role that third parties are playing in the initiative can be extended to mitigate the risks even further.

In the same vein of thought, in Chapter 7, **Fernanda Ilhéu** takes the discussion to another level, debating different scales of B&RI financing. In China’s vision, the world needs a more integrated

and globally controlled world economic model, to achieve a more dynamic and balanced growth, where China must assume global responsibilities. China wants to have a role in the decision-making of the rules of the relationship model for the world's countries, especially regarding international organizations and regional integration policy. **Fernanda Ilhéu** declares that the B&RI is an ongoing cooperation process between China and Third World countries, which creates a new vision for trade and investment relations with the objective of common development and destiny. This new vision aims to find a way for countries to interconnect their development strategies, which complement their competitive advantages. Moreover, this new vision aims to establish economic development corridors—hubs of cooperation platforms with inland distribution logistic networks, infrastructures and industrial parks.

In Chapter 8, **Richard Hardiman** introduces the topic of sustainability in the B&RI, from the perspective of the environment, natural resources, ecology, biodiversity and climate change, in the light of the Paris Climate Agreement and the International Coalition for Green Development on the Belt and Road. **Hardiman** discusses the greenness of banks investing in B&RI, the existence of green bounds and advanced case studies such as the Lamu power plant, to emphasize that to date there has been no strategic environmental assessment conducted on the B&R economic corridors.

Chapter 9 by **Yichao LI** and **Mário Vicente** concludes Part I. They present a chapter that first discusses the establishment and development of Chinese partnerships and the cooperation between other countries with China in the relevant areas of the B&RI. Then, the authors analyse the establishment and development of Chinese partnerships before and after the B&RI, how the situation has changed, as well as the evolution of the interactions and contributions between Chinese partnerships and the B&RI. The authors argue that the Chinese government has also tried to make some adjustments based on the challenges that have arisen in the development of the B&RI in recent years. Moreover, the Chinese government has made many efforts to improve the transparency of the B&RI, to ensure the openness and reciprocity of the project and to enhance mutual trust among participants. Despite the diversity of partnerships established by China, the hierarchical classification of partnerships is difficult to define due to the interpretation challenges of the Chinese language.

However, no matter what kind of partnership, China should carefully manage and maintain these partnerships.

Part II—Debates the central questions associated with the B&RI and the European Union. This part contains three chapters.

In Chapter 10, **Carmen Amado Mendes** and **Lorenzo Gagliano** focus on the impact of the B&RI on the international order led by the West, raising the question: Is the B&RI a threat or an opportunity? The authors have taken an important stand by acknowledging that as the Chinese interest in Europe expanded geographically and substantially, new trends in investment and trade emerged, highly differentiated across Europe and across sectors, despite the existence of some common patterns. China's increasingly important role as a global economic player and its attempt to reform its economy to achieve a 'new normal', in which economic growth is increasingly based on technology and services, make dialogue and continued cooperation with Beijing a top priority for the EU. In addition, **Carmen** and **Gagliano** argue that given the limited progress made in Europe in terms of B&RI projects started and completed (especially in comparison with the Asian region), it is difficult to predict exactly the impact of China's initiative in Europe. Finally, both authors seem to be clear about the real nature of China-EU relations in the framework of the B&RI. Indeed, this new Chinese proposal for international cooperation—to improve multilateralism and tackle global issues—is not an aid plan. It is a rather pragmatic ongoing process without specific planning behind it, which develops on the basis of commercial interests.

In Chapter 11, **Laura C. Ferreira-Pereira** and **Livia Brasil Carmo Grault** returned to the topic of partnerships as previously presented by **Yichao Li** and **Mário Vicente**, to discuss specifically and comprehensively the EU-China bilateral maritime cooperation (2003–2019). The authors asserted that this cooperation has not unleashed its full potential yet, due to power competition as well as prevailing differences between the two actors when it comes to their nature, identity, values and worldviews. **Laura** and **Livia** further stressed that when it comes to maritime security against the backdrop of

Maritime Silk Road, cooperation apart from practices is hard to achieve. At the political level, cooperation is limited insofar as each partner has its own strategy regarding EU-Asia connectivity. This occurs because the relationship in the realm of maritime cooperation is marked by reciprocal mistrust, as well as conflicts deriving from diverging background knowledge.

In Chapter 12, **Sten Idris Verhoeven** concludes Part II and argues that EU has not yet adopted any common position on the B&RI. Whereas southern and eastern EU member states are generally enthusiastic, northern and western EU member states are more hesitant. Therefore, projects under the B&RI may conflict with EU rules, as evidenced by the EU Commission's investigation into the Budapest-Belgrade Railway for possible violation of EU public procurement rules. This contribution looks into the potential legal obstacles posed by EU law for the successful implementation of the B&RI and proposes that China and the EU should set up a comprehensive international framework through which both the B&RI and the EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy may be accomplished.

Part III—Overviews Belt and Road Initiative key areas such as Latin America, North Atlantic, Central Europe and Central Asia. This part also contains nine chapters:

In Chapter 13, **Gretchen Small** reviews how and in what way the BRI has developed into a political and economic force in Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC), and its prospects going forward. The author examines two proposed great projects, in particular—South America's Bioceanic railroad and a railroad connecting the continents of North and South America through Central America—to illustrate the interplay of history and current forces shaping the direction of this unique endeavour in the region.

In Chapter 14, **Ivete Silves Ferreira** and **João Paulo Madeira** introduce a particular discussion on the B&RI, from the perspective of a small archipelago state, Cabo Verde. The authors declare that Cabo Verde shares an auspicious relationship with China. The country has a high geopolitical value that makes it comparatively unique, in part due to its geographical proximity to important geopolitical and



geoeconomic areas, in particular the African continent. Furthermore, the authors acknowledge that for Cabo Verde, the strategic partnership represents the renewal of the partnership model implemented so far. **Ivete** and **Madeira** conclude that after six decades of relationship with Cabo Verde, Chinese priorities have changed. China presents itself as a capitalist power, with an imperialist project on the African continent. Gradually, we have been witnessing the extension of China's presence in Cabo Verde, not only through the implemented projects and agreements, but also in the context of private investment. The signing of the strategic partnership in 2006, the inclusion of tourism in the set of pillars of this partnership and the progress in the construction of the large ongoing tourist complex by a Macanese company mark a new phase in this relationship.

In Chapter 15, **Francisco B. S. José** and **Paulo Afonso B. Duarte** argue that the B&RI makes a positive contribution to the implementation of the 'de-bordering concept' between China and European Union. At the same time, they assess the relevance of Portugal within the B&RI. The authors stress that de-bordering does not necessarily suggest the removal of physical borders nor does it entail terminating the demarcation of sovereign limits. Indeed, de-bordering refers to simultaneous processes of boosting cross-border interactions, through the implementation of facilitating mechanisms compatible with the exercise of sovereign power. **Leandro** and **Duarte** discuss the geopolitical value of the Beja Airport, Praia da Vitória, Leixões and Sines deep-water seaports, Lajes Aero naval base in the Azores, the Blue Economy Partnership, the establishment of the technological labs and the triangular or trilateral cooperation, and conclude that Portugal is literally the ultimate European border.

In Chapter 16, **Jorge Tavares da Silva** and **Rui Pereira** further elaborate on the importance of the B&RI in the context of the Atlantic Ocean, assuming that one of the main objectives is to extend the B&RI to the 'Portuguese Sea', particularly the port of Sines or even islands in Azores. The authors aim to evaluate the cooperation that is increasing in the maritime port area between China and Portugal. The chapter begins with an analysis of Chinese investment in the European continent after the sovereign debt crisis and tensions with the United States. Then, the focus shifts to the investment in Portugal in the so-called second wave, particularly the maritime domain. In conclusion, **Tavares da Silva** and **Pereira** argue that the

Portuguese maritime assets are important in the Atlantic area, where trade flows cross with those of northern Europe. It is also a gateway into Europe if we consider the Panama Canal and Nicaragua Canal and the Chinese strategic interests. The authors also point out that Lisbon is also under pressure from Washington and Brussels due to its ‘excessive’ cooperation with Beijing in strategic areas and technology sectors.

In Chapter 17, **Weiqing Song** and **Lilei Song** provide a systematic analysis of China’s cooperation with Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) in the context of the One Belt, One Road Initiative. The authors argue that China’s cooperation with the CEECs is motivated by the desire to serve the mutual interests of the participatory states by providing public goods that foster international connectivity and cooperation. In the authors’ view, the 16 + 1 cooperation framework between China and the CEECs can be understood as China’s attempt to strengthen the public good of connectivity. It is mainly an inter-regional public good, but has substantial implications for global connectivity. China has devoted enormous resources to develop this new approach. **Weiqing Song** and **Lilei Song** conclude that the 16 + 1 cooperation framework, part of China’s BRI, was established to expand and deepen exchange and cooperation between China and the CEE region. Therefore, it can be understood as an effort to construct a global public good, specifically connectivity. If successful, it would add an important component to global economic governance.

In Chapter 18, **Joanna Ciesielska-Klikowska** presents the issue of German-Chinese cooperation in the context of the development of the B&RI. The main supposition is that in Germany, the shape of cooperation with China is not only influenced by the political perception of benefits resulting from bilateral relations and pursuit of interests of national actors in accordance with the spirit of *Realpolitik*, but also by the impact that non-state actors exert on the decisions taken by the government in Berlin. Germany sees China as its crucial economic partner in Asia, mainly because of China’s economic potential and impressive dynamics of growth in recent years. **Ciesielska-Klikowska** concludes that while German-Chinese cooperation has lasted several decades, the B&RI certainly gave a perfect frame for it. The chapter implies that Germany—through close cooperation with the People’s Republic of China—wants to

maximize the benefits of the BRI and create a synergy effect, based on the ‘win-win’ principle—a position that China has declared as well.

In Chapter 19, **Ahmet Salih İköz** discusses the role of Turkey in the context of the B&RI. Indeed, he declares that China’s One Belt, One Road initiative represents a strategic process towards strengthening the economic and political cooperation between regions that will be home to 83% of the world population, and it will provide a great impetus to Turkey as a crossroad. In his study, he draws some projections for the coming decades according to those arguments as well as the possible benefits of B&RI. **Salih İköz** concludes that the B&RI makes Turkey a potential transportation hub. Modernization and updating the customs union agreement with Europe could yield benefits for Turkey’s role in the B&RI project. Multi-level EU enlargement would improve dialogue on Turkish membership in the EU. Since EU members have different growth patterns and development levels, different levels of integration with member states may be needed.

In Chapter 20, **Carlos Branco** presents a twofold objective: to understand how China cooperation with Afghanistan has served the purposes of the B&RI and to assess the role played by Afghanistan in the implementation of that project. The author begins by declaring that Afghanistan’s relative importance to the B&RI is not determined by geography but mainly by security reasons. Moreover, the author clearly states that China is very uncomfortable with the American presence in Central Asia. One significant part of ‘Chinese efforts in Afghanistan are aimed at restricting U.S. influence in the region’ (Shams 2017). China’s security interests in Afghanistan as a main gate to Central Asia are closely connected with its security interests in Central Asia. **Branco** asserts that China used the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as an instrument to attract attention to Central Asian security and concomitantly to Afghan security. While contributing to fight insecurity in Central Asia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization simultaneously improved China’s own security, i.e., reducing and/or eliminating the footprint of competing powers close to its borders and the aspirations to autonomy in Xinjiang. In his final concluding remarks, the author clearly takes an important stand: Afghanistan is important to China, but the key reason is not the B&RI.

In Chapter 21, **Sandra Dias Fernandes** and **Vera Ageeva** analyse the Russian perspective on the greater involvement of China in the Eurasian space, namely under the B&RI. They argue that the Russian turn to the East undertaken recently by the Kremlin has a complex prequel rooted in Russian modern history, when Moscow sought to establish a new international identity and place in global politics. According to the authors, the turning point in the reorientation of Russian foreign policy to the East took place in period 2008–2014. During this period, Russia entered into a profound conflict with European and American political elites, and arguably, this state-of-play did not leave a room for any manoeuvre in world politics except the turn to the East. **Fernandes** and **Ageeva** discuss the BRICS, the World Trade Organisation, the Eurasian Economic Union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to make a very simple and clear point: China and Russia are close partners, but not allies.

In a nutshell, the editors aimed to deliver a varied input to the current literature on the B&RI. The array of contributors was selected according to three criteria. Firstly, their earlier work on the B&RI and among them, we have widely recognized authors. Secondly, with the right combination of geographical origins, academic backgrounds and professional experience, this volume brings together three dozen senior and young researchers, based on four continents: Africa, America, Asia and Europe, and sharing a passion for academic research in the field of the B&RI. Finally, among these researchers are new young talents, to whom Palgrave has given a chance to publish in a book with global range.

Based on analyses provided by the contributors to this volume, the conclusion will outline the strengths and weaknesses of the B&RI. The editors will make policy-oriented recommendations to scholars and policy-makers in the context of the new global order that the B&RI will certainly influence. There is in fact an additional contribution of the Chinese-led initiative: a framework for numerous regional material and immaterial silk roads, such as the Sahel silk road, the polar silk road, the Balkans silk road, the digital silk road, cultural silk road, green silk road, information silk road and the space silk road. However, it is important to bear in mind the words of **Tanguy Struye** and **Dorothee Vandamme** at the beginning of this book: this all about China as a status-seeking great power, looking at

the year 2049 as a milestone, which represents the symbolic achievement of its rise to the status of the world's greatest power.

The editors wish to state that to ensure the strict observation of academic freedom of all contributors, all chapters are published in their original form, following review by the authors themselves. The editors hereby disclaim their own understanding and express their free adherence to the 'One-China policy' since it is the official position of the United Nations.

Macau SAR, China  
Braga, Portugal  
October 2019

Francisco José B. S. Leandro  
Paulo Afonso B. Duarte

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Vera Ageeva** (Russian Federation) holds master's degrees in philosophy, French, and in international relations. She received a Ph.D. in political science from St. Petersburg State University in 2016 and served as international relations expert at St. Petersburg City Administration in 2008–2016. Since 2017, she has been Associate Professor at the Higher School of Economics (St. Petersburg), and since 2019 deputy head of the Department of Political Science at the same institution in St. Petersburg. Her most recent studies focus on the soft power of competing actors in Eurasia.

**Carlos Martins Branco** (Portugal) is a Major General (retired) who served in the Portuguese Army. Currently, he is a Ph.D. candidate at Universidade Nova de Lisboa. He is a researcher in the Portuguese Institute of International Relations (IPRI) and associate researcher in the National Defense Institute (IDN). He authored two books and more than 70 scientific articles on conflict resolution, security and defence matters published in books, periodicals and newspapers, and co-edited four books. He lectures at various higher education schools and defence institutions on security and defence, and international relations (United Nations Peacekeeping, NATO, CSDP and conflict resolution) and was the scientific co-director of postgraduate studies in media and crisis management at Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais, do Trabalho e da Empresa (ISCTE). He was the Director of the Cooperation and Regional Security Division of the International Military Staff at the NATO HQ (Brussels),

Deputy Director of the Portuguese War College and National Defence Institute and is a member of various think tanks and civic organizations.

**Joanna Ciesielska-Klikowska** (Poland) is Assistant Professor in the Department of Asian Studies at the University of Lodz, Poland, scholarship holder of the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) at the Technische Universität Chemnitz, visiting lecturer at the Universität des Saarlandes in Saarbrücken and Otto-von-Guericke-Universität in Magdeburg, and member of the Polish Society for International Studies and Poland-Austria Society.

**Cátia Miriam Costa** (Portugal) is Guest Professor at ISCTE-IUL and a researcher in the Centre for International Studies—Instituto Universitário de Lisboa. She is the director of the Chair Global Ibero-America of the European Institute of International Studies (Stockholm). Her research focuses on international communication and discourse analysis, specifically concerning the cases of Macau, Hong Kong and China. She is also developing her academic work on China's international relations and Macau's public diplomacy towards Eurasia, the Portuguese-speaking Countries, and Latin America.

**Jorge Tavares da Silva** (Portugal) holds a Ph.D. in international relations from the Faculty of Economics at the University of Coimbra, in the specific field of international politics and conflict resolution: 'Channels of Non-Governmental Intermediation in the Transformation of Sino-Formosan Conflict: The Case of the Taiwanese Business Community' (dissertation, 2012) and degree in international trade at the Institute of Information and Management Sciences (ISCIA): *The Impacts of China's Integration on the Global Economy* (monograph, 2004). He is a researcher at GOVCOPP—Research Unit on Governance, Competitiveness and Public Policy. He is Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Aveiro, Department of Social, Political and Territorial Sciences (DCSPT), and Master of Chinese Studies and also teaches at the Faculty of Letters, University of Coimbra. From 2012 until 2017, he taught at the University of Minho (Braga, Portugal). He is a founding member of the Observatory of China (Portugal) and the Center for Studies and Research on Security and Defense of Tras-os-Montes and Alto Douro (CEID-STAD). Between 2012 and 2016, he was President of the Observatory for Trade and International Relations (OCRI); member of the Scientific

Council; coordinator of the Department of Management and International Relations and coordinator of ISCIA's master's in Security, Defense and Conflict Resolution programme; auditor, National Defence Course of 2013–2014, National Defence Institute (IDN); member of the European Association for Chinese Studies (EACS), the Association of Chinese Political Studies (ACPS) and the Portuguese Institute of Sinology (IPS); and member of the Editorial Board of the *Zhongguo Yanjiu—Journal of Chinese Studies* and *Tempo Exterior* (Spain). He sat on the Scientific Committee of the 20th Congress of the European Association of Chinese Studies held in Portugal (2014). He is the author of multiple articles and chapters of books in international journals, particularly on political, economic and social issues facing contemporary China. He is the author of the book *BRICS and the New International Order* (Caleidoscópio, 2015) and co-author of the book *Em Bicos de Pés e de Olhos em Bico—Experiences and Living Together Between the Chinese and Portuguese* (Mare Liberum, 2012).

**Tanguy Struye de Swielande** (Belgium) is Professor in International Relations at Université Catholique de Louvain and director of the Centre for Studies in International Crises and Conflicts (CECRI).

**Paulo Afonso B. Duarte** (Portugal) is Assistant Professor at Universidade Lusófona do Porto and Guest Professor at the University of Minho. He is a postdoctoral researcher at Centro de Investigação em Ciência Política, University of Minho. He holds a Ph.D. in political science (Catholic University of Louvain). His research focuses on China's Belt and Road Initiative and Central Asia, where he has carried out an extensive on-the-ground research. Recent publications are: *La Nouvelle Route de la Soie chinoise et l'Asie centrale*, Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 2018; 'Whose Silk Road? The Chinese, US, European Union and Russian Strategic Projects for Regional Integration in Central Asia', in C. Mendes (ed.), 2018, pp. 38–49; *The New Silk Road in the Context of East Asian Relations and Wider International Implications*, Routledge; 'China's Momentum: The "One Belt One Road" Triple's Securitisation', pp. 143–165, and Conclusion written with Li Xing, 'The OBOR in the Politics of Fear and Hope', pp. 279–289, in Li Xing (ed.), *Mapping China's 'One Belt One Road' Initiative*, Palgrave, 2018.

**Sandra Dias Fernandes** (Portugal) has been Professor of International Relations and Political Science at the University of Minho since 2001. She has a Ph.D. in political science, with a specialization in international relations, from Sciences Po (Paris). She received the Jacques Delors Prize 2005 for research on the relationship between the European Union and Russia, focusing on political dimensions and security (in *The European Union, Russia and NATO: The Institutionalization of a Strategic Relationship*, Lisbon: Principia, 2006). She was assigned two consecutive mandates to provide direction for the B.A. and M.A. programmes in international relations, and she was also Deputy Director of the Department of International Relations and Public Administration at the University of Minho. She was also a member of the Steering Committee of the Ph.D. in political science and international relations of the University of Minho. She was elected president of the Section of International Relations of the Portuguese Association of Political Science (APCP) in 2016–2018 and is currently Deputy Director of the Research Centre in Political Science (CICP). Her research interests focus on European studies, the post-Soviet space, the European Union’s external actions, the relationship between the European Union and Russia, foreign policy analysis, international security and multilateralism. She has published books, book chapters and papers, including *Estonia and Portugal in Europe: Escaping Peripherality, Capitalizing on Marginality*, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* (2019, with A. Mkarychev); ‘The European Union and Russia during the Two Waves of Enlargement: New Political and Implementation Rationales on Old Issues’, in T. Hasimoto & M. Rhimes (Eds.), *Reviewing European Union Accession* (pp. 275–292; 2017), Leiden and Boston: Brill. She has also been a speaker at national and international scientific conferences, seminars and lectures, and given interviews for national and international media.

**Ivete Silves Ferreira** (Cabo Verde) received a Ph.D. in geography from the Federal University of Pernambuco (Brazil) and his dissertation was entitled ‘Great Urban Project in a Small Island Country: The Chinese Project Cape Verde Integrated Resort and Casino (2014/2018)’. From 2006 to 2011, she was a member of the Cape Verdean Parliament and member of the Specialized Commission of the Economy, Environment and Land Use. Between 2012 and 2014, she coordinated the Urban Development Service in the Directorate General of Spatial Planning and Urban Development (DGOTDU). She is currently Technician at the

National Institute of Territorial Management (INGT) in Cape Verde and member of the Research Group on Innovation, Technology and Territory (GRITT) of the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE).

**Laura C. Ferreira-Pereira** (Portugal) is Full Professor of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Minho and Visiting Professor of the University of São Paulo. She has published extensively on the EU's Foreign Policy (CFSP/CSDP) and Portuguese Foreign Policy in the journals such as *International Politics*, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Journal of European Integration*, *Cooperation and Conflict*, *International Politics*, *Global Society*, *European Politics and Society* and *European Security* as well as in several edited volumes. Her current research explores the nature and significance of the EU's strategic partnership diplomacy, Europeanization within and beyond Europe, comparative regional governance and integration processes, and Euroscepticism and its impact upon the process of European (dis)integration. She is a member of the editorial board of the journals *Contemporary Politics* and *European Review of International Studies*. She is a founding member of the European International Studies Association (EISA).

**Lorenzo Gagliano** (Italy) completed his bachelor's degree in political science and received his master's degree in international relations at the University of Palermo (Italy). His thesis was entitled 'The Belt and Road Initiative, what role for the European Union?' He furthered his academic career with numerous postings abroad: Kozminski University in Warsaw (Poland), Finnova Foundation in Brussels (Belgium) and the University of Coimbra as a visiting researcher. He is a member of the Mediterranean Institute for International Studies (IMESI) based in Southern Italy where he is a researcher and adviser of the board. His research activities mainly concern China and the European Union.

**Lívia Brasil Carmo Grault** (Federal Republic of Brazil) holds a Bachelor of Laws and Social Science degree from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. She is pursuing a master's degree in international relations at the University of Minho and is currently on an exchange programme at the University of Macau. Her current research interest is the European Union's strategic partnerships with Brazil and China.

**Amit Gupta** (United States of America) is Associate Professor in the USAF Air War College, Alabama. His writings have focused on arms production and weapons proliferation, South Asian and Australian security policies, diaspora politics, popular culture and politics and, more recently, on the US-China rivalry and the impact of demography on US foreign policy. His articles have appeared in *Orbis*, *Asian Survey*, *Security Dialogue*, *The Round Table* and *Mediterranean Quarterly*. He has published seven books (as author or editor), the most recent of which are *Air Power: The Next Generation*, Amit Gupta (ed.), Howgate Publishing, 2019; *Maritime Heritage and Challenges in the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific*, Howard M. Hensel and Amit Gupta (eds.), Routledge, 2018.

**Richard Hardiman** (Israel) is Professor at Lisbon's NOVA School of Business and Economics in Portugal, and also a senior lecturer and research fellow of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel. His research areas include: China's geopolitical and economic development and impact upon global natural resources and environment, geopolitics of energy, fossil fuels and impact upon climate change, water and air pollution. He has lived and worked in China over a period of 30 years both with the European Commission and as a consultant to central and provincial governments.

**Ahmet Salih İkiş** (Turkey) received a Ph.D. in economics from Dokuz Eylül University of Turkey in 2000. He has been involved in Civic Education Project of OSI in 2001 in Bulgaria. He was visiting faculty in Macedonia, Hungary and Russia. He edited several books such as *Political Economy of Muslim Countries* and *Economic Dynamics of Global Energy Geopolitics*. He has also written books on the Turkish economy and has plans for more of such books. He used to work at Ege University. Dr. İkiş is currently faculty in the Department of Political Sciences and International Relations in Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University.

**Fernanda Ilhéu** (Portugal) is Professor at the Lisbon School of Economics and Management (ISEG), Lisbon University, and a researcher at the Lisbon School's Centre for African, Asian and Latin American Studies. At ISEG she also coordinates ChinaLogus, a Business Knowledge & Relationship Center. She completed her undergraduate studies in economics at ISEG and received her Ph.D. degree in management and marketing from Seville University. She is the President of the New

Silk Road Friends Association, a think tank on the B&R Initiative. Ilhéu has lived in Macao for 18 years, serving in the government and directing private business institutions.

**Francisco José B. S. Leandro** (MSAR, People's Republic of China) received a Ph.D. in political science and international relations from the Catholic University of Portugal in 2010. From 2016 to 2017, he took part in a post-doctoral research programme on state monopolies in China—One belt one road studies. In 2014 and 2017, he was awarded the Institute of European Studies in Macau (IEEM) Academic Research Grant, which is a major component of the Asia-Europe Comparative Studies Research Project. From 2014 to 2018, he was the Programme Coordinator at the Institute of Social and Legal Studies, Faculty of Humanities at the University of Saint Joseph in Macau, China. He is currently Associate Professor and Assistant Dean of the Institute for Research on Portuguese-Speaking Countries at the City University of Macau, China. His most recent books are *Steps of Greatness: The Geopolitics of OBOR* (2018) and *The Challenges, Development and Promise of Timor-Leste* (2019).

**Emanuel Leite Junior** (Federal Republic of Brazil) is currently a Ph.D. student studying public policies at the DCSPT, University of Aveiro. He is also an integrated researcher in the Governance, Competitiveness and Public Policy (GOVCOPP) research unit at the University of Aveiro. He holds a bachelor's degree in law from the Catholic University of Pernambuco and a bachelor's degree in social communication—journalism, from the Mauricio de Nassau University Center. He is the author of two books *As cotas de televisão do campeonato brasileiro* and *A história do futebol na União Soviética*.

**Yichao Li** (People's Republic of China) is a Ph.D. candidate at the Institute for Research on Portuguese-speaking Countries, City University of Macau. She has received a master's degree in comparative civil law (in Chinese) from the University of Macau and a Bachelor of Laws, from Nanjing University of Information Science & Technology, China. The main research area of her master's degree was the testamentary trust system in mainland China. Her current research area is 'the Belt and Road' initiative and Portuguese-speaking countries and she has developed an academic interest in Chinese 'partnerships' in the context of the B&RI.



**João Paulo Madeira** (Cabo Verde) is Assistant Professor at the University of Cape Verde (Uni-CV), and researcher at the Center for Public Administration and Public Policies (CAPP-ISCSP-UL) and the Centre for Political and Social Sciences Research (CICSP-Uni-CV). He has received Ph.D. in social sciences, University of Lisbon, Institute of Social and Political Sciences (ISCSP-UL), is a postdoctoral fellow at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Faculty of Science and Technology, New University of Lisbon (FCT-UNL) and is a member of the Network of REALP—Network of Environmental Studies of the Portuguese-Speaking Countries.

**Enrique Martínez-Galán** (Philippines) has received a Ph.D. in economics from ISEG-Lisbon School of Economics and Management of the University of Lisbon. He is also a researcher, lecturer, reviewer and author of several books and book chapters in development finance, international trade and foreign direct investment and co-author of several scientific articles published in the following academic journals: *The World Economy*, *Applied Econometrics and International Development* and *Portuguese Economic Journal*. The author has more than 15 years of experience in development finance, financial macro policy, project finance, business development consulting and international trade and investment policies, as well as in strategic consulting for several national governments in Africa, Asia and Europe. He is currently the Alternate Executive Director on the Board of Directors of the Asian Development Bank (Philippines) and on special leave from the Finance Ministry of Portugal. He has previous professional experience in: the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank; European Investment Bank; World Bank; European Commission; Council of the European Union; Portuguese and Cape Verdean Ministries of Foreign Affairs; and the Portuguese Agency for Public Debt.

**Carmen Amado Mendes** (Portugal) is Professor and Head of the International Relations Office at the School of Economics of the University of Coimbra. She also designed and coordinated the course ‘China and the Portuguese-speaking Countries in World Trade’. She received her Ph.D. from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; her master’s degree from the Institut des Hautes Études Européennes, Université Robert Schuman, France; and her bachelor’s degree from the Higher Institute of Social and Political Sciences—University of Lisbon

(Portugal). She is the co-founder of the consulting company ChinaLink and of the Observatory for China in Portugal.

**Rui Pereira** (Portugal) is the Head of the International Relations Unit at the Directorate General for Economic Activities within the Portuguese Ministry of Economy. He is the Portuguese Focal Point of the Economic and Trade Forum between China and the Portuguese-speaking Countries ('Macau Forum'). He has a Master of Arts in European studies and a completed postgraduate course on contemporary China. He is a founding member of the Observatory of China in Portugal. His research interests include Portugal-China economic relations, economic relations between China and the Portuguese-speaking countries, the Chinese economy and economic diplomacy.

**Carlos Rodrigues** (Portugal) is Assistant Professor at the DCSPT, University of Aveiro. He holds a Ph.D. in social sciences and conducts research at the Research Unit GOVCOPP. He carries out research work on territorial innovation systems, focusing on the triple helix dynamics affecting socio-economic development and on the roles science, technology and innovation policy play in the configuration of innovation systems. He participates in several national and international R&D projects and has accumulated much experience in carrying out research for many public and private non-academic entities. He has published in several international journals. He teaches courses in the areas of territorial innovation systems, science and technology policy, planning theory and Asian studies (science, technology and innovation). He is currently Head of the Department of Social, Political and Territorial Sciences, Coordinator of the Center for Asian Studies and Master in Chinese Studies at the University of Aveiro.

**Gretchen Small** (United States of America) has been a senior Ibero-American analyst for *Executive Intelligence Review* (EIR) since its founding in 1974, specializing in US-Latin American relations, military and anti-drug policy, and in recent years, the impact of the BRICS and China's Belt and Road Initiative on the region. She was the principal editor of EIR's 1987 White Paper on the Panama Crisis and co-editor of the book *El complot para aniquilar a las Fuerzas Armadas y a las naciones de Iberoamérica* (The Plot to Annihilate the Armed Forces and the Nations of Ibero-America), published by EIR in 1993 and in 1994 by the Ministry of Defence of Mexico. She was also a co-author of the

Schiller Institute's 2018 Special Report, *The New Silk Road Becomes the World Land-Bridge: A Shared Future for Humanity*, Vol. II. She attended Swarthmore College in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

**Lilei Song** (People's Republic of China) is Associate Professor at the School of Political Science and International Relations, Tongji University, Shanghai, China. She holds a Ph.D. from Fudan University, China, and was postdoc at the Corvinus University of Budapest in 2014–2015. Her research interests include: China-EU relations, Chinese public diplomacy and European Union neighbourhood policy. She is the author of *European Neighborhood Policy and EU's External Governance*, Shanghai Renmin Press, 2011.

**Weiqing Song** (MSAR, People's Republic of China) is an associate professor of political science and holds the Jean Monnet Chair in European politics at the University of Macau, Macao SAR, China. His research focuses on Chinese foreign policy, with respect to transnational norms and global governance. He also conducts research on European politics, with an emphasis on the European Union and European foreign policy. He has published widely in these areas.

**Dorothee Vandamme** (Belgium) is a visiting lecturer teaching international relations at the Université de Mons and the Université Catholique de Louvain. She is also a research associate at the CECRI and Genesys Network and research fellow at the European Foundation for South Asian Studies.

**Sten Idris Verhoeven** (Belgium) obtained his law degree at the KU Leuven in 2002. In 2002–2003, he studied international relations and conflict prevention at the same university. From 2003–2009, he was a research and teaching assistant at the Institute for International Law at the KU Leuven. In September 2009, he joined the University of Macau as senior instructor. In 2013, he became an assistant professor and teaches international and European Union law. His interests are in legal theory as applied to international and EU law, constitutionalism in international and EU law, human rights and international criminal law.

**Mário Barbosa Vicente** (Cabo Verde) is a Ph.D. candidate at the Institute for Research on Portuguese-speaking Countries, City University of Macau. He has received a Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Saint Joseph in Macau and a Bachelor of Tourism

Management degree from Estoril Higher Institute for Tourism and Hotel Studies, Portugal. His current research area is on the China-African Portuguese-Speaking Countries Partnership and Belt and Road Initiative.

**Zheng Xiaowen** (People's Republic of China) is a Ph.D. fellow at the School of Government, Beijing Normal University (China). She is also a research affiliate attached to the Research Centre on Development and International Relations, Faculty of Social Sciences, Aalborg University.

**Li Xing** (Denmark) is Professor and the Director of the Research Centre on Development and International Relations, Faculty of Social Sciences, Aalborg University. He is also the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of China and International Relations*. In addition, he is adjunct professor at a number of Chinese universities, as well as the Director of the Research Center for Soft Power and Regional Development at Jiaying University, China. His research interests include international political economy, international relations, emerging powers and world order. Apart from publishing numerous articles in international and Chinese journals, he has edited a number of books in a series on the rise of China/emerging powers and the existing world order.

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