



CHINA IN CONTEXT AND PERSPECTIVE

## Mapping the footprint of Belt and Road influence operations

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August 12, 2019<sup>†</sup>

Over the past six years, Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has become so omnipresent in the PRC's external discourse and activity that it is now almost impossible to distinguish it from China's overall foreign policy. Even though Beijing presents the initiative as designed to enhance economic prosperity via the creation of physical linkages across the globe, its real purpose is not infrastructure-building but the creation of a new world order in which China thrives and rules.<sup>1</sup> The perception gap between what BRI is in reality (a springboard to achieve the "China dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation") and what Beijing claims it is (an economic cooperation proposal and not a "China club"<sup>2</sup>) is the result of a deliberate Party-State worldwide influence campaign waged since BRI's inception.<sup>3</sup>

To enable BRI's smooth promotion and implementation abroad and ensure other countries' cooperative behavior, Beijing has not only carefully crafted a benevolent narrative around BRI that has been widely disseminated worldwide, but also established, mobilized, and coordinated a web of specific "Belt and Road" organizations that act as proxies for central Party-State organs. As part of the PRC's united front work (统战工作),<sup>4</sup> their role is to shape foreign perceptions and behaviors in a manner favorable to BRI, while at the same time inhibiting potential attempts to criticize or counter it. They generally use the same techniques as the ones otherwise observed in China's usual united front work activities targeting foreign audiences, such as lavish propaganda campaigns as well as various inducements (financial, prestige, access, and other rewards) offered to institutions and individuals. The creation of new entities specifically dedicated to influence foreign perceptions about BRI, giving them not only additional funding but a clear focus and a sense of purpose, reflects how the PRC's united front

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<sup>†</sup>Paper presented at the workshop "Mapping China's footprint in the world II", Prague, July 2019.

<sup>1</sup>Nadège Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century: Political and Strategic Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative*, NBR, 2017.

<sup>2</sup>"Xi pledges to bring benefits to people through Belt and Road Initiative," Xinhua, August 28, 2018.

<sup>3</sup>Nadège Rolland, "China's Belt and Road Initiative," in Ross Babbage, *Winning Without Fighting: Chinese and Russian Political Warfare Campaigns and How the West Can Prevail. Volume II: Case Studies*, CSBA, 2019, pp. 65-74.

<sup>4</sup>In this paper, "united front work" (or "united front tactics") refers to efforts carried out by organizations across the Party-State to "control and co-opt party outsiders". In a narrower sense, some of the organs discussed primarily conduct united front work "under the coordination of the united front system" (*xitong*) supervised by the United Front Work Department. See Alex Joske, "The Central United Front Work Leading Small Group: Institutionalising United Front Work," Sinopsis, July 23, 2019, and Anne-Marie Brady, "Magic Weapons: China's Influence Activities Under Xi Jinping," Wilson Center, September 18, 2017.



work is capable of mutating and metastasizing. They are the newest face of agents of influence that operate for the benefit of the Chinese Party-State in promoting its most ambitious and important foreign policy initiative.

In the Party-State's extensive battle to win foreign hearts and minds over BRI, three communities - international media, academia and business – stand out as critical targets. A set of specific “Belt and Road cooperation” platforms have been created for each of them. The purpose of this paper is to unveil them and situate them within the PRC's wider united front work efforts.

## 1 Media

Media is used by the Chinese propaganda apparatus to spread the BRI benevolent and positive narrative worldwide<sup>5</sup> via the usual channels that the Central Propaganda Department controls:

- Printed media that publish State-anointed information translated in foreign languages (including *China Daily* inserts under the “China Watch” title published in Western newspapers such as *The Washington Post* and *The Telegraph*);<sup>6</sup>
- Broadcast media including film production, video clips, TV and radio stations. In the run-up to the May 2017 Belt and Road international forum, a stream of video clips was produced, showing, among other things, English-speaking children singing BRI's praises, and a Western father telling BRI bedtime stories to his daughter.<sup>7</sup> A series of CGTN documentaries, showcasing BRI's stunning achievements around the world started broadcasting in 2016;<sup>8</sup>
- Digital media such as websites and social media networks (including Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, which are not allowed in China). A Xinhua website specifically dedicated to BRI-related news was launched in March 2017,<sup>9</sup> and its articles are accessible in English, Arabic, French, Spanish and Russian. A BRI internet portal is hosted under a “.gov.cn” address, also with articles accessible in six different languages.<sup>10</sup> Although their description does not reveal who exactly is behind the Twitter handle, several Twitter accounts relay a positive vision of BRI.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup>David Gitter, “[The CCP Plants the China Dream Abroad](#),” *The Diplomat*, December 9, 2017.

<sup>6</sup>Louisa Lim and Julia Begin, “[Inside China's Audacious Global Propaganda Campaign](#),” *The Guardian*, December 7, 2018.

<sup>7</sup>Manya Koetse, “[China's Belt and Road Propaganda Machine Running at Full Speed: An Overview](#),” *What's On Weibo*, May 13, 2017.

<sup>8</sup>“[One Belt One Road Documentary Episode One: Common Fate](#)”, published by CGTN on November 10, 2016.

<sup>9</sup>[Xinhua Silk Road portal](#).

<sup>10</sup>[Belt and Road Portal](#).

<sup>11</sup>[@BeltandRoadDesk](#) with over 10K followers, [@beltandroad1](#) with over 6,000 followers, as well as [@OBORCHINA](#), [@OneBeltOneRoad\\_](#), [@beltroadnews](#), [@beltandroadnow](#), [@obor\\_srilanka](#). Some of them were endorsed in a tweet by Zhao Lijian, deputy of the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan, as some of the “best Twitter handles devoted for [sic] research on the BRI”: See Lijian Zhao 赵立坚, “[Twitter post](#)”, July 28, 2019. Some of these accounts may be related to the LaRouche movement and not the PRC government. For insights about the links between the LaRouche movement and the PRC, see Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “[Lyndon LaRouche is Running a Pro-China Party in Germany](#),” *Foreign Policy*, September 18, 2017.



In addition to the usual international dissemination techniques, the Central Propaganda Department is also increasingly using BRI as a rallying theme to seek cooperation with foreign media outlets. Media cooperation indeed “plays an important role for presenting the real images to partner countries of the ‘Belt and Road.’”<sup>12</sup> The objective is to reach out directly to foreign journalists and media outlets in order to create and nurture a pool of “friends” that will absorb and deliver made-in-China propaganda through their local media channels. A number of initiatives have appeared since 2014.

### Belt and Road Media Cooperation Union (一带一路媒体传播联盟)



One of them is the “Belt and Road Media Cooperation Alliance” (also translated as “**Belt and Road Media Cooperation Union**,”<sup>14</sup> 一带一路媒体传播联盟), launched in April 2016 by the State Council Information Office (国务院新闻办公室, SCIO), which is the State Council name of the CCP Central Office of Foreign Propaganda.<sup>15</sup> The Media Alliance aims at pooling resources, encouraging joint program production, disseminating, marketing, and jointly presenting “authentic, accurate, inspiring and intriguing stories of Belt and Road.”<sup>16</sup> As of March 2017, 43 global media organizations have joined. They are mostly media corporations and TV channels from developing countries along the Belt and Road, but also include the National Geographic, Discovery Channel, and Channel News Asia. Since 2017, VideoChina has offered to provide content that members of the Media Alliance can use under license, for streaming or for purchase. The Media Alliance is also preparing the development of satellite TV channels

to cover Belt and Road countries.

“Authentic and intriguing” Belt and Road stories are therefore created by the CCP central propaganda office, which keeps editorial control over substance. These pre-fabricated products are then provided to media outlets in Belt and Road countries that do not necessarily have the financial resources or technical means to produce content independently. This method is an illustration of the tactic known as “borrowing a boat to go out to sea” (借船出海), i.e. using a local entity to promote the Chinese Party-State propaganda to foreign audiences.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Cai Shangwei 蔡尚伟, Che Nanlin 车南林, “*‘一带一路’上的媒体合作*,” *People’s Daily*, August 9, 2017, also in English: “*Media Cooperation Along the ‘Belt and Road’*,” *People’s Daily*, August 14, 2017.

<sup>13</sup>Image source: “*The Belt and Road Media Cooperation Union*,” VideoChina, April 17, 2017.

<sup>14</sup>*Lianmeng* 联盟 is usually translated as “alliance,” “league” or “coalition,” but these terms may sound too martial for external propaganda purposes. The majority of the entities studied in this paper are 联盟 in their Chinese names but are presented as “association,” “consortium,” or “union” in their English translation.

<sup>15</sup>The SCIO and Office of Foreign Propaganda were formally merged in 1991. See Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2008, p. 23.

<sup>16</sup>“*The Belt and Road Media Cooperation Union Annual Manual 2017*.”

<sup>17</sup>The tactic of getting foreign media outlets to do China’s propaganda work is called “using foreign strength to promote China” (利用外力为我宣传) or “borrowing the foreign press” (借用海外报刊). Brady,



Scholarships and training programs for journalists from Belt and Road countries have also been deployed. The “**Dongfang Fellowship Program**” (东方奖学金项目), for example, is jointly hosted by *China Daily*, the Shanghai International Studies University (SISU) and the University of International Business and Economics (UIBE) and sponsored by China Eastern Airlines. Senior editors and reporters from 12 Belt and Road countries have participated in a 26-day training program in 2018 to “gain a full understanding of China’s development in the new era.”<sup>18</sup>

## Media Cooperation Forums on the Belt and Road (“一带一路”媒体合作论坛)



Media Cooperation Forums on the Belt and Road<sup>19</sup>

Since 2014, the *People’s Daily* has convened four consecutive “**Media Cooperation Forum[s] on Belt and Road**” (“一带一路”媒体合作论坛) which have included over 460 journalists from 126 countries.<sup>20</sup> Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory letter to the participants of the 2016 Forum, which illustrates its political importance. In his letter, he wrote that the media “plays an irreplaceable role in information dissemination, mutual trust, and consensus [...] I hope that the media in various countries will make good use of this platform to [...] play an active role in the construction of the Belt and Road.”<sup>21</sup> The *People’s*

*Daily’s* president, Yang Zhenwu 杨振武, explained that the purpose of the forum was to “formulate an information expressway, tear down emotional barriers, expand the circle of friends, and form a cultural concentric circle.” During the September 2017 forum, Yang announced the launch of a “Belt and Road Media Cooperation Centre” and a “Cross-border Joint Reporting Project” specifically dedicated to “strengthen[ing] cooperation among domestic and international media on the Belt and Road.”<sup>22</sup> Memorandums of understanding and joint declarations have already been signed with 36 media from 26 countries under this framework.<sup>23</sup>

op. cit., p. 162. For an example of how this tactic is applied in Europe, see Jichang Lulu, “China’s State Media and the Outsourcing of Soft Power,” CPI, July 15, 2015.

<sup>18</sup>Zhou Wenting, “Program Aims to Link Countries Through Press Collaboration, Cultural Exchange,” *China Daily*, June 21, 2018; “Manual for Dongfang Fellowship Program.” See also “一带一路媒体研修班在上海外国语大学启动” [Belt and Road Media Seminar Begins at SISU], *SISU Today*, June 21, 2018. *China Daily* and SISU jointly created a School of journalism and communication in September 2017: “中国日报社与上外共建新闻学院，系‘捍卫宣传阵地大局之措’” [China Daily and SISU Jointly Set Up a School of Journalism, as a Measure to Safeguard the Overall Propaganda Situation], *The Paper*, September 19, 2017.

<sup>19</sup>Image source: Kong Defang, “Media Cooperation Forum on ‘One Belt and One Road’ opens in Beijing,” *People’s Daily Online*, September 21, 2015.

<sup>20</sup>“2018 一带一路媒体合作论坛” [2018 Media Cooperation Forum on Belt and Road] portal; Kimeng Hilton Ndukong, “Foreign Journalists Laud Belt and Road at International Media Cooperation Forum,” *People’s Daily*, September 19, 2017.

<sup>21</sup>“习近平致 2016‘一带一路’媒体合作论坛的贺信” [Xi Jinping’s Letter to the 2016 ‘Belt and Road’ Media Cooperation Forum], *People’s Daily*, July 26, 2016.

<sup>22</sup>“People’s Daily Launches Media Center to Boost Belt and Road Cooperation,” *People’s Daily*, September 19, 2017.

<sup>23</sup>“亚洲媒体高峰论坛在三亚举行黄坤明出席并发表主旨演讲” [Asian Media Summit Held in Sanya – Huang Kunming Attended and Delivered Keynote Speech], *People’s Daily*, April 10, 2018.



## Belt and Road News Alliance (一带一路新闻合作联盟)



*Belt and Road News Alliance*<sup>24</sup>

The “Belt and Road News Alliance” (BRNA, 一带一路新闻合作联盟, Belt and Road News Cooperation Alliance), an idea that emanated from the State Council in April 2016,<sup>25</sup> was first launched by CCTV during the May 2017 Belt and Road Forum with a mission to “assist key media organizations in countries along the Belt and Road.” It originally included 63 members from 35 countries.<sup>26</sup> It seems not to have been very active for the following two years and was reborn as “Belt and Road News Network” (BRNN,

keeping its original Chinese name of 一带一路新闻合作联盟) during the second B&R Forum in April 2019, in order to “serve as a platform for information sharing, exchanges and cooperation, news distribution, and copyright trading among media outlets along the BRI.” Its membership has expanded to 182 members from 86 countries.<sup>27</sup> Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory letter to BRNN’s inaugural council meeting, read by the head of the Central Propaganda Department, Huang Kunming 黄坤明. The *People’s Daily* acts as BRNN’s “CEO unit” (理事长单位).<sup>28</sup>

When not creating new platforms for enhanced international media cooperation to serve as echo chambers for positive reports on BRI, the Central Propaganda Department uses existing international fora to rally potential media partners. For example, during the 2017 Asian Media Summit<sup>29</sup> held in Qingdao, then vice-Premier and former UFD head Liu Yandong 刘延东 emphasized in her opening remarks that “media collaboration is an important part of deepening regional cooperation and working together on projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative.”

<sup>24</sup>Image source: Md Enamul Hassan, “Media Cooperation a Must for Sustainable Success of BRI,” *People’s Daily Online*, April 30, 2019.

<sup>25</sup>“Introduction to the News Alliance,” OBOR Europe, May 23, 2017.

<sup>26</sup>“第一届‘一带一路’新闻合作联盟会员大会在海南成功召开” [The First ‘Belt and Road’ News Cooperation Alliance Conference Successfully Held on Hainan], CCTV, November 29, 2017.

<sup>27</sup>“Belt and Road News Network to Further Facilitate Media Cooperation Along the Belt and Road,” *People’s Daily*, April 23, 2019.

<sup>28</sup>“‘一带一路’新闻合作联盟首届理事会会议开幕” [First Council Meeting of ‘Belt and Road’ News Network Opens], Xinhua, April 24, 2019.

<sup>29</sup>The Summit has been organized annually since 2003 with a local host by the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD), an entity under UNESCO and UNDP purview. See AIBD.



## 2 Academia

In a speech made at the Warsaw Silk Road Forum in June 2016, Xi Jinping enjoined think tanks to play a “leading role” in advancing BRI, to serve as “advisers and assistants for the government” in planning policies and designing appropriate mechanisms, and as “bridges” between the political level and the public opinion.<sup>30</sup> Many new “Belt and Road” research centers have been created within Chinese universities and think tanks in order to develop deeper expertise on Belt and Road countries and to support the central leadership’s policies. International outreach is also expanding, mostly under the auspices of the CCP Central Committee’s International Liaison Department (CCP/ILD). Through its in-house think tank, the China Center for Contemporary World Studies (CCCWS, 中联部当代世界研究中心), the CCP/ILD acts as the national secretariat for outreach activities directed at think tanks and research centers in Belt and Road countries.

The objectives of the new BRI academic cooperation platforms appear to be threefold:

- first, as with journalists and the media community, to influence and shape the perceptions of public intellectuals so they view BRI as a positive undertaking;
- second, to gain access to knowledge, skills and technologies studied in foreign universities research centers and laboratories. This is part of a broader effort to serve the same objectives through a multitude of other mechanisms;
- third, to become engaged in foreign educational systems (especially in the developing Belt and Road countries) as a longer-term effort to shape and affect how the future generations of local elites are educated and trained.

### Silk Road Think Tank Association (一带一路智库合作联盟)



Silk Road Think Tank Association<sup>31</sup>

The CCP/ILD has sponsored the creation of a **Belt and Road Think Tank Cooperation Alliance** (一带一路智库合作联盟), translated in English as “**Silk Road Think Tank Association**” (SRTA), launched in April 2015.<sup>32</sup> Jin Xin 金鑫, CCCWS’s Director-General, is the Think Tank Alliance’s Secretary General, and is assisted by three co-Chairmen (see Table 1).<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Li Wei, “Think Tanks Need to Play a Leading Role in Advancing the Belt and Road Initiative,” Development Research Center of the State Council of the PRC, July 25, 2017.

<sup>31</sup>Image source: *Dialogue on Silk Road Think Tank Association Conference*, Central Compilation and Translation Press, 2016.

<sup>32</sup>“一带一路’智库合作联盟理事会成立” [‘Belt and Road’ Think Tank Cooperation Alliance Council Established], *Xinhua*, April 8, 2015.

<sup>33</sup>Liu Yuhang 刘宇航, Jia Yu 贾宇, “一带一路’智库合作联盟研讨会召开” [‘Belt and Road’ Think Tank Cooperation Alliance Seminar Held], *Guangming Ribao*, February 27, 2017.





Table 1: Co-Chairmen of the “Belt and Road Think Tank Cooperation Alliance”

Guo Yezhou 郭业洲	Vice Minister, CCP/ILD (中共中央对外联络部副部长)
Jiao Yang 焦扬	Party Secretary of Fudan University (复旦大学党委书记)
Wei Jianguo 魏建国	Vice-Chairman of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges (CCIEE) (中国国际经济交流中心副理事长)

The platform includes over 50 Chinese research institutions (including DRC, CASS, Fudan University and others) in an effort to coordinate domestic intellectual resources, and with a mission to intensify so-called “track 2” diplomacy with the outside world. Under the Think Tank Alliance’s purview, exchanges with foreign think tanks are intended to “enhance the accurate understanding of BRI” and to “enhance positive feelings” towards the initiative within local public opinion.<sup>34</sup>



Belt and Road  
International Think Tank  
Cooperation Alliance<sup>35</sup>

SRTA’s international arm (一带一路国际智库合作联盟, **Belt and Road International Think Tank Cooperation Alliance**) was launched in Shenzhen in February 2016, keeping the SRTA acronym. Guo Yezhou (郭业洲), the Vice-Minister of the CCP/ILD and Chairman of the CCCWS Council gave a keynote speech at the opening ceremony.<sup>36</sup>

## SiLKS (丝路国际智库网络)



SiLKS<sup>37</sup>

Through its Development Research Center (DRC), the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) has for its part launched the “Silk Road Think Tank Network” (SiLKS, 丝路国际智库网络), inaugurated by 43 founding parties during the October 2015 Madrid Silk Road Forum, with the mission of “inspiring the knowledge generation, sharing and application of think tanks in an effort to jointly build the Belt and Road and to contribute to the sustainable development.”<sup>38</sup> The NDRC is a central player in the supervision, co-

ordination and implementation of the BRI. It hosts the Office of the Politburo BRI

<sup>34</sup>“一带一路”智库合作联盟成立智库将大有可为 [‘Belt and Road’ Think-Tank Cooperation Alliance Sets Up Great Potential for Think-Tanks], Xinhua, April 8, 2015.

<sup>35</sup>Image source: He Na, “Think tank to support Belt and Road Initiative,” *China Daily*, February 23, 2016.

<sup>36</sup>“一带一路国际智库合作联盟深圳启动” [Belt and Road International Think Tank Cooperation Alliance Launched in Shenzhen], *CPC News*, February 2, 2016.

<sup>37</sup>Image source: *2017 Silk Road Think Tank Network Annual Meeting booklet*, op. cit.

<sup>38</sup>“About the Secretariat of the Silk Road Think Tank Network.” For a detailed list of members and partners, see *2017 Silk Road Think Tank Network Annual Meeting booklet*. The detailed “Three-Year Work Plan for the Silk Road Think Tank Network (2019-2021)” can be found at [Goeconomic Forum](#).



Leading Small Group and manages the day-to-day activities and decision-making related to BRI. Within the NDRC's Office of the BRI Leading Small Group, a "Belt and Road Promotion Center" was created in 2017.<sup>39</sup> SiLKS's secretariat is hosted by the DRC's Department of International Cooperation. Although not an immediately apparent part of the SiLKS network, the CCP/ILD is never far away: Jin Xin gave the opening remarks at the May 16, 2017 SiLKS meeting in Beijing.



The annual meeting of the Silk Road Think Tank Network is held at DRC in Beijing on May 16. [photo/drc.gov.cn]

Image source: "Silk Road Think Tank Network 2017 Annual Meeting held in Beijing," eSiLKS, June 5, 2017.



From left to right, DAMJAN KRNEVIĆ MIŠKOVIĆ, Senior Fellow of the Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development (CIRSD), STJEPAN MESIĆ, President of the Republic of Croatia (2000- 2010), VUK JEREMIĆ, President of the CIRSD, DR. PATRICK C.P. HO, Chairman and Secretary General of the CEFC, DR. JASNA PLEVNIK, Vice President of the Geoeconomic Forum.

Image source: "Silk Road Forum Held in Madrid," Geoeconomic Forum, October 28, 2015.

<sup>39</sup>In November 2018, the promotion center was looking for staff: "国家发展和改革委员会一带一路建设促进中心 2018 年面向社会公开招聘工作人员公告" [NDRC Belt and Road Construction Promotion Center, 2018 Staff Recruitment Public Announcement], *Sina*, November 6, 2018.



Table 2: Members of the First SiLKS Steering Committee<sup>40</sup>

Organization	Name of Commissioner	Position
Development Research Center of the State Council of China	Li Wei	President
United Nations Development Programme	Xu Haoliang	Assistant Administrator and Director of the Asia-Pacific Bureau
International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development	Ricardo Meléndez-Ortiz	Chief Executive
United Nations Industrial Development Organization	Zou Ciyong	Director of Department of Partnerships & Results Monitoring
OECD Development Center	Mario Pezzini	Director
Mekong Institute	Watcharas Leelawath	Director
Institute of World Economics and Politics under the Foundation of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan	Yerzhan Saltybayev	Director
Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Indonesia	Jusuf Wanandi	Vice Chairman
Elcano Royal Institute of Spain	Charles Powell	Director
Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development	Vuk Jeremić	President
Institute of Far Eastern Studies, Russian Academy of Science	Sergei Luzianin	Director

SiLKS is one of the six partners of the “Global Coalition of Think Tank Networks for South-South Cooperation” launched jointly by UNDP and UNOSSC (UN Office for South-South Cooperation) in 2016.<sup>41</sup>

## RANDI (蓝迪国际智库平台)

RANDI<sup>42</sup>

Another cooperative think tank platform, usually translated in English as “**Research and Development International**” or RDI (蓝迪国际智库平台, Landi International Think Tank Platform) and chaired by Zhao Baige 赵白鸽, vice chairperson of the National People’s Congress Foreign Affairs Committee, was launched in April 2015.<sup>43</sup> Composed of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and the China Institute for Reform and Development (CIRD), RDI partnered with the Islamabad-based Pakistan-China Institute to establish a joint think tank dedicated to the study of the China-Pakistan economic corridor (CPEC) on April 18, 2015, two days before Xi Jinping’s first State visit to Pakistan.<sup>44</sup> The name of the new Sino-Pakistani think tank, RANDI, has been widely ridiculed in South Asia because it sounds like “whore” in

<sup>40</sup>“Members of the First SiLKS Steering Committee.”

<sup>41</sup> *South-South Global Thinkers Brochure*, South-South Global Thinkers.

<sup>42</sup>Image source: “RDI’s Purpose and Function,” Pakistan-China Institute.

<sup>43</sup>“蓝迪国际智库简介” [Brief Introduction of RANDI International Think Tank], RDI.

<sup>44</sup>“Joint Pakistan-China Think Tank Launched,” *Pakistan Today*, April 18, 2015.



Image source: “Research and Development International (RDI),” Pakistan-China Institute, June 1, 2015.

Urdu and Hindi.<sup>45</sup> RANDI is co-chaired by Zhao Baige and Senator Mushahid Husain, and has two secretariats - one located within the Pakistan-China Institute, the other co-hosted by CASS and CIRI.<sup>46</sup> CCP/ILD Vice-Minister Guo Yezhou addressed a RDI “Belt and Road” seminar in Beijing in March 2016.<sup>47</sup>

### Belt and Road Studies Network (一带一路国际智库合作委员会)



*Belt and Road Studies Network*<sup>48</sup>

officially translated as the “Belt and Road Studies Network” (BRSN). It was inaugurated during the Second Beijing Belt and Road Forum on April 24, 2019 with 16 founding members or “initiators.”<sup>49</sup> BRSN’s chairman is the president of Xinhua News Agency, Cai Mingzhao 蔡名照.

The latest addition to the panoply of united front entities designed to target international think tanks is the Belt and Road International Think Tank Cooperation Committee (一带一路国际智库合作委员会)

<sup>45</sup>“Twitter Giggles as China, Pakistan Launch Randi Think Tank,” *Straits Times*, April 21, 2015; *The John Thompson Platts Dictionary of Urdu and Classical Hindi*, s.v. *randī*.

<sup>46</sup>“Joint Pakistan-China Think Tank Launched,” op. cit.

<sup>47</sup>“‘One Belt and One Road’ Seminar Held in Beijing,” China.org, March 2, 2016.

<sup>48</sup>Image source: BRSN.

<sup>49</sup>“Initiators,” Belt and Road Studies Network.

Table 3: The 16 “Initiators” of the Belt and Road Studies Network<sup>50</sup>

Xinhua Institute	PRC – part of the CCP/CC/Propaganda Department
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS)	PRC -
China Center for International Economic Exchanges (CCIEE)	PRC -
China Center for Contemporary World Studies (CCCWS)	PRC – part of the CCP/CC/International Liaison Department
China Institute of International Studies (CIIS)	PRC – part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation (CAITEC)	PRC -
Institute of New Structural Economics at Peking University	PRC -
The Belt and Road Research Institute	PRC – Beijing Normal University
Bulgaria National Association for the Belt and Road	Bulgaria – est. April 2017, chaired by Prof Zahari Zahariev
The African Center for Economic Transformation	Ghana – est. 2008, chaired by Dr. K.Y. Amoako
Center for Strategic and International Studies	Indonesia – est. 1971, chaired by Philips J. Vermonte
Nazarbayev University	Kazakhstan – chaired by Shigeo Katsu
East Asia Institute	ROK – est. 2002, chaired by Prof. Young-Sun Ha
New Silk Road Institute	ROK – est. 2017
The Valdai Discussion Club	Russia – est. 2004, chaired by Andrey Bystritskiy
Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at the Harvard Kennedy School	USA – est. 2003, chaired by Prof. Anthony Saich

Chinese and foreign members of the Alliance, SiLKS, RDI and the Network sometimes overlap. There does not seem to be a clear geographic or thematic division of labor among the different entities. There is little doubt however that the international seminars and workshops they sponsor provide countless channels of communication through which to relay the Party line and BRI’s positive narrative. International participants are expected to absorb the information given by their Chinese counterparts and perhaps even to integrate it into their own analyses. If they are foreign think tankers, there is a possibility that this information might eventually appear in the reports that they produce for their respective governments, hence directly impacting local policymakers’ perceptions of BRI.

Multiple “alliances” have also been created to target more specifically international universities along the Belt and Road. The following section attempts to list them. Joint Belt and Road research centers and bilateral agreements between Chinese universities and foreign counterparts are not systematically included.

<sup>50</sup>Source: “Initiators,” op. cit.



Cai Mingzhao (L, center), president of Xinhua News Agency, chairman of Xinhua Institute and chairperson of an initiators council of the Belt and Road Studies Network (BRSN), witnesses with other guests the launching of the BRSN's official website, [www.brsn.net](http://www.brsn.net), in Beijing, capital of China, April 24, 2019. The Belt and Road Studies Network (BRSN), co-initiated by Xinhua Institute and 15 other think tanks, was inaugurated in Beijing Wednesday. (Xinhua/Jin Liangkuai)

Image source: “*Belt and Road Studies Network Inaugurated*,” Xinhua via Beijing Review, April 25, 2019.

## University Alliance of the Silk Road (丝绸之路大学联盟)



University Alliance of the Silk Road<sup>51</sup>

The University Alliance of the Silk Road (UASR, 丝绸之路大学联盟) was launched by Xi'an Jiaotong University (XJU, 西安交通大学) on May 22, 2015 on the margins of an educational cooperation fair for countries along the Silk Road, and initially included 20 universities from 22 countries.<sup>52</sup> The UASR Secretariat is located within XJU's Western Science and Technology Innovation Hub (西部科技创新港) and is chaired by professor Yang Xiao 杨笑.<sup>53</sup> By 2017, UASR had included 135 member universities from 35 countries<sup>54</sup> and XJU had separately signed cooperation agreements with 29 universities members of the Alliance, including a joint laboratory on micro and nano-fabrication with the University of New South

Wales<sup>55</sup> and a joint university center with Liverpool University, based in Suzhou.<sup>56</sup> UASR upholds the “Silk Road spirit of peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit and win-win” and vows to foster the realization of a “Silk Road Academic Belt.”<sup>57</sup> UASR set up four “sub-alliances” centered around law (丝绸之路法学院联盟), management (丝绸之路管理学院联盟), forensics (SRFC, 丝路法医联盟)<sup>58</sup> and advanced manufacturing and nanotechnologies (丝绸之路先进制造和纳米技术子联盟),<sup>59</sup> as well as the Silk Road Economic

<sup>51</sup>Image source: “University Alliance of the Silk Road,” Husteducn.

<sup>52</sup>UASR website.

<sup>53</sup>“丝绸之路大学联盟人才培养的‘西交声音’” [Xi'an Jiaotong's Voice in Talent Cultivation of the UASR] *People's Daily*, July 27, 2017.

<sup>54</sup>“丝绸之路大学联盟打造‘一带一路’教育合作新典范” [UASR to Build a New Model of Education Cooperation], *People's Daily*, July 26, 2017.

<sup>55</sup>“Two Cooperation Agreements Signed Between XJTU and UNSW,” XJTU website, December 8, 2014.

<sup>56</sup>XJTU website.

<sup>57</sup>“University Alliance...”, *op. cit.*

<sup>58</sup>See below.

<sup>59</sup>“向西而歌”的丝绸之路大学联盟 [UASR's ‘Westward Song’].



Belt Collaborative Innovation Center (丝绸之路经济带合作创新中心), the Eurasian Economic Forum Research Institute (欧亚经济论坛研究所) and the BRI Free Trade Area Research Institute (一带一路倡议自由贸易区研究所).<sup>60</sup>

### Silk Road Forensics Consortium (丝路法医联盟)



Silk Road Forensics Consortium<sup>61</sup>

The Silk Road Forensics Consortium (SRFC, 丝路法医联盟, Silk Road Forensics Alliance)<sup>62</sup> is worth examining in more detail. SRFC's founding conference was held on October 30–31, 2016 in Xi'an. It was jointly organized by XJU, Shaanxi Province Department of Human Resources and Social Security (陕西省人力资源和社会保障部), Shaanxi Province Bureau of Foreign Experts (陕西省外国专家局), Xi'an new Fendong district administrative committee (西安新区凤东新城管委会) and Shenzhen Huada (深圳华大基因科技有限公司 / 华达基因), also known as BGI Genomics, a biotech development company that specializes in genetic testing and agricultural genomics research.<sup>63</sup> During the second international conference held in Xi'an in November 2017 which included over 50 foreign experts from 20 countries, BGI Genomics

signed a MOU with Poland's Central Police Forensic Laboratory to create a joint experimental center,<sup>64</sup> and with XJU and Moscow State University to also establish a China-Russia joint experimental center. Professor Henry C. Lee (李昌钰), a leading Chinese-American forensics expert, is the chairman of SRFC.<sup>65</sup>

SRFC officially acts as a "platform" for forensic experts from China and abroad to exchange ideas. However, its potential implications go beyond simple academic exchanges among experts from Belt and Road countries. During the third SRFC international conference, Prof. Henry C. Lee called for the SRFC members to "build a mutual DNA database to better help solve criminal cases." According to Professor Li Shenbing, the development of unified DNA identification standards and identification procedures regulations would help fight against crime, "especially cross-regional crime and terrorism."<sup>66</sup> The internationalization of Chinese standards has been identified by the Party-State as one of the key domains that will "provide comprehensive support" for the construction of BRI, and standardization in the Humanities is one of the areas envisaged.<sup>67</sup> A specific "Belt and Road University Alliance for Standardization Edu-

<sup>60</sup>"Joint Pakistan-China Think Tank Launched," op. cit.

<sup>61</sup>Image source: "Invitation Letter – The Frontier Symposium of Forensic Sciences, 2016", SRFC, 2016.

<sup>62</sup>"The 3rd Conference of Silk Road Forensic Consortium (SRFC)."

<sup>63</sup>"法医科学前沿国际研讨会召开并成立丝路法医联盟" [International Symposium on Forensic Science Held, Silk Road Forensic Alliance Established], XJU Health Science Center, November 1, 2016.

<sup>64</sup>"Scientific Conferences of Silk Road Forensic Consortium in China," Central Forensic Laboratory of the Police, November 7, 2017; "Bilateral Cooperation – Beijing Genomics Institute (BGI)."

<sup>65</sup>Prof. Lee used to teach at the University of New Haven (Connecticut), where he founded the Henry C. Lee Institute of Forensic Science. In 1985, while director of the Connecticut State Police Forensic Laboratory, Lee was invited by China's ministries of public security and education to lead a training course at Renmin University. He was commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Public Safety until his retirement in 2000. He returns to China seven to eight times a year to deliver lectures. Cao Yin 曹音, "Top Forensic Scientist Finds Evidence of Great Progress," *China Daily*, December 4, 2018.

<sup>66</sup>Cao Yin, "Forensic Conference Seeks Global Standards on DNA," *China Daily*, September 18, 2018.

<sup>67</sup>"标准联通，一带一路'行动计划(2015–2017)" [Action Plan on Belt and Road Standard Connectivity (2015-17)] and "标准联通共建'一带一路'行动计划(2018–2020年)" [Action Plan on Belt and Road Standard Connectivity (2018-20)], Belt and Road Portal.





Left: Adam Frankowski (Poland Police). Below: representatives from BGI-Genomics, University of Warsaw, the Russian Academy of Sciences and XJU. Source: “Scientific Conferences of Silk Road Forensic Consortium in China,” Central Forensic Laboratory of the Police, November 7, 2017.

cation and Academics” (一带一路标准化教育与研究大学联盟成立) was created in May 2018 to support that effort.<sup>68</sup>

Table 4: SRFC Committees<sup>69</sup>

<i>Organizing Committee</i>		
Prof. Henry C. Lee	University of New Haven	USA
Prof. Tadeusz Tomaszewski	University of Warsaw	Poland
Prof. Li Shengbin	Xi'an Jiaotong University	P.R.China
<i>Scientific Committee</i>		
Prof. Henry C. Lee	University of New Haven	USA
Prof. Tadeusz Tomaszewski	University of Warsaw	Poland
Prof. Li Shengbin	Xi'an Jiaotong University	P.R.China
Prof. Niels Morling	University of Copenhagen	Denmark
Prof. Vugar Mammadov	World Association for Medical Law	Azerbaijan
Prof. Yuri Pigolkin	First Moscow State Medical University of Sechenov	Russia
<i>Advisory Board</i>		
Prof. Kamiel Samy Gabriel	University of Ontario Institute of Technology	Canada
Dr. Lan Zhuangli	Shaanxi Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs	P.R.China
Dr. Liu Shaowen	Ministry of Justice	P.R.China
Dr. Liu Yao	Chinese Academy of Engineering	P.R.China
Dr. Wang Jian	BGI-Shenzhen	P.R.China

<sup>68</sup>Liu Shangjun 刘尚君, “一带一路标准化教育与研究大学联盟成立” [BRI Standardization Education and Research University Alliance Established], *Zhongguo Qingnian Wang* via *People's Daily*, May 21, 2018.

Table 4: SRFC Committees<sup>69</sup>

Dr. Wang Shuguo	Xi'an Jiaotong University	P.R.China
Dr. Yang Huanming	BGI-Shenzhen	P.R.China
Dr. Yan Hong	Xi'an Jiaotong University	P.R.China
Dr. Yang Shuang	BGI-Shenzhen	P.R.China
Dr. Yu Jun	Beijing Institute of Genomics, Chinese Academy of Sciences	P.R.China
Dr. Zhang Maizeng	Xi'an Jiaotong University	P.R.China
Prof. Dragan Primorac	International Affairs Committee of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences	Croatia
Prof. Damir Marjanović	International Burch University	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Prof. Prasanta Kumar Chattopadhyay	Punjabi University, Patiala	India
Dr. Rajinder Singh	Punjabi University	India
Prof. Imad M.Al-Abdallat	The University of Jordan	Jordan
Prof. Yury Bikbaev	Kazakhstan Ministry of Justice and the World Bank	Kazakhstan
Prof. Henryk Malewski	Mykolas Romeris University	Lithuania
Insp. Adam Frankowski	Central Forensic Lab of the Police	Poland
Prof. Ewa J. Bulska	University of Warsaw	Poland
Dr. Zanetta Makowska	Central Forensic Lab of the Police	Poland
Dr. Magdalena Spólnick	Central Forensic Lab of the Police	Poland
Prof. Piotr A. Girdwoyń	University of Warsaw	Poland
Dr. Taiyana Averianova	Russian State University of Justice	Russian Federation
Dr. Tatiana Moiseeva	Russian State University of Justice	Russian Federation
Prof. Osama Almadani	Exam Committee Forensic Medicine, SCFHS Riyadh	Saudi Arabia
Mr. Ivan Dombrowskiy	Ministry of Internal Affairs	Ukraine
Dr. Carol Cox	University of Central Lancashire	U.K.
Dr. Clive D. Tattum	University of Central Lancashire	U.K.
Prof. Robert E. Barsley	LSU School of Dentistry	U.S.A.
Dr. Mario Thomas Gaboury	University of New Haven	U.S.A.
Prof. Daniel J. May	University of New Haven	U.S.A.
Prof. Robert E. Gaensslen	Forensic Science Program Accreditation Commission	U.S.A.
Prof. Haskell M. Pitluck	NIST OSAC Odontology Subcommittee	U.S.A.
Dr. Michael F. Rieders	FRF FOUNDATION Center for Forensic Sciences Research and Education	U.S.A.
Dr. David W. Webb	University of New Haven	U.S.A.
Prof. David N. Wecht	Supreme Court Justice on the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania	U.S.A.



## University Alliance of the Belt and Road (一带一路高校联盟)



University Alliance of the Belt and Road<sup>70</sup>

The University Alliance of the Belt and Road (UAB&R, 一带一路高校联盟, Belt and Road Higher Education Alliance) was established in Dunhuang on October 17, 2015 by Lanzhou University, Fudan University, Beijing Normal University, and the Ural National Economics University of Russia.<sup>71</sup> It has expanded from 47 member universities from 8 countries to 126 universities from 25 countries.<sup>72</sup> Its secretariat is hosted by Lanzhou University's International Cooperation and Exchange Office.<sup>73</sup> Several international MOUs focusing on cooperation in scientific research were signed during its first international conference, held on the margins of the Dunhuang Silk Road International Cultural Expo in September 2016.<sup>74</sup> Pictures taken at the event show that it was jointly sponsored by the Propaganda Department of the Gansu Provincial CCP Committee and the Gansu Province Education Department.



Image source: “首届”一带一路”高校联盟论坛在敦煌举行” [First Belt and Road Higher Education Alliance Forum Held in Dunhuang], Lanzhou University International Cooperation and Exchange Office, September 22, 2016.

A branch of UAB&R was established in Shenyang on November 22, 2018 within Northeastern University. At the founding ceremony, Feng Shouquan 冯守权, director of Shenyang's Propaganda Department and secretary of the Education, Scientific and Cultural Committee, stressed the important part Shenyang had to play in constructing the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor, and called for the branch member universities to “serve the regional social and economic development in a bid to help revitalize Northeast China and boost the transformation and upgrading of Shenyang by providing human and technical support to the city's construction and the development of its real economy.”<sup>75</sup>

<sup>69</sup>Source: “The 3rd Conference of Silk Road Forensic Consortium (SRFC).”

<sup>70</sup>Image source: “2018年‘一带一路’高校联盟生态文明主题论坛开幕” [2018 UAB&R Forum on Ecological Civilization Opens], Gansu Jiaoyu via Sohu, September 9, 2018.

<sup>71</sup>“Belt and Road Initiative' University Alliance.”

<sup>72</sup>“25国加入”一带一路”高校联盟成员增至126个” [25 Nations Join the Belt and Road University Alliance, Increasing the Membership to 126], *Xinhua*, May 10, 2017.

<sup>73</sup>“首届”一带一路”高校联盟论坛在敦煌举行” [First Belt and Road Higher Education Alliance Forum Held in Dunhuang], Lanzhou University International Cooperation and Exchange Office, September 22, 2016.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>“BRI University Alliance Comes to Shenyang,” *China Daily*, December 25, 2018; “校长潘一山参加‘一带一路’高校联盟沈阳分盟成立大会暨‘融入一带一路，推进东北振兴’主题论坛” [President



## University Consortium of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road (21 世纪海上丝绸之路”大学联盟)



University Consortium of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road<sup>76</sup>

The inaugural meeting of the “University Consortium of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road” (UCMSR, “21 世纪海上丝绸之路”大学联盟) was hosted by Xiamen University on October 20, 2018.<sup>77</sup> The alliance, whose secretariat is hosted by Xiamen university,<sup>78</sup> is officially composed of 66 universities (including 36 from China) from 15 countries along the maritime Silk Road.<sup>79</sup> A closer look at the member universities shows however that membership is not based on geographic location: the US, France, the UK, Japan and South Korea are not located on the Maritime Silk Road and yet are represented. UCMSR is committed to develop international cooperation in personnel training and technological innovation and to “become the vanguard” in implementing the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Maritime Silk Road development strategy.<sup>80</sup>

The list of Belt and Road academic alliances is long and growing. In addition to the few mentioned above, some alliances are more specifically dedicated to a given domain, such as textiles (一带一路世界纺织大学联盟, Belt and Road World Alliance of Textile Universities),<sup>81</sup> architecture (一带一路建筑类大学国际联盟, Belt and Road Architecture University International Consortium, BRAUIC),<sup>82</sup> technical skills (一带一路暨金砖国家技能发展国际联盟, International Alliance of Skills Development for Belt and Road and BRICS Countries, IASDBR),<sup>83</sup> railways (一带一路铁路国际人才教育联盟, Belt and Road Railway International Talent Education Alliance, RTEA),<sup>84</sup> aerospace innovation (一带一路航天创新联盟, Belt and Road Aerospace Innovation

Pan Yishan Participates in UAB&R Shenyang Branch Founding Ceremony and Forum on “Joining BRI, Promoting North-Eastern Stimulus”, Liaoning University, November 23, 2018.

<sup>76</sup>Image source: [UCMSR website](#).

<sup>77</sup>[UCMSR website](#).

<sup>78</sup>“University Consortium of Maritime Silk Road Launched in Xiamen,” *Xinhua*, October 21, 2018.

<sup>79</sup>Feng Yang 冯扬, “我校加入“21 世纪海上丝绸之路”大学联盟” [Harbin Institute of Technology Joins the “21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road” University Alliance], HIT, October 23, 2018. A list of the Chinese and foreign university representatives participating in the inaugural ceremony can be found in the program of the event: “21 世纪海上丝绸之路”大学联盟成立大会暨校长论坛 / Inauguration Ceremony of the University Consortium of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road and University Presidents’ Forum,” October 2018.

<sup>80</sup>“21 世纪海上丝绸之路大学联盟”秘书处揭牌暨倡议书发布仪式在厦门大学举行” [Secretariat of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road University Alliance Unveiled, and Proposal Launching Ceremony Held in Xiamen University], Xiamen University, December 22, 2017.

<sup>81</sup>Established in September 2018 by Donghua University and the Orient International Holding Co., “一带一路”世界纺织大学联盟成立” [Belt and Road World Textile Universities Alliance Established], *NewsQQ*, September 12, 2018; “Belt and Road Participants Begin Textiles Seminar in Shanghai,” *Belt and Road News*, March 25, 2019.

<sup>82</sup>Established in October 2017 by the Beijing University of Civil Engineering and Architecture: “一带一路建筑类大学国际联盟在北京成立” [BRAUIC Established], *China News*, October 10, 2017; Li Na, “Architecture University Union Set Up in Beijing,” *Belt and Road Portal*, October 12, 2017.

<sup>83</sup>Established in June 2017 by the BRICS Business Council and China COSCO Shipping Group: “International Alliance of Skills Development (IASDBR) Officially Set Sail,” BRICS Business Council Secretariat (via Asian Welding Federation), June 24, 2017; “一带一路暨金砖国家技能发展国际联盟”正式起航” [IASDBR Officially Takes Off], *Toweld.com*, June 29, 2017.

<sup>84</sup>Established in June 2018 by Southwest Jiaotong University and Central South University: “一带一路”铁路国际人才教育联盟在北京揭牌” [RTEA Inaugurated in Beijing], *SWJTU*, June 6, 2018.



Alliance, BRAIA),<sup>85</sup> medical education (一带一路国际医学教育联盟, Belt and Road International Medical Education Alliance, BRIMEA),<sup>86</sup> engineering education (一带一路工程教育国际联盟, International Alliance of Engineering Education for the Belt and Road),<sup>87</sup> scientific organizations (一带一路科技组织联盟, Alliance of Scientific Organizations in the Belt and Road Region, ANSO),<sup>88</sup> scientific research institutes (一带一路科研院所联盟, Belt and Road Scientific Research Institute Alliance),<sup>89</sup> and academic publishing (一带一路学术出版联盟, Belt and Road Academic Publishing Alliance, BR-APA).<sup>90</sup>



Image source: “Inauguration Ceremony of the University Consortium of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and University Presidents’ Forum,” UCMSR, August 7, 2018.

The creation of the University Alliance of the Silk Road and of the University Alliance of the Belt and Road in 2015 foreshadowed the “**Education Action Plan for the BRI**” launched in July 2016 by the ministry of Education, which envisions cooperation with Belt and Road countries in the field of education as a way to “build an integrated educational community.” Among other objectives, the plan encourages Chinese universities to “steadily expand cooperation and exchanges with their counterparts” in

<sup>85</sup>Established in April 2017 by the Northwestern Polytechnical University and the Chinese Society of Astronautics, “The Belt and Road Aerospace Innovation Alliance (BRAIA) Young Scholar Workshop Was Successfully Held in Qingdao,” BRAIA, December 8, 2017; “2017「一带一路」航天创新联盟 首届‘太空探索营’夏令营开营仪式在西北工业大学举行,” BRAIA, November 30, 2017.

<sup>86</sup>Established by China Medical University in May 2018, “President Wen Presided Over the First Meeting of the Preparatory Work for the ‘Belt & Road International Medical Education Alliance (BRIMEA)’,” CMU, November 8, 2017; “‘一带一路’国际医学教育联盟在中国医大成立” [BRIMEA Established in China Medical University], CMU, May 28, 2018.

<sup>87</sup>Established by Zhejiang University in November 2018, “International Alliance of Belt and Road Engineering Education Established in Hangzhou,” ZJU, November 16, 2018; “‘一带一路’工程教育国际联盟在杭州成立” [Belt and Road International Alliance for Engineering Education Established in Hangzhou] ZJU, November 16, 2018.

<sup>88</sup>Established by the Chinese Academy of Sciences in May 2017, “‘一带一路’科技组织联盟成立” [ANSO Established], State Council Information Office of the PRC, May 9, 2017; “中国科学院牵头推进建设‘一带一路’科技组织联盟” [Chinese Academy of Sciences Leads in Building ANSO], CAS Bulletin, No.32, 2017; ANSO website.

<sup>89</sup>Established on June 14, 2018 in Shenyang, with the Shenyang Surveying Geotechnical Research Institute Co. Ltd. as chair of the council, “‘One Belt and One Road’ Scientific Research Institute Alliance Was Established in Shenyang,” PRNewswire, June 20, 2018; “‘一带一路’科研院所联盟在沈阳成立” [Belt and Road Scientific Research Institute Alliance Established in Shenyang], China News, June 14, 2018.

<sup>90</sup>Established by Renmin University on August 24, 2018 “under the guidance of the State Information Office, the State Administration of Press, and the Ministry of Education”: “B&R Academic Publishing Alliance Launched in Beijing,” SCIO News, August 28, 2017; Tan Hua 谭华, “一带一路学术出版联盟成立” [Belt and Road Academic Publishing Alliance Established] *Guangming Ribao*, August 26, 2017.





Belt and Road countries.<sup>91</sup> It also makes it clear that international education cooperation is regarded as a tool to bring “closer people-to-people ties,” and “cultivate supporting talent” that can “buttress the efforts” dedicated to the success of BRI.<sup>92</sup> This means in effect that the BRI education plan is underpinned by the same principles that guide other overseas united front activities: it is designed to coopt foreigners to support and promote the CCP’s foreign policy goals – in this case, BRI. Although not typically identified as a united front entity on par with, for example, the CCP/ILD or CCP/UFWD, the ministry of Education nevertheless takes part in the united front work. This is, after all, a “task of all CCP Party-State-Military agencies.”<sup>93</sup>

The trope of China’s dominating the future world economy thanks, in part, to BRI, serves as a rallying cry for Chinese universities to induce overseas counterparts to not be left behind. This kind of language can be effective. As one British academic puts it: “Those European businesses and universities smart and swift enough to forge long-lasting partnerships with suitable Chinese universities will no doubt position themselves very favorably to take full advantage of the imminent and momentous change in the economic and educational balance of power from West to East.”<sup>94</sup> The British Chamber of Commerce in China recently published a report identifying BRI educational plans as a potential area of engagement, provided a certain number of benchmarks (high standards and rigor, fiscal responsibility, sustainability and ethics) are guaranteed.<sup>95</sup>

In the case of educational cooperation, the “Belt and Road” or “Silk Road” label is used as a marketing bait designed to attract new customers to engage with China on issues beyond education. The boundary between academic exchanges and specific technological and industrial know-how transfers can be blurry, especially as some Chinese business companies are also actively involved in a number of these academic alliances. Foreign universities willing to join Belt and Road education alliances should make sure they understand who their Chinese partners are, what their objectives are, what their joint research will be used for, and pay particular attention to the possibility of dual-use applications.<sup>96</sup> In the long run, Beijing’s emerging efforts to standardize education along the Silk Roads could also shape the future code of conduct followed by regional universities, especially how they approach data management, research integrity, ethics, open access, and academic freedom.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>91</sup>“推进共建‘一带一路’教育行动” [Education Action Plan for the Belt and Road Initiative], Ministry of Education, July 13, 2016 ([English version](#)).

<sup>92</sup>“We will spare no effort in cultivating the much-needed talent for the BRI to support policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, and financial integration among the Belt and Road countries.” *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup>Anne-Marie Brady, *Submission to the Inquiry on Foreign Interference, New Zealand Parliament, Justice Select Committee*, April 2019; “New Zealand: Anne-Marie Brady’s parliamentary submission on political interference”, Sinopsis, May 10, 2019.

<sup>94</sup>Mike Bastin, “China Climbs the University Ladder,” *China Daily*, July 14, 2017.

<sup>95</sup>“Education on the Belt and Road,” British Chamber of Commerce in China, February 2019.

<sup>96</sup>Alex Joske, “Picking Flowers, Making Honey: The Chinese Military’s Collaboration with Foreign Universities,” Australian Strategic Policy Institute Report No. 10, 2018.

<sup>97</sup>Brendan O’Malley, “New Silk Road Opportunities are High on EU and HE Agenda,” University World News, April 13, 2019. Utrecht University has a specific project led by Prof. Marik van der Wende, dedicated to BRI’s implications for higher education and research cooperation between China and Europe: “The New Silk Road,” Centre for Global Challenges, Utrecht University.



### 3 Business

Together with foreign media and the academic world, the business community has also become one of the favorite targets of China's push for shaping international perceptions of BRI as a positive endeavor. Here, united front operations play on familiar grounds: the international corporate world has for decades been nurtured and coaxed into believing promises of profitable gains that the massive Chinese market and a growing Chinese economy would offer. Local business communities have been used as lobby groups nudging their government representatives to favor policies of engagement with China. Similar themes are now weaved around BRI. To the worldwide business community, the BRI-related narrative is generally one of not-to-be-missed money-making opportunity. United front work aims to ensure that Beijing's messages about BRI's "peaceful intentions, the benefits of closer economic ties, the economic damage from a fall-out" will be communicated by local "faces and voices," thereby giving it greater legitimacy.<sup>98</sup>

The expected outcomes are twofold: one, to attract foreign businesses to work on concrete Belt and Road projects, especially in sectors where Chinese companies lack competence (such as for example, financial services, or some niche technological providers); and two, to cultivate local businessmen and prominent economic actors to gain increased access to politicians and high-ranking civil servants of Belt and Road countries.<sup>99</sup> The BRI message dissemination and cooptation process is conducted via multiple mechanisms that take the form, among others, of associations for the promotion of international trade, Silk Road business councils, and Silk Road Chambers of Commerce.

#### China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (中国国际贸易促进委员会)



CCPIT<sup>100</sup>

The China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT, 中国国际贸易促进委员会) is listed by a May 1957 CIA report as a united front organization, i.e. "an instrument used by the CCP to mobilize a number of federations and important persons in support of an important propaganda program." CCPIT's objectives are described as twofold: "(1) to persuade businessmen in non-Communist countries that strategic embargoes on trade with the Soviet bloc and China are detrimental to their own interests; and (2) to develop trade relations with non-Communist countries."<sup>101</sup> These objectives have obviously evolved since 1957 but CCPIT has an enduring role as an instrument to engage important foreign businessmen for trade and investment related issues. CCPIT's current Secretary-General, Yu Jianlong 于健龙, still believes that its task is to serve the Party's BRI objectives and sees business communities as "a driving force in the promotion of the Belt and Road."<sup>102</sup>

<sup>98</sup>Clive Hamilton and Alex Joske, "United Front Activities in Australia: Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security," January 22, 2018.

<sup>99</sup>Read, for example, on how the company CEFC China Energy managed to engage a significant segment of the Czech political establishment: Martin Hála, "United Front Work by Other Means: China's 'Economic Diplomacy' in Central and Eastern Europe," *China Brief*, May 9, 2019.

<sup>100</sup>Image source: CCPIT via Wikipedia.

<sup>101</sup>"The United Front in Communist China: A Technique for Controlling, Mobilizing and Utilizing Non-Communist Masses," CIA Report, May 1957, declassified in August 1999.

<sup>102</sup>Xu Wei, "China is Rallying World Business Communities to Join Belt and Road," *Yicai*, March 30, 2018.



CCPIT has recently teamed up with the World Chambers Federation to “encourage more business communities to participate in China’s Belt and Road initiative.” In April 2018, the partners organized in Beijing a forum focused on “Belt and Road trade and investment” for over 600 participants from 70 countries<sup>103</sup> with the objective of making “world business communities more confident about participating in Belt and Road construction.”<sup>104</sup>

CCPIT also acts as secretariat for Chinese Chambers of Commerce. Under its patronage, the China Chamber of Commerce in the UK<sup>105</sup> hosted a forum in London in January 2018, exploring “new areas for China-UK cooperation,” taking the opportunity of “jointly building the ‘One Belt & One Road’ projects” and “in the context of a post-Brexit market,” exploring “new models, new projects and new areas for both British and Chinese enterprises.”<sup>106</sup>

In the same way that Belt and Road “alliances” committed to promote international BRI cooperation with journalists and academics have emerged, several newly-created Silk Road business associations are now actively trying to rally global CEOs and enjoin them to cooperate with Chinese partners to ultimately serve the Party’s objectives. As Dr. Gerry Groot notes, “Chambers of commerce provide a useful face for dealings with foreigners, while associations allow the UFDW to discreetly manage more directly political aspects.”<sup>107</sup>

### Silk Road Chamber of International Commerce (丝绸之路国际总商会)



SRCIC<sup>108</sup>

Among the most proactive is the “Silk Road Chamber of International Commerce” (SRCIC, 丝绸之路国际总商会), which, according to its website, counts 110 members from 75 countries, “forming a community of shared interests, shared responsibilities and a shared future” with the objective of serving “as a bridge connecting enterprises and governments, creating a cooperative platform between business associations and SRCIC members. It also is a key voice in the promotion of Belt and Road construction and plays a vital role in advancing economic and social development with an emphasis on international collaboration and global governance.”<sup>109</sup> The language similarity with the Party’s “community of shared future” (人类命运共同体) mantra is noticeable.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>103</sup>“Belt and Road Trade, Investment Forum to Open in April,” China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, April 2, 2018.

<sup>104</sup>Xu Wei, *op. cit.*

<sup>105</sup>China Chamber of Commerce in the UK.

<sup>106</sup>Cecilia Liu, “Forum in London to Explore B&R Opportunities,” *China Daily*, January 4, 2018. Program available via Renfrewshire Chamber of Commerce.

<sup>107</sup>Gerry Groot, “Understanding the Role of Chambers of Commerce and Industry Associations in United Front Work,” *China Brief*, 18(11), June 19, 2018.

<sup>108</sup>Image source: SRCIC.

<sup>109</sup>SRCIC website. For more on SRCIC and its lobbying activities at the UN, see Andréa Worden, “The CCP at the UN: Redefining development and rights,” Sinopsis, March 17, 2019.

<sup>110</sup>On the “community of shared future,” see Nadège Rolland, “Eurasian Integration ‘a la Chinese’: Deciphering Beijing’s Vision for the Region as a “Community of Common Destiny”,” *The ASAN Forum*, June 5, 2017; Rolland, “Examining China’s ‘Community of Common Destiny’,” *Power 3.0*, January 23, 2018, and Rolland, “Beijing’s Vision for a Reshaped International Order,” *China Brief* 18:3, February 26, 2018.



Although founded (in December 2015) and based in Hong Kong, SRCIC's secretariat is in Xi'an, hometown of its chairman, Lü Jianzhong 吕建中, a member of the CP-PCC.<sup>111</sup> Lü is also founding chairman and director of DTXS Silk Road Investment, executive committee member of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce (ACFIC), and vice-President of the China International Chamber of Commerce affiliated with CCPIT.<sup>112</sup> Mr Lü travels regularly abroad to promote international business cooperation with BRI, and often meets with high level political circles.<sup>113</sup> SRCIC's vice-chairman and secretary general is Li Zhonghang 李中航, a former PLA colonel and CEO of Tang West Market Group.<sup>114</sup>

In February 2019, SRCIC offered two-week internships to 7 Fulbright students.<sup>115</sup> It is also sponsoring scholarships through a Silk Road Sunshine Fund created in 2016 to support outstanding graduate students from Belt and Road countries to study in Xi'an. SRCIC's partners are Xi'an Jiaotong University, Northwest Polytechnical University, Northwest University, Chang'an University and Shaanxi Normal University.<sup>116</sup>

### Belt and Road Industrial and Commercial Alliance (一带一路工商协会联盟)



*Belt and Road Industrial and Commercial Alliance*<sup>117</sup>

The “Belt and Road Industrial and Commercial Alliance” (BRICA, 一带一路工商协会联盟, Belt and Road Industrial and Commercial Association Alliance), was founded with the approval of the Office of the Belt and Road Leading Small Group (推进“一带一路”建设领导小组办公室) and is sponsored by the China Federation of Industrial Economics (CFIE, 中国工业经济联合会).<sup>118</sup> The launching ceremony took place at the Diaoyutai State Guest House in Beijing in June 2016.<sup>119</sup> Several prominent United Front personalities preside over BRICA's activities: Chen Yuan 陈元 (Chen Yun's son), vice-chairman of the 12th National Committee of the CPPCC, and Gu Xiulian 顾秀莲,

<sup>111</sup>On the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) as a United Front organ, see, e.g., “*人民政协是最广泛的统一战线组织*” [The People's Consultative Conference is the Broadest United Front Organization], *Deng Xiaoping on the United Front*, CCP News; Gerry Groot, *Managing transitions: the Chinese Communist Party's united front work, minor parties and groups, hegemony and corporatism*, PhD thesis, University of Adelaide, 1997.

<sup>112</sup>SRCIC website.

<sup>113</sup>Among other places, he was in Georgia in April 2016 (“*Georgia takes strong step toward Silk Road project*,” agenda.ge, April 7, 2016) and November 2017 (“*We have launched new reform package to create more favourable business environment*” - Georgian PM at Tbilisi Silk Road Forum,” Georgian Journal, November 29, 2017); in Ukraine in 2016 (“*President's wife opened first Ukrainian Silk Road Forum*,” Presidential Administration of Ukraine, November 7, 2016); in Lebanon in 2017 (“*Belt and Road Initiative 'golden key' to Arab region: SRCIC chairman*,” Xinhua, July 4, 2017). He also gave a keynote speech at the September 2017 10<sup>th</sup> World Chambers Congress in Sydney (“*Silk Road Chamber of International Commerce (SRCIC)*,” CSEBA, April 22, 2019) and while in Turkmenistan in May 2018, received a certificate of Honor for Reviving the Ancient Silk Road (SRCIC, *Twitter post*, May 7, 2018).

<sup>114</sup>SRCIC website.

<sup>115</sup>SRCIC, *Twitter post*, March 3, 2019.

<sup>116</sup>“*Notice on Application for Chinese Government Scholarship: SRCIC Partner Universities*,” SRCIC, March 15, 2019.

<sup>117</sup>Image source: “*The Belt and Road Industrial and Commercial Alliance (BRICA)*,” TÜSIAD.

<sup>118</sup>“*一带一路工商协会联盟6月成立*” [Belt and Road Industrial and Commercial Association Alliance Established in June], *China Industry News* via *Global Times*, May 23, 2016.

<sup>119</sup>“*Belt and Road Industrial and Commercial Alliance Established in Beijing*,” CCTV, June 17, 2016.



Image source: “BRICA – A new alliance established in Beijing,” *China Fastener*, June 17, 2016.

vice-chairman of the 10th National People’s Congress Standing Committee and honorary President of CFIE, serve as counselors; Li Yizhong 李毅中 member of the Standing Committee of the 12th National Committee of the CPPCC and president of CFIE, serves as one of the 22 co-chairmen of the alliance from 20 countries;<sup>120</sup> Xiong Meng 熊梦, vice-chairman and secretary-general of CFIE, serves as BRICA’s secretary-general. Li Yizhong stated that BRICA will “actively encourage members to participate in [BRI], facilitate information sharing and matching of projects, and link the initiative with the Made in China 2025 strategy.”<sup>121</sup>

### Belt and Road Alliance of International Chambers of Commerce (一带一路国际商业协作联盟)



AICC<sup>122</sup>

The Belt and Road Alliance of International Chambers of Commerce (AICC, 一带一路国际商业协作联盟), located in Guangzhou, was jointly established by the Guangdong General Chamber of Commerce and the Guangzhou General Chamber of Commerce. It comprises 36 domestic and 35 foreign business chambers – although it is not clear from the list available on its website if these are foreign or Chinese chambers based overseas.<sup>123</sup> AICC’s international activities seem to be much more limited than SR-CIC’s.

<sup>120</sup>They include Belarus, Brazil, the Czech Republic, Egypt, France, Georgia, Germany, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

<sup>121</sup>“Business Alliance BRICA to Help Companies Tap Belt and Road Initiative,” *China Daily*, December 22, 2016.

<sup>122</sup>Image source: AICC website.

<sup>123</sup>AICC website.





Image source: “出席一帶一路總商會就職典禮林鄭：香港將更好地融入中國發展大” [Carrie Lam Attends Belt and Road General Chamber of Commerce Inauguration Ceremony: Hong Kong Will Better Merge into China’s Development], TMHK, April 17, 2018.

### Belt and Road General Chamber of Commerce (一帶一路总商会)



Belt and Road General Chamber of Commerce<sup>124</sup>

Building on Hong Kong’s reputation as a central platform for international trade and financial exchanges, a group of tycoons established in September 2017 the “Belt and Road General Chamber of Commerce” (一帶一路總商會) to “promote closer relations and trade between Hong Kong and Southeast Asian countries.”<sup>125</sup> The four founding billionaires are Peter Lam (林建岳), chairman of the Lai Sun Group and Media Asia Group, and a member of the standing committee of the CPPCC; Pan Sutong 潘苏通, CEO of

Goldin Real Estate Holdings and member of the CPPCC;<sup>126</sup> the Sino-Thai property developer Chanchai Ruayrungruang (严彬), CEO of Reignwood Group and member of the CPPCC;<sup>127</sup> and Cheng Cheung-Ling 鄭翔玲, CEO of the Tai Pharmaceutical Group and member of the CPPCC.<sup>128</sup> Candid about the Chamber’s aim as a supporting arm of Beijing’s Belt and Road policy, Ms Cheng said the Chamber would “act as a supplement to the mainland government in terms of Belt and Road connections with other countries on the route.”<sup>129</sup> Carrie Lam and Leung Chun-ying 梁振英, vice-chairman of the National Committee of the CPPCC and Lam’s predecessor as Hong Kong Chief Executive, were present at the Chamber’s inauguration ceremony on April 17, 2018.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>124</sup>Image source: [Belt and Road Chamber](#), Facebook. For more information, including relevant images, see Ng Cheuk-on 吳偉安, “張建宗指一帶一路已取得階段性成果 年底將辦高峰論壇” [Matthew Cheung Says the Belt and Road Has Achieved Stage Results, Summit to be Held at Year’s End], HK01, March 25, 2019.

<sup>125</sup>Phoenix Un, “Chamber Set Up to Ease Belt, Road Path in SEAsia,” *The Standard*, September 13, 2017.

<sup>126</sup>“政协第十三届全国委员会委员名单发布新闻出版界 44 人” [List of Members of the 13<sup>th</sup> National Committee of the CPPCC, 44 Members of the Press and Publishing Industry], Xinhua, January 25, 2018.

<sup>127</sup>And of the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (中华全国归国华侨联合会). Ibid.

<sup>128</sup>And also, among others, member of the standing committee of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, member of the standing committee of the China Overseas Friendship Association. See “Directors,” Sinobiopharm.

<sup>129</sup>Un, *op. cit.*

<sup>130</sup>“出席一帶一路總商會就職典禮林鄭：香港將更好地融入中國發展大” [Carrie Lam Attends Belt and Road General Chamber of Commerce Inauguration Ceremony: Hong Kong Will Better Merge into China’s Development], TMHK, April 17, 2018.



### Belt and Road Global Forum (一带一路国际联盟)



*Belt and Road Global Forum*<sup>131</sup>

Hong Kong is generally a very proactive promoter of BRI. The **Hong Kong Trade Development Council** (HKTDC) hosts and sponsors various platforms to enhance the visibility of Beijing's initiative, including a web portal<sup>132</sup> and the **Belt and Road Global Forum** (一带一路国际联盟, Belt and Road International Alliance), inaugurated in June 2018. The Forum includes "chambers of commerce, industry associations, investment promotion agencies and think tanks" totaling 110 members from 29 countries, with HKTDC serving as its secretariat.<sup>133</sup> Its self-described mission is to "support the advancement of the BRI through Hong Kong by bringing together local and international organizations committed to the Initiative, and helping them connect and create business opportunities together."<sup>134</sup>

### Silk Road International Association (丝路国际联盟)



*Silk Road International Association*<sup>135</sup>

The "Silk Road International Association" (SRIA, 丝路国际联盟, Silk Road International Alliance) is an offshoot of the International Finance Forum (IFF, 国际金融论坛) which was founded in Beijing in 2003 with the mission of "establishing regular dialogue and communications at highest level, while conducting research on global financial matters."<sup>136</sup> IFF includes both high-level Chinese and foreign political and financial leaders. Since December 2018, its chairman is Zhou Xiaochuan 周小川, vice-chairman of the 12th CPPCC and former Governor of the People's Bank of China.<sup>137</sup> SRIA was established during the IFF's 2016 annual conference and includes "former political leaders, experts, scholars, economic and financial institutions, and outstanding entrepreneurs from countries participating in the BRI." SRIA officially vows to "enhance mutual trust and build consensus by carrying forward the 'Silk Road spirit' of peace and co-operation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit, and win-win outcomes. With the recognition of and consensus on the core values of the BRI, the SRIA aims to provide a mechanism that boosts non-governmental collaboration and dialogue"<sup>138</sup> – a statement that toes, almost word for word, the Belt and Road Party line.

<sup>131</sup>Image source: [Belt and Road Global Forum website](#).

<sup>132</sup>HKTDC Belt and Road portal.

<sup>133</sup>"Global Alliance on Belt and Road Inaugurated in China's Hong Kong," State Council Information Office, June 28, 2018, [http://english.scio.gov.cn/beltandroad/2018-06/28/content\\_53820013.htm](http://english.scio.gov.cn/beltandroad/2018-06/28/content_53820013.htm)

<sup>134</sup>[Belt and Road Global Forum website](#).

<sup>135</sup>Image source: SRIA, Facebook.

<sup>136</sup>IFF Forum.

<sup>137</sup>"IFF 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference: New Globalization, A Path to the Future," Paulson Institute, December 3, 2018.

<sup>138</sup>"A New Milestone: Introducing the Silk Road International Association," *Central Banking*, May 2, 2018.



Image source: IFF.

SRIA's inaugural meeting, co-hosted by SRIA and China News Service (中国新闻社) was held in June 2017 in Hangzhou where it has established its headquarters.<sup>139</sup> Former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon sent a congratulatory letter, expressing his “firm belief” that SRIA would “make great contributions to the realization of the goals of the BRI and that IFF members w[ould] fully devote themselves to realizing the vision of the modern Silk Road.”<sup>140</sup> Senior leaders from Chinese SOEs such as the China Railway Group, China Construction Bank and Everbright Securities were present. Former New Zealand Prime Minister Jenny Shipley was also attending, and praised BRI as a “massively big idea, connecting a range of countries” in an “inspired” way.<sup>141</sup>

## Conclusion

A Leninist concept invented a hundred years ago<sup>142</sup> is at the heart of the Chinese Party-State's efforts to promote and support the Belt and Road Initiative, Xi Jinping's “project of the Century.” Instead of getting stuck in the early Soviet revolutionary times, united front tactics “in the new era” are evolving and adapting. Xi has raised the status of the United Front Work Department, consolidated CCP control over Party-State organizations that are responsible for executing united front work, and intensified its domestic and overseas undertakings.<sup>143</sup> Historically, the main target of united front work outside the PRC has been overseas Chinese communities, but the considerable expansion of Xi's foreign policy agenda has brought these activities to new regions where overseas Chinese communities are not necessarily well established. There, the traditional united front approaches have given way to “creative adapta-

<sup>139</sup>Song Haoxin 宋豪新, “丝路国际联盟在杭州正式成立” [SRIA Formally Established in Hangzhou], *People's Daily*, June 19, 2017.

<sup>140</sup>Yan Dongjie 闫东洁, “丝路国际联盟在杭州成立” [SRIA Established in Hangzhou], *China Daily*, June 18, 2017.

<sup>141</sup>Russell Flannery, “Fast Momentum of China's Silk Road Helps Its Appeal, Jenny Shipley Says,” *Forbes*, June 17, 2017.

<sup>142</sup>Jichang Lulu, “United Frontlings Always Win,” in “The Battle Behind the Front,” *China Heritage*, September 2017.

<sup>143</sup>Gerry Groot, “The Rise and Rise of the United Front Work Department Under Xi,” *China Brief*, April 24, 2018; Groot, “The Expansion of the United Front Under Xi Jinping,” in *China Story Yearbook 2015*.



tion”<sup>144</sup> which is also reflected in the extended web of new united front entities that have emerged since 2015<sup>145</sup> specifically devoted to the international advancement of the BRI objectives. As united front tactics are now applied globally and united front entities are projecting outwards using BRI’s appeal, they mostly target local elites (journalists, intellectuals, students, businesspeople) that constitute the enduring backbone of local societies, implanting their influence in newly-created friendly networks for years to come.

This paper has attempted to compile the main Belt and Road united front entities targeting foreign media, academic, and business communities. Although incomplete,<sup>146</sup> it constitutes a first step in mapping the scope of the Party-State’s efforts dedicated to inducing and coopting foreign groups into supporting the BRI cause. The list of “Belt and Road alliances” (一带一路联盟) bears striking similarities with long-standing united front entities traditionally used to mobilize specific groups and sectors outside of the CCP, such as the various “all-China federations,” (中华全国联合会), “friendship associations” with foreign countries (对外友好协会) and “peaceful reunification councils” (和平统一促进会) and their duplicated local chapters.<sup>147</sup> As a tactic, united front is not limited within a specific bureaucracy, and it can “be innovatively employed through new channels,” but its ultimate goal remains constant: to help forge “temporary tactical alliances with local elites in areas beyond direct Party control” and to “advance the CCP’s strategic goals in environments the Party cannot yet control by more direct application of force.”<sup>148</sup>

The Chinese leadership is using all available means, short of military invasion, to achieve BRI’s ultimate objective – the creation of a “community of common destiny.”<sup>149</sup> To this end, tried and tested united front tactics are the CCP’s natural element of choice. With its newfangled Belt and Road “alliances,” the Party-State is pouring old united front wine into new, silken, containers.

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*Sinopsis* is a collaborative project between the Institute of East Asian Studies at Charles University in Prague and the non-profit AcaMedia Institute. The *Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences (CAS)*, a public research institution, co-organised the 2019 *Sinopsis* workshop with financial support from CAS Strategy AV21.

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<sup>144</sup>Hála, *op. cit.*

<sup>145</sup>The date coincides with the first work conference on united front in 9 years, convened by Xi Jinping on May 18-20, 2015. “Xi Urges Strengthening of United Front,” *China Daily*, May 21, 2015.

<sup>146</sup>For example, there are also Belt and Road or Silk Road art and entertainment alliances, library alliances, museum alliances etc.

<sup>147</sup>John Dotson, “The United Front Work Department Goes Global: The Worldwide Expansion of the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China,” *China Brief*, May 9, 2019.

<sup>148</sup>Hála, *op. cit.*

<sup>149</sup>See Rolland, *opp. citt.*