



# BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

## New Knowledge Spaces and Asian Regionalism

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27–28 NOVEMBER 2019

Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is known to be a Chinese government-led vision that emphasizes infrastructural developments to achieve economic cooperation and market integration among countries along proposed routes spanning across Europe, Africa, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. The component of education and training, however, has also emerged as an important aspect of this trans-continental project. In 2016, the Education Action Plan was released to serve as a blueprint for building a transnational educational community to spur collaborations and exchanges among countries on the Belt and Road routes. According to the plan, the fundamental mission of education is to “serve as a bridge to closer people-to-people ties, whereas the cultivation of talent can buttress the efforts of these countries toward policy coordination, connectivity of infrastructure, unimpeded trade, and financial integration along the routes” (EAPBRI, 2016). Education is thus imagined as a vehicle to promote mutual learning for improving development of education at both country- and regional-level, to deepen cross-cultural understanding and bonds, and to cultivate talents and future leaders needed to advance the BRI. In other words, education and training is meant to develop the ‘soft infrastructure’ (Peters, 2019) that would hold together and sustain this ambitious vision.

At the same time, China has played a significant role in the context of international higher education as both a ‘sender’ of international students to and ‘importer’ of educational models from western countries. The BRI framework, however, is changing this pattern. China is now gaining prominence as a hub for hosting international students, particularly for its role in contributing to greater levels of intra-Asia student mobility, and this achievement has been attributed partially to the Belt and Road Scholarships. Additionally, there are attempts to export Chinese educational programmes to the rest of the world, such as the setting up of Confucius Institutes and scholarships across Asia to promote Chinese education and values, the formation of various high-level educational partnerships such as the University Alliance of the Silk Road and the University Consortium of 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, as well as the establishment of international branch campuses and joint educational ventures such as the Xiamen University Malaysia and Soochow University in Laos. These developments manifest what Yang (2010: 243) observes as a “new form of China’s higher education internationalisation, featured by a much-improved balance between introducing the world into China and bringing China to the world”. The scale, speed and comprehensiveness of these internationalisation efforts has also spurred questions about the role of Chinese higher education in wider geopolitical and international influence, knowledge and cultural diplomacy, as well as its potential in re-scripting the prevailing western hegemony in global higher education.

The primary objective of this workshop is to create an interdisciplinary group of scholars interested in how the BRI is revising patterns and processes of higher education and academic mobilities (including those of faculty, researchers and students) in East and Southeast Asian regional contexts. We are keen to understand how different actors and institutions are responding to opportunities and challenges emerging from this current reconfiguration of the global landscape of higher education. We are also interested in generating novel approaches towards understanding the role that China and Chinese education plays in shaping contemporary globalisation of knowledge spaces, with interests particularly in ‘rising’ Asian universities, intra-Asian student mobilities, and the prospects for Asian regionalism.

## 27 NOVEMBER 2019 • WEDNESDAY

09:45 – 10:00	REGISTRATION
10:00 – 10:15	WELCOME REMARKS
10:00	YI'EN CHENG, National University of Singapore
10:15 – 12:15	PRESENTATIONS • EDUCATIONAL MOBILITIES AND KNOWLEDGE SPACES
10:15	Understanding Scholarship Provision in Relation to International Mobilities: The Case of China JOHANNA WATERS • University College London
10:30	Belt Road Initiative: Implication on China's International Student Mobility ROCHELLE YUN GE • University of Saint Joseph
10:45	China in the Global Field of International Student Mobility: An Analysis of Economic, Human and Symbolic Capitals PEIDONG YANG • Nanyang Technological University
11:00	Staff and Student Mobilities at a Mainland Chinese International Branch Campus in Malaysia SIN YEE KOH • Monash University Malaysia
11:15	Mobile Scientists, Mobile Knowledge Worlds, Shifting Political Subjects RAVINDER SIDHU • University of Queensland
11:30	Discussant's Comments PARVATI RAGHURAM • Open University, and National University of Singapore
11:45	Questions & Answers
12:15 – 13:15	LUNCH
13:15 – 15:00	CLOSED DOOR DISCUSSIONS I
13:00	Presentations on Belt and Road Initiative, Higher Education, and Pilot Research Findings YI'EN CHENG • National University of Singapore
13:30	Discussion I • Malaysia / ASEAN Case
15:00 – 15:30	AFTERNOON TEA
15:30 – 17:30	CLOSED DOOR DISCUSSIONS II
15:30	Discussion II • Malaysia / ASEAN Case
17:30	END OF DAY 1
17:45 – 19:30	WORKSHOP DINNER

## 28 NOVEMBER 2019 • THURSDAY

10:00 – 12:00	CLOSED DOOR DISCUSSIONS III
10:00	Discussion III • Methodologies and Research Scope
12:00 – 13:00	LUNCH
13:00	END OF WORKSHOP

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## Understanding Scholarship Provision in Relation to International Mobilities: The Case of China

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**Catherine MONTGOMERY**

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In this paper, we consider the growth in the number of scholarships provided by the Chinese government to students from the Global South (largely through the Belt and Road initiative) and ask: what does scholarship provision mean in the context of global (im)mobilities? Scholarships offer a different and as yet insufficiently explored perspective on international student migration – recipients are not always ‘privileged’ in the traditional sense of the term, but potentially come from more diverse backgrounds, in possession of less overt forms of capital. The paper considers what we know about scholarships to date – their provision and how they are received – and how we might conceptualise them (as, for example, ‘soft power’). The paper considers what scholarship provision might mean for changing patterns of international student mobilities and changing understandings of international education, globally.

**Johanna Waters** is a Reader in Human Geography and Migration Studies at University College London in the UK. She previously worked at the universities of Oxford, Birmingham and Liverpool. She is the co-editor of the journal *Migration and Society*. Johanna's work focuses on understanding the relationship between the migration/mobilities of young people and education and she has published widely on issues of transnational households and educational migration. Her latest research (with Maggi Leung) is on cross-boundary schooling between Shenzhen and Hong Kong, and she is in the early stages of a project on scholarships and the Global South with Catherine Montgomery (Durham University) and Gift Maisaiti (University of Zambia).

**Catherine Montgomery** is Professor in the School of Education at the University of Durham. Prior to joining Durham in September 2019, Catherine has held professorial posts at the University of Bath and the University of Hull, both with a focus on international higher education. Catherine's research focuses on internationalisation of higher education and she has a particular interest in transnational higher education in China and East Asia. Her recent work focuses on international higher education mobilities, mainly with reference to flows of international students and considers what this can tell us about the changing landscapes of global higher education.

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## **Belt Road Initiative: Implications on Internationalization of Higher Education in China**

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Since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, internationalization of China's higher education enters a new stage of development. This paper aims to understand how BRI represents a new phase in China's higher education by reviewing developments in international student mobility:

- a) broadening the scale of international mobility to engage more polytechnic/vocational colleges;
- b) international student flow with a rationale of geographical matching between domestic regions/cities and BRI countries;
- c) the promotion and usage of Chinese language in sharpening the transnational talent cultivation.

Compared with the earlier broad internationalization agenda, China's policies guiding the international flow of students and talents under the framework of BRI are more targeted and purposeful. By strategically designing the circle of "bring in", "going out" and "returning" flows in line with its international economic collaboration agenda, China's BRI shows a new phase of transnational education involving state government.

**Rochelle Yun Ge** obtained her PhD from Sociology in National University of Singapore. She was a visiting fellow in Yenching Institute, Harvard University (2013-2014). She works from a cross-disciplinary angle, integrating sociological perspectives into the teaching and research of education. Based in Macau, her current research interests include but not limited to internationalization of higher education in Asia, international education migration, human capital formation, curriculum development and educational organizations. Her work can be found in *Asia Pacific Education Review*, *Journal of Population Research* and *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*.

**Kong Chong Ho** is trained as an urban sociologist at the University of Chicago. His research interests are neighbourhood and community development, heritage and place-making, the political economy of cities as well as a more recent interest in higher education. Much of his published work is on East (Hong Kong, Seoul and Taipei) and Southeast Asian (Bangkok and Singapore) cities. Recent publications include "The Neighbourhood Roots of Social Cohesion: Notes on an exceptional case of Singapore" *Environment and Planning C* (2018, with V Chua) "The Cultivation of Research Labour in Pacific Asia" *Asia Pacific Education Review* (2018, with Ge Yun) and "Discrepant Knowledge and InterAsian Mobilities: unlikely movements, uncertain futures" *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* (2018, with Francis Collins). Forthcoming publication include *Neighbourhoods for the City in Pacific Asia* with the University of Amsterdam Press (2019).

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## China in the Global Field of International Student Mobility: An Analysis of Economic, Human and Symbolic Capitals

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The global landscape of higher education (HE) is an uneven field where players like nation-states are placed in hierarchical and center-periphery relations. This paper focuses on the global field of international student mobility (ISM) and investigates China's place in the field using an analytical framework consisting of three key categories of 'capital': *economic*, *human*, and *symbolic*. Drawing on existing scholarship and the author's first-hand ethnographic research, the paper examines the case of China as both a source and a destination of ISM, and analyzes the outflows and inflows of these three forms of capital as consequences of outbound and inbound student mobilities. Analyses show that in a global ISM field characterised by asymmetries and inequalities, China's place is arguably *semi-peripheral* economically and symbolically.

**Peidong Yang** (DPhil Oxford) is an Assistant Professor of Sociology and Social Studies Education at the National Institute of Education (NIE), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. With a background in sociology of education, Peidong's research interests are mainly located at the intersections between education and migration/mobility. He has conducted qualitative research projects on Singapore's recruitment of mainland Chinese students under the "foreign talent" policy; immigration tensions and immigrant integration in Singapore; and Indian students pursuing medical education in China. He is the author of *International Mobility and Educational Desire: Chinese Foreign Talent Students in Singapore* (Palgrave, 2016) and various international peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters.

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## Staff and Student Mobilities at a Mainland Chinese International Branch Campus in Malaysia

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One of the five stated goals of China's state-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the fostering of "people-to-people bonds". Education plays a key role in achieving this goal through initiatives such as promoting student exchanges, mutual recognition of academic qualifications, jointly run educational institutions and research centres, research collaboration, as well as skills training and development. Extant debates and scholarship on how the BRI impact upon and shape international and regional higher education have thus far focused on macro accounts and analyses. These include discussions on China's soft power projection and knowledge diplomacy, as well as macro-scale mobility trends, especially on inbound student mobility to China. By contrast, there is a lack of examination of the micro-scale mobility motivations and lived experiences of individuals (including staff and students) in outbound contexts.

This paper attempts to contribute to this gap in the literature by examining the individual accounts of staff and student mobilities at Xiamen University Malaysia Campus (XMUM), a branch campus of a mainland Chinese public university. Based on 18 interviews conducted between October 2018 to February 2019 with XMUM staff and students, Xiamen University (XMU) staff, and a representative from the United Chinese School Committees' Association (UCSCA), this paper examines the constellation of motives and opportunities that brought mainland Chinese, Malaysian and international staff and students to XMUM. What emerges from individual accounts are complex and nuanced lived experiences that both support and challenge top-down portrayals of BRI-led higher education mobilities. Countering the pervasive account of BRI and China as the key initiators of new higher education mobilities, this paper argues that equal attention must also be given to the actors and conditions at destination contexts.

**Sin Yee Koh** ([www.sinyeekoh.wordpress.com](http://www.sinyeekoh.wordpress.com)) is Senior Lecturer at the School of Arts and Social Sciences at Monash University Malaysia. She is a human geographer working at the intersections of migration studies, urban studies, and postcolonial geography. Her work strives to understand the causes, processes, and consequences of structural inequalities, and how people cope individually and collectively under such conditions—with a particular focus on migration and mobilities. She is the author of *Race, Education, and Citizenship: Mobile Malaysians, British Colonial Legacies, and a Culture of Migration* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) and co-editor of *New Chinese Migrations: Mobility, Home, and Inspirations* (Routledge, 2018). She has published on differentiated citizenship, diaspora strategies, the education-migration nexus, cities and the super-rich, the globalisation of real estate, property tourism, and the role of intermediaries in elite transnational mobilities.

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## Mobile Scientists, Mobile Knowledge Worlds, Shifting Political Subjects

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The past two decades has seen policy activity and corresponding investment in specific areas of science research in universities and public research institutes. The mobile trajectories of scientists offer a rich resource from which to explore knowledge politics and political subject-making. Using as its empirical basis interviews conducted with scientists, who move between knowledge 'centres' and aspiring knowledge centres including those located at the 'edges', this paper discusses the conditions of possibility for political subjectivity inspired by, and arising from 'experiences' of academic mobility. Celebrated through narratives of universalism in which a seamless flow of cognitive 'goods' move across borders, many scientists are faced with navigating highly uneven, gendered terrains where largesse co-exists with insecurity and precarity. The desires of individual scientists to imagine new professional horizons have to be balanced with the pull of forces relating to 'home', such as accommodating spousal careers, and care responsibilities. The spatialities, temporalities and socialities of mobile scientists provide a helpful starting point from which to consider the personal, professional and ethical demands arising from institutional projects and people-to-people relations proposed by new multilateral education projects such as those sponsored by the Belt and Road Initiative.

**Ravinder Sidhu** works at the School of Education, University of Queensland (Australia). Her research has focused on the cultural politics of higher education and schooling for mobile populations such as migrants and refugees. She is the author of *Universities and Globalization: To Market, to Market* (Mahwah: NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates).

## ABOUT THE ORGANISERS & DISCUSSANT

**Brenda S.A. YEOH** is Raffles Professor of Social Sciences at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Research Leader of the Asian Migration Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, NUS. Her research interests include the politics of space in colonial and postcolonial cities, and she also has considerable experience working on a wide range of migration research in Asia, including key themes such as cosmopolitanism and highly skilled talent migration; gender, social reproduction and care migration; migration, national identity and citizenship issues; globalising universities and international student mobilities; and cultural politics, family dynamics and international marriage migrants. She has published widely on these topics and her recent books include *Transnational Labour Migration, Remittances and the Changing Family in Asia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, with Lan Anh Hoang) and *Contested Memoryscapes: The Politics of Second World War Commemoration in Singapore* (Routledge, 2016, with Hamzah Muzaini), *Asian Migrants and Religious Experience: From Missionary Journeys to Labor Mobility* (Amsterdam University Press, 2018 with Bernardo Brown) and *Handbook of Asian Migrations* (Routledge, 2018 with Gracia Liu-Farrer).

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**Kong Chong HO** is trained as an urban sociologist at the University of Chicago. His research interests are neighbourhood and community development, heritage and place-making, the political economy of cities as well as a more recent interest in higher education. Much of his published work is on East (Hong Kong, Seoul and Taipei) and Southeast Asian (Bangkok and Singapore) cities. Recent publications include “The Neighbourhood Roots of Social Cohesion: Notes on an exceptional case of Singapore” *Environment and Planning C* (2018, with V Chua) “The Cultivation of Research Labour in Pacific Asia” *Asia Pacific Education Review* (2018, with Ge Yun) and “Discrepant Knowledge and InterAsian Mobilities: unlikely movements, uncertain futures” *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* (2018, with Francis Collins). Forthcoming publication include *Neighbourhoods for the City in Pacific Asia* with the University of Amsterdam Press (2019).

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**Parvati RAGHURAM** is Professor in Geography and Migration at the Open University. She came to the UK after her MA in India. She has published widely on retheorising migration of international students and skilled migrants. She is currently leading a grant on contextualising peace education in Nigeria and Zimbabwe. In this project she is looking at decolonisation of education as a pedagogical challenge in interdisciplinary and intercontinental research. She has co-authored *Gender, Migration and Social Reproduction* (Palgrave), *The Practice of Cultural Studies* (Sage), *Gender and International Migration in Europe* (Routledge) and co-edited *South Asian Women in the Diaspora* (Berg) and *Tracing Indian Diaspora: Contexts, Memories, Representations* (Sage). She has written for policy audiences having co-authored research papers for a number of think-tanks. She co-edits the journal *South Asian Diaspora* with the Centre for Study of Diaspora, Hyderabad and the Palgrave Pivot series *Mobility and Politics* with Martin Geiger and William Walters both at Ottawa.

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**Yi'En CHENG** is Research Fellow in the Asian Migration Cluster at Asia Research Institute (ARI), National University of Singapore. He was previously Postdoctoral Fellow of the Social Sciences at Yale-NUS College (2016-2019). His research interests lie in the intersection across education, youth, and mobilities in Asian cities, with a current focus on how higher education restructuring is changing young people's aspirations and identities and their relationships to mobility and immobility. He is completing a project funded by the Yale-NUS College that examines liberal arts higher education institutions and curricula in Asia, focusing on whether and how such initiatives are shaping novel models of citizenship among young adult students. His latest project at ARI explores how the Belt and Road Initiative is impacting higher education and mobilities in the context of the ASEAN region. Yi'En is guest co-editor of Special Issues 'Mobile Aspirations? Youth Im/mobilities in the Asia-Pacific' in *Journal of Intercultural Studies* and 'Geographies of Citizenship in Higher Education' in *Area*. His works have been published in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *Antipode*, *Environment & Planning A*, *Gender, Place & Culture*, and *Social & Cultural Geography* as well as in edited volumes.

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