



MIGRATIONS & MOBILITIES

ALONG THE BELT AND ROAD
Emergent Geographies in Asia and Beyond

11-12 Jan 2024



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO



For more information, please visit: ari.nus.edu.sg/events/migrations-mobilities

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an ambitious infrastructure and development project aimed at promoting trade between China and other countries and regions around the world. Since its initial announcement in 2013, the BRI has rapidly evolved into a strategy for China's internal and external development, a 'brand umbrella' under which a vast array of China's geopolitical projects—ranging from trade and investment to humanitarian initiatives—have been implemented. Although the BRI lacks a formal legal mandate and binding rules, it is being rolled out through a variety of policy instruments, including bilateral agreements, investment incentives, development projects, and trade and infrastructure programmes.

While the macroeconomic impact of China's growing presence in the BRI nations is the subject of increasing scholarly attention, the effects of Belt and Road projects on the conditions of migration and mobility remain under-researched. We know little about how investments and policies delivered under the banner of the BRI are altering the diversity of migrant groups, the sociocultural and economic drivers of migration, and the legal and administrative governance of migration. Equally sparse is research along the Belt and Road on encounters and dynamics between migrants and local residents, and the impact on sociocultural exchange and knowledge circulation. This workshop aims to address these gaps by examining topics such as:

- Economic and socio-political forces that produce particular migration regimes and conditions of (im)mobility;
- The social, economic, political, and cultural implications of emerging flows of migration and mobilities in both sending and receiving contexts;
- The experiences of mobility between China and the BRI countries among various groups of migrants; and
- The effects of the BRI's sociocultural exchange and knowledge circulation on migration and mobilities.

The workshop invites empirically grounded papers that analyse migration and mobilities set in motion by elements of the Belt and Road, including:

- Cross-border commerce and trade
- Work opportunities across different sectors
- Entrepreneurship and deskilling
- Education and vocational training
- Marriage and family reunion
- Lifestyle migration
- Precarity and displacement

This two-day interdisciplinary workshop aims to bring together international, regional, and local scholars to reflect on how the conditions of mobility have changed along the Belt and Road by addressing a range of salient issues on the emerging geographies of migration, such as migration regimes and conditions of (im)mobility, various implications of emerging flows of migration, and the dynamics of sociocultural exchange and knowledge circulation.

It is part of a partnership project (Belt and Road in Global Perspective or BRGP) funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) involving Professor Rachel Silvey and Professor Edward Schatz (Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy, University of Toronto), Professor Neil Collins (Nazarbayev University), and Professor Brenda Yeoh (National University Singapore) to investigate the rapidly developing and widely varying changes and downstream effects that are occurring in the wake of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

WORKSHOP CONVENORS

Prof Brenda S.A. Yeoh, FBA | National University of Singapore

Prof Rachel Silvey | University of Toronto

Prof Edward Schatz | University of Toronto

Assoc Prof Kong Chong Ho | National University of Singapore & Yale-NUS College

Dr Yi'En Cheng | National University of Singapore

Dr Kris Hyesoo Lee | National University of Singapore

PROGRAM AT-A-GLANCE

DATE	TIME (SGT)	PANEL SESSION
11 Jan 2024 (Thu)	10:30 – 11:00	WELCOME & INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
	11:00 – 12:30	PANEL 1 – MIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS AND BORDER TRADE
	14:00 – 15:30	PANEL 2 – EDUCATION MOBILITIES
	16:00 – 17:10	PANEL 3 – GENDER AND MIGRATION
	18:00 – 19:30	WORKSHOP DINNER <i>(For Presenters, Chairpersons and Invited Guests)</i>
12 Jan 2024 (Fri)	10:30 – 12:00	PANEL 4 – NAVIGATING LABOUR RIGHTS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS
	13:30 – 15:00	PANEL 5 – MIGRANT COMMUNITIES, CONNECTIVITY, AND NETWORKS
	15:30 – 17:00	PANEL 6 – (IM)MOBILITY INFRASTRUCTURES
	17:00 – 17:30	SUMMARY & CLOSING REMARKS

11 JANUARY 2024 • THURSDAY

10:30 – 11:00	WELCOME AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
	Brenda S.A. Yeoh <i>National University of Singapore</i> Rachel Silvey <i>University of Toronto</i>
11:00 – 12:30	PANEL 1 – MIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS AND BORDER TRADE
Chairperson	Yi'En Cheng <i>National University of Singapore</i>
11:00 <i>online</i>	Chinese Entrepreneurs and the BRI Shift in Australia Yingyi Luo <i>Swinburne University</i> Shiyang Zhu <i>RMIT University</i>
11:20	Performative Commerce: Mobile Traders and the Staging of BRI Potential at the Sino-Mongolian Border Thomas White <i>King's College London</i>
11:40	New Emigrant, Socio-Economic Network and Transnational Governance: A Case Study of a Post-2000's <i>Qiaoxiang-Shaodong</i> County in China Na Ren <i>Jinan University</i>
12:00	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
12:30 – 14:00	LUNCH BREAK
14:00 – 15:30	PANEL 2 – EDUCATION MOBILITIES
Chairperson	Kris Hyesoo Lee <i>National University of Singapore</i>
14:00	Time and Precarity in "South-South" Academic Mobility: A 2019-2023 Longitudinal Study of Pakistani PhD Students in China Mengwei Tu <i>Swansea University</i>
14:20	Springboard to the West: Studying in China for International Students from Countries along the Belt and Road Yingjing Du <i>Waseda University</i>
14:40	Navigating the Belt and Road, and Beyond: Education-Migration and Aspirational Pathways among Internationally Mobile Chinese Young People in Southeast Asia Brenda S.A. Yeoh <i>National University of Singapore</i>
15:00	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
15:30 – 16:00	TEA BREAK

16:00 – 17:10	PANEL 3 – GENDER AND MIGRATION
<i>Chairperson</i>	Lan Anh Hoang <i>University of Melbourne</i>
<i>16:00</i>	Cultural Hybridity as the Recipe of Stable Romance: A Qualitative Study of Transnational Marriages between Chinese and Foreigner Raja Rameez <i>Xiamen University</i> Miaoyan Yang <i>Xiamen University</i>
<i>16:20</i>	Chinese Distant-Water Fishers in Guinea-Bissau: (im)mobilities and Masculinities Hang (Ayo) Zhou <i>Chr. Michelsen Institute</i>
<i>16:40</i>	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
17:10	END OF DAY 1
18:00 – 19:30	WORKSHOP DINNER (<i>For Presenters, Chairpersons and Invited Guests</i>)

12 JANUARY 2024 • FRIDAY

10:30 – 12:00	PANEL 4 – NAVIGATING LABOUR RIGHTS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS
<i>Chairperson</i>	Kris Hyesoo Lee <i>National University of Singapore</i>
10:30 <i>online</i>	Transregional Mobility and Cross-Border Dispute Resolution for Chinese Workers Returning from Africa Ding Fei <i>Cornell University</i>
10:50	BRI Project Workers in the Western Balkans: Politics and Public Perception Jelena Gledić <i>University of Belgrade</i>
11:10	A Belt and Rights Initiative? Labor and the Complexities of BRI Migration Diplomacy Marina Kaneti <i>National University of Singapore</i> Yuxin Hou <i>National University of Singapore</i> Israruddin <i>Independent Researcher</i>
11:30	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
12:00 – 13:30	LUNCH BREAK
13:30 – 15:00	PANEL 5 – MIGRANT COMMUNITIES, CONNECTIVITY, AND NETWORKS
<i>Chairperson</i>	Brenda S.A. Yeoh <i>National University of Singapore</i>
13:30	Forever Strangers in the Atomized Immigrant Community: The (Dis)integration of International Middling Immigrants in China under the Belt and Road Initiative Cheng Chow <i>University of Hong Kong</i>
13:50	A Tightening Belt, A Road to Escape: "Runology" and the BRI Pál Nyiri <i>Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam</i>
14:10	Inequality through the Lens of <i>Danwei</i> : The Anti-malaria Healthcare among Chinese SOE Migrants in Zambia Beibei Yang <i>Shandong Women's University</i>
14:30	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
15:00 – 15:30	TEA BREAK

15:30 – 17:00	PANEL 6 – (IM)MOBILITY INFRASTRUCTURES
<i>Chairperson</i>	Han Cheng <i>National University of Singapore</i>
15:30	(Im)Mobility Infrastructures: How a BRI Hydropower Project (Im)Mobilized People in Northern Laos Floramante SJ Ponce <i>Martin Luther University-Halle</i>
15:50	The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway and The Production of Enclaved Mobility David Fernando Bachrach <i>University of Colorado Boulder</i>
16:10	Transborder State-Building: Digital Infrastructures of China’s Diaspora Governance During the Pandemic Jiaqi Liu <i>Singapore Management University & Princeton University</i>
16:30	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
17:00 – 17:30	SUMMARY & CLOSING REMARKS
	Rachel Silvey <i>University of Toronto</i> Brenda S.A. Yeoh <i>National University of Singapore</i>
17:30	END OF DAY 2

Chinese Entrepreneurs and the BRI Shift in Australia

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This paper critically examines the repercussive landscape for Chinese entrepreneurs in Australia following the abrupt dissolution of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) agreements. Despite the initiative's ambitious intent to enhance global commerce, the study identifies a research gap in the BRI's impact on the entrepreneurial fabric within advanced economies, particularly in the context of heightened geopolitical scrutiny. By interlacing Entrepreneur C's narrative with broader economic analyses, the paper uncovers the multifaceted challenges these entrepreneurs face, from navigating policy-driven market dynamics to reassessing the alignment with China's global economic outreach. The study foregrounds the need for agility and innovation in transnational entrepreneurship and contributes to the discourse on policy-driven market dynamics affecting Chinese migrant entrepreneurs.

Yingyi Luo is a distinguished researcher and migrant rights advocate with a particular focus on the regulation, migration, and mobility. She holds a PhD in Law from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, where her research centered around regulatory policies, human rights, and corporate governance. Dr Luo's expertise encompasses the intricate intersection of legal frameworks, human rights, and corporate behavior, particularly within the context of migration and mobility. Dr Luo's work has garnered recognition, and she has an emerging track record of publication in top-tier journals. Her work stands at the forefront of academic research in the field, offering valuable insights into the complex interplay between regulation, human rights, and migration.

Shiyang Zhu is a PhD student in Media and Communication at RMIT University, Australia. Shiyang's research interest is centered on cultural and societal narratives in East Asia.

**Performative Commerce:
Mobile Traders and the Staging of BRI Potential
at the Sino-Mongolian Border**

Thomas White

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In recent years Mongolia has been transformed into an extractive frontier supplying China with coal to fuel its economy. The country is also an important part of the Belt and Road Initiative, and the establishment of the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor is envisaged as deepening the connectivity between these countries. However, despite the adoption of BRI rhetoric at the highest levels of the Mongolian government, anxieties about Chinese influence are deep-rooted and widespread in the country. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the summer of 2019 on the Chinese side of the Sino-Mongolian border, this paper explores the case of the proposed opening of a new border crossing between the two countries in the Gobi Desert, to facilitate the export of coal to China. In 2019, while the Chinese side was eagerly awaiting the new border crossing, and had completed various infrastructure projects related to it, the Mongolians were more wary. Developing the notion of 'performative commerce', I show how local officials on the Chinese side organized a small international trade fair at a remote border town, in order to convince a visiting delegation of Mongolian local officials from across the border of the potential cross-border economic opportunities. This involved inviting mobile 'suitcase traders' from Mongolia and other BRI countries (including Pakistan) to this remote location. I argue that mobile, small-scale, informal trading played an important role in the performance of BRI potential, staged by local officials engaged in diplomacy at a subnational scale.

Thomas White is Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in China and Sustainable Development at the Lau China Institute, King's College London. His research draws on perspectives from Social Anthropology, Geography and China Studies to examine interrelated social, economic and ecological transformations in China's borderlands, and the centrality of these 'peripheries' to projects of nation-building, state environmentalism, and transnational economic connectivity. His first monograph, *China's Camel Country: Livestock and Nation-Building at a Pastoral Frontier*, will be published in 2024. His articles have appeared in international journals such as *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, and *Eurasian Geography and Economics*.

New Emigrant, Socio-Economic Network and Transnational Governance: A Case Study of a Post-2000's *Qiaoxiang-Shaodong* County in China

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Since the 21st century, with the deepening of China's open-door policy and going-out strategy, several new *qiaoxiangs* (Chinese diaspora hometowns), have emerged. The launch of the *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) in 2013 has further strengthened Chinese transnational mobility and emigrants' interactions with their place of origin. Drawing upon a case study of *Shaodong*, a county of Hunan province in China, and from a socio-economic perspective, this study illustrates the dynamic formation of a post-2000 *qiaoxiang* and how the transnational emigrants, as non-state actors, are involved in local governance. The following questions will be examined: Compared with traditional *qiaoxiang*, what similarities and differences does *Shaodong* have as a new type of emergent *qiaoxiang*? What are the dynamics of the transnational emigrants' participation in *qiaoxiang* governance? What interactions are structurally constructed between transnational emigrants and local governments? How does this study, from a *qiaoxiang*-centric perspective, contribute to transnational governance theory? This study applies transnational network governance as a theoretical approach and argues that transnational emigrants' involvement in *qiaoxiang* governance relies not only upon their primordial ties of locality, kinship, and ethnicity, but are also dynamically shaped by the political, economic and social networks that the local governments establish with the transnational emigrants. Moreover, this study proposes a new concept of governance competition to highlight the phenomenon of different levels of local governments in *qiaoxiang* competing for transmigrant economic resources to improve their governance performance.

Na Ren is an Associate Professor in the School of International Studies/Academy of Overseas Chinese Studies at Jinan University where she first took her post-doctoral position in 2013 and has been a faculty member since 2015. She completed her PhD at the National University of Singapore. Her research interests lie in the area of overseas Chinese studies, including Southeast Asian Chinese society, transnational Chinese migrants and the globalization of China, and overseas Chinese entrepreneur studies.

Time and Precarity in “South-South” Academic Mobility: A 2019-2023 Longitudinal Study of Pakistani PhD Students in China

Mengwei Tu

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Pakistan became China’s top degree student sending country in 2018. One third of Pakistani students in China study for a PhD, and the majority are funded with a full scholarship by the Chinese government. This paper focuses on these Pakistani doctorate students’ academic mobility to China and their migration trajectories beyond graduation. Through a longitudinal qualitative approach to capture the perception of precarity and how it is shaped by temporal regulations in the Global South’s social infrastructure, this paper highlights the temporal angle in understanding the limitations and strategies involved in “South-South” academic mobility, in the context of China’s emergence as a destination for such mobility.

Pakistani doctoral students’ migration journey is deeply entangled with state-monitored migration infrastructure and dominated by institutional timeframes. Before and during arrival, the important timeframes include the timing of the scholarship application, the length of the funding period, and the visa expiry date in accordance with term times. Such institutional timeframe restrictions were heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Upon graduation, the participants in this study – 10 recent PhD graduates from Pakistan - find themselves in a semi-peripheral position vis-à-vis the international western-centred academic hierarchy. In their attempt to pursue further academic mobility, participants are increasingly being directed to temporary academic jobs, thus facing a future trajectory of staggered migration. In addition, the relatively advanced life stage of the interviewed PhD graduates in this study – many were married, had children, and had worked in Pakistani academia before beginning a doctorate in China - complicates the consideration of time and timing in their migration decision making.

Mengwei Tu is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Swansea University, UK. Her research focuses on international migration, specifically on two streams: first, she looks at international student cohorts both from China and to China and investigates their post-study career and migration trajectories; second, she explores the familial side of highly skilled migration by conducting qualitative longitudinal research on transnational families between China and the UK. Mengwei is the author of book "*Education, migration, and family relations between China and the UK*" (Emerald, 2018, 2020). She also leads a funded project "Students/graduates from Belt-Road countries in China: migration networks and career trajectory" (2018-2023)

Springboard to the West: Studying in China for International Students from Countries along the Belt and Road

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The geography of international higher education has changed greatly in recent decades, with a growing number of students choosing China as their destination, facilitated by the Chinese government's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The students from the BRI countries make a major contribution to the expansion of international students in China. This paper investigates the decision-making for inbound international students from BRI countries in choosing China as their study destination. This paper adopts the theoretical framework of multinational migration to study the reasons why students choose to study in China, their study abroad experiences, and their post-graduation trajectories. Through the use of the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews with 32 students of various disciplines from 15 BRI countries, this paper finds that educational degrees in China act as a springboard for mobility to Western countries. This paper discovers the facilitating factors for students to choose China, how their studies in China prepare them for springing, and their reasons for leaving China, both for active and reluctant springing.

Yingjing Du is a PhD student at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan. She graduated with the Dean's List Award in MA International Relations at Waseda University. Her research concerns the inbound international student mobility to China under the Belt and Road Initiative and is granted the MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology) Scholarship. She also has an interest in the comparison of international student mobility in Japan and Germany. She has worked as a research assistant and teaching assistant at Waseda University on international migration and mobility research. She uses a qualitative research method to conduct in-depth interviews with international students studying in various countries. She looked at the role played by public diplomacy in international student migration and how international relations shape personal migration decision-making mechanisms.

Navigating the Belt and Road, and Beyond: Education-Migration and Aspirational Pathways among Internationally Mobile Chinese Young People in Southeast Asia

Brenda S.A. Yeoh

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The opening decades of the 21st century herald a significant moment in which global and regional education-migration processes are being altered through China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) amidst multiple globe-spanning crises from the COVID-19 pandemic, climate emergencies to the war in Ukraine. China's rising ambition to take the lead in economic globalisation and compete for a central place in the world via the BRI needs to be set against a looming nationalism in the West that is weakening educational cooperation and free movement of students, academics, and knowledge. In this context, the BRI provides a vehicle to advance and strengthen knowledge mobility circuits at different levels between Chinese educational institutions and their Southeast Asian counterparts. In this paper, we focus on the BRI-inspired knowledge mobility circuits-and its impact on the educational and career aspirations of internationally mobile Chinese students enrolled in tertiary programmes in Thailand and Singapore. Drawing on biographical interviews with 49 Chinese international students, we examine two interrelated themes: (a) how internationally mobile Chinese students perceive the BRI and China's place in the world in the context of longstanding China-Southeast Asia relations; and (b) how transregional education positions them for a hyper-uncertain future and contours their aspirational mobility pathways. By shifting the focus from traditional East-West student mobilities to focus on emerging intra-Asian dynamics, we go beyond conceiving of international students as strategic accumulators of cultural capital competing for class mobility (Waters, 2008) to positioning them as aspirational subjects seeking to reconcile personal motivations with geopolitical realities in pursuing diverse, yet constrained, pathways towards the future.

Brenda S.A. Yeoh, FBA is Raffles Professor of Social Sciences, National University of Singapore (NUS) and Research Leader, Asian Migration Cluster, at NUS' Asia Research Institute. She was awarded the Vautrin Lud Prize for outstanding achievements in Geography in 2021 for her contributions to migration and transnationalism studies. Her research interests in Asian migrations span themes including social reproduction and care migration; skilled migration and cosmopolitanism; and marriage migrants and cultural politics.

Cultural Hybridity as the Recipe of Stable Romance A Qualitative Study of Transnational Marriages between Chinese and Foreigners

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In this article, we explore the role of transnational marriages in the activities and strategies of international students in China through the lens of cultural hybridity in marriage. We attempted to answer why some transnational marriages are not durable, and some are stable. We argue that a highly educated background and long-term pre-marriage relationship in spousal relations facilitated the durability and stability of such unions and the effectiveness of their role in day-to-day life. These unique features are shaped by intertwined factors, including especially the embedded relationship between cultural understanding, flexibility, compromise, and mutual respect. Transitional spousal relations driven by these factors create trust in both marriages and societal perception; they also shape shifting orientations toward future life. Therefore, we argue that the transnational marriages and family strategies envisioned and practiced by these couples reflect both the cultural adaptation and their active quest for upward mobility in the host society.

Rameez Raja (PhD, Sun Yat-Sen University) is a Postdoctoral fellow at Xiamen University. He is a highly motivated individual who recently completed his doctoral studies in Sociology. With a strong academic background and a passion for research, Raja has acquired expertise in Migration studies. Throughout his doctoral journey, Raja's work focused on International Student Mobility and Chinese Immigrants in Africa. As a fresh Ph.D. degree holder, Raja brings a deep understanding of Migration studies and a commitment to advancing knowledge and making a meaningful contribution to his field. He has published articles in journals such as *International Migration*, *Humanities & Social Science Communication*, *International Migration Review*, *Asian Journal of Social Science*, and *Frontiers in Psychology*.

Miaoyan Yang (PhD, the University of Hong Kong) is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at Xiamen University. Her research interests include sociology of education, sociology of immigration and ethnicity, and youth studies. As a bilingual writer, she has published articles in both leading Chinese and English journals such as *Higher Education*, *Harvard Educational Review*, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, and *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. Her Monograph "Learning to be Tibetan: The Construction of ethnic identity at the Minzu University of China" has been highly rated by academic peers. She is a Harvard-Yenching Visiting Scholarship recipient for the 2018-2019 academic year.

Chinese Distant-Water Fishers in Guinea-Bissau: (Im)Mobilities and Masculinities

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China's distant water fishing (DWF) activities has attracted growing attention from both academia and the wider policy world. The overwhelming majority of the existing literature has been mainly devoted to exploring their scale and ecological implications for coastal countries and communities. This primary focus (a commendable one given their often-damaging ecological consequences), however, renders a simplified good versus evil dualist framing pervade the current analysis of Chinese DWF. It risks compromising our ability to understand the complex and multi-layered actors, flows, and relations that are involved in and enabling the actual expansion of Chinese DWF and its embedding into coastal host contexts.

This paper proposes focusing on the human dimension of China's DWF, that is, the Chinese distant-water fishers without whose labour the capitalist expansion of China's DWF across the globe would not be possible. More specifically, by zeroing on Guinea-Bissau – one of the very first countries that host Chinese DWF fleets since 1985, and a Chinese central state-owned DWF enterprise operating therein, I make an empirically grounded attempt to explore the biography of Chinese distant-water fishers, including company managers based on land and fishing crew members working in the sea. Drawing on 4-month fieldwork in Guinea Bissau between April 2022 and January 2023, this paper seeks to explore who these Chinese distant-water fishers are, how and why they are recruited to migrate abroad and work in this sector, how they experience socially and professionally their work, and how they imagine their future. As the entire body of Chinese employees in the studied enterprise are men, particular attention would also be given to exploring the fluidity and contextuality of fishing masculinities, particularly at a time of structural changes, including the depletion of fishing stocks and fierce competition from other private Chinese DWF companies.

Hang (Ayo) Zhou is a post-doctoral researcher in the Transoceanic Fishers: Multiple mobilities in and out of the South China Sea research project funded by the European Research Council. He obtained his PhD in politics and international studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. His PhD thesis was shortlisted for the 2022 Audrey Richards Best Doctoral Thesis Prize of the UK African Studies Association. His works have appeared in *African Affairs*, *Marine Policy*, *Revue internationale des études du développement*, and *Africana Studia*. His main research interests include Global China, South-South Cooperation, state-building and peacekeeping in Africa, infrastructure, and maritime anthropology.

Transregional Mobility and Cross-Border Dispute Resolution for Chinese Workers Returning from Africa

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The rapid outflow of Chinese capital has led to increased transregional mobility of Chinese workers. In Africa, Chinese companies often hire a significant number of Chinese workers for their overseas contracts and investment projects. The interaction between Chinese workers and local Africans has been the subject of scrutiny, particularly regarding the tensions, conflicts, and disputes that arise in communities and workplaces. However, there has been insufficient attention given to the relationships between Chinese workers and their Chinese employers, even though working in Africa often involves unique forms of labor management and dispute resolution processes. It is crucial to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of migrant workers in Africa, especially considering that many of them are employed in the construction and manufacturing sectors, which are known for having challenging labor relations in China.

The paper explores how Chinese investment in Africa (re)produces a domestic space of simultaneous opportunities and exclusion for migrant workers and the ramifications for workers' claims of fair treatment, enumeration, and benefits in Chinese courts. It employs a critical document study based on over 200 court cases that workers brought to domestic courts in China pertaining labor disputes happened in top five Chinese labor-receiving countries in Africa – Algeria, Angola, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Equatorial Guinea. Analysis draws a typology of workers' claims, identifies key debates between workers and employers, and discusses judicial considerations to reach judgements. The findings of the paper reveal ways that working in Africa creates new pathways for labor migration that are closely intertwined with the global ventures of Chinese companies. The distinctive labor recruitment/management regime in the "China-Africa" context gives rise to unique dynamics of citizenship, legality, and (im)mobility; and in and through such space, employers' selective manipulation and courts' uneven interpretation of these elements become apparent.

Ding Fei is an assistant professor in the Department of City and Regional Planning at Cornell University. As a development and economic geographer, Fei has areas of expertise in the political economy of international development, global production networks, infrastructure-led industrialization, capital-labour relations, South-South migration, and China-Africa relations. Cutting across the fields of critical development studies, economic geography, and labor studies, her empirical research combines a political economy approach to examine the norms, values, and developmental impacts of Chinese investment in Africa with an ethnographic lens into the everyday encounters among states, firms, and workers. Fei received her PhD from the Department of Geography, Environment and Society, with a doctoral minor in Geographical Information Sciences at the University of Minnesota. She was an early career fellow in China Studies at the American Council of Learned Societies in the 2020-2021 period.

BRI Project Workers in the Western Balkans: Politics and Public Perception

Jelena Gledić

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This paper aims to map out emergent trends of local national politics influencing Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project workers in the Western Balkans. Building on the author's previous work on Chinese migrant workers and the perception of the Chinese in the Western Balkan region, this research further analyses the population of workers on BRI projects and how narratives about them are connected with local and regional political interests. Most states in this historically turbulent region are developing economies with governments that strive for good relations with rival global powers but have autocratic traits in internal affairs. Additionally, they all seem to aim to secure the role of China's key regional partner because BRI projects are used in media as tools for gaining political points. Conversely, through an analysis of predominantly local media but also public opinion surveys, this study shows how BRI project workers are instrumentalized to portray political parties and politicians in power in a positive or negative light. Existing negative stereotypes about Chinese and other Asian people become devices used for political interests unrelated to them and essentially unrelated to China and the BRI. Oscillations between positive and negative discourses on mostly Chinese workers in Western Balkan BRI projects are also shown to be connected with local national election cycles, political leaning of media etc. The study discusses the situation in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and North Macedonia, focusing mainly on Serbia as the state with the largest number of BRI projects and, consequently, Chinese workers. This paper provides lessons for understanding the importance of local national factors for migrants' work and living conditions, as well as the interplay of perceptions of the BRI and the migration and mobility it affects.

Jelena Gledić is a Senior Instructor at the University of Belgrade, where she teaches a range of Chinese language and culture courses at the Faculty of Philology. She also held a cross-appointment at Osaka University's Graduate School of Language and Culture as a Specially Appointed Associate Professor. Ms. Gledić holds an MA degree in Chinese Language, Literature and Culture from the University of Belgrade, and she is finalizing her PhD thesis in Cultural History at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts Graduate School. In her work, she has focused on applying inter- and cross-disciplinary methods to try and elucidate societal challenges that are likely rooted in the perception of difference and change. Her recent research has mainly been focused on the Chinese presence in the Western Balkans. She regularly presents her work at scientific conferences and publishes her research output in scholarly journals and monographs.

A Belt and Rights Initiative? Labor and the Complexities of BRI Migration Diplomacy

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In the wake of growing reports of abuse of Chinese migrant workers on the Belt Road initiative (BRI), this paper examines how labor migration aligns with the overarching BRI migration diplomacy. We suggest that despite the initiative's considerable emphasis on cross-border cooperation and people-to-people exchanges, overseas Chinese labor migration is not part of high-level BRI diplomatic interactions and BRI-style of migration diplomacy. We argue that the invisibility of labor migration in high-level diplomatic engagements contributes to the further evolution of a two-track migration labor system and, often, the de facto illegality of Chinese migrant workers overseas. At the same time, Beijing counters the combined effects of growing scrutiny and limited capacity to respond to this two-track system through a targeted "performative governance" mechanism: i.e. by allowing the circulation of migrant stories on social media. In its essence, this mechanism also becomes a tool for self-regulation, suggesting that would-be migrant workers have full awareness and can be held responsible for the choice of engaging in overseas labor.

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Forever Strangers in the Atomized Immigrant Community: The (Dis)Integration of International Middling Immigrants in China under the Belt and Road Initiative

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International migration studies typically focus on movements from the Global South to the North. However, this research shifts attention to an overlooked group—middling immigrants from the Global North relocating to China, an emerging economic power in the Global South. Set against the backdrop of China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), this study probes the nuanced migratory patterns and opportunities arising from this trillion-dollar venture. The BRI has catalyzed the influx of these middling immigrants, defined as skilled and educated individuals from middle socio-economic tiers in their origin countries, enticing them to China through infrastructural and policy developments conducive to foreign entrepreneurship and investment. This paper examines the factors influencing the integration—or lack thereof—of such immigrants within Chinese society. Through 22 in-depth interviews and comprehensive ethnography in China's urban hubs, we scrutinize the BRI's dual role as both a facilitator of opportunity and a creator of obstacles. Our findings illuminate a precarious migration support structure plagued by bureaucratic hurdles in visa procedures, policy opacity, challenges in securing permanent residency, and limited access to social services. Notably, these immigrants often find themselves ensconced in insular social enclaves, disconnected from local Chinese networks and increasingly estranged from their countries of origin. We introduce the term "atomized immigrant community" to encapsulate the disintegrated and peripheral existence of these middling immigrants, who are constrained by scant communal support and face disparate living conditions despite ostensibly favorable policies. This study challenges the prevailing narrative that migrants from the North to the South enjoy seamless integration due to their socio-economic standing and targeted policies in host developing nations. It underscores the overlooked marginalization within North-South migration and extends critical insights into the BRI's broader implications on migratory trends, cross-cultural interactions, and the exchange of knowledge.

Cheng Chow is a PhD student in the Department of Social Work and Social Administration at the University of Hong Kong. His research interests revolve around global North-South migration, immigrant political incorporation, and immigrant community development. His work has appeared in the journals *Social Sciences*, *Social Science and Medicine*, and other journals in the field of migration studies. Additionally, Cheng is actively involved in immigrant-serving organizations and is passionate about enhancing the lives of immigrants. He previously served as an intern at the International Organization for Migration (IOM), where he gained valuable experience and insight into the challenges and opportunities faced by immigrant communities.

A Tightening Belt, A Road to Escape: "Runology" and the BRI

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"Runxue", or the science of running away from the country, emerged as a buzzword in late- and post-Covid China (Zhang 2022). In the same way as countries like Serbia that maintain friendly relations with Russia paradoxically provide a place for Russians to run away from Putin's regime, so the "Belt and Road" (BRI) framework, a post-hoc label applied in China's state discourse to the globalisation of Chinese capital and institutions, can counterintuitively expand migration processes that are part of the discontents with China's development model. In this talk, I will situate lifestyle and student migration from China to Hungary, the first European state to sign on to the BRI, in the expanding geography of middle-class Chinese migration and suggest that the infrastructure as well as the imaginary of a global China framed as the BRI can catalyse migrations whose motivations are quite distant from the national project.

Pál Nyíri is Professor of Global History from an Anthropological Perspective at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam. His research focuses on the international mobility of China's middle class. His most recent books are *Reporting for China: How Chinese Correspondents Work with the World* and, edited with Danielle Tan, *Chinese Encounters in Southeast Asia: How People, Money, and Ideas from China are Changing a Region*.

**Inequality through the Lens of *danwei*:
The Anti-malaria Healthcare among Chinese SOE Migrants in Zambia**

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Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs henceforth) migrants are a unique phenomenon in the process of China-Africa economic engagement, but their health aspects were seldom addressed. This study examines how Chinese SOE migrants' anti-malarial health seeking experience are formed in the transnational social field of Chinese SOEs in current China-to-Africa context. The findings show that Chinese SOEs play a complex role in influencing the health of their Chinese employees. On one hand, Chinese SOEs in Zambia follow the traditional *danwei* model to provide basic medical security to Chinese employees; on the other hand, however, SOEs have actually implemented a dual health care policy to unequally distribute health care resources according to staff and workers' hierarchy. Workers, as the vulnerable groups, are not equally entitled to many convenience, services, and medical resources accorded to their staff peers due to their low socioeconomic status as temporary contract workers; consequently, they suffered from serious health losses. This article also discusses policy implication for the Chinese SOEs in Africa, which failed to deliver appropriate care to all their Chinese employees when China is seeking to become a more influential power in Africa. This article addresses the complex dynamics of emigration, employment, and rights to health in contemporary context of Chinese-Africa infrastructure development.

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(Im)Mobility Infrastructures: How a BRI Hydropower Project (Im)Mobilized People in Northern Laos

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Despite the growing research on how the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has mobilized financial capital to promote China's global economic and political interests, numerous scholars have been reticent about how Chinese infrastructure projects under such initiative engender forms of mobility and immobility on the ground. Drawing on ethnographic data from a BRI Hydropower Project's resettlement site in north-western Laos, this paper has bridged this gap by exploring how a BRI Project facilitates or hinders the geographical movements of its displaced people. Following Xiang's and Lindquist's (2014) 'migration infrastructure' and Schewel's (2020) '(im)mobility categories,' this paper has particularly analyzed various capabilities and aspirations of both movers and stayers in the resettlement community, as well as different infrastructures that engendered, mediated, or impinged upon their (im)mobilities, which I called '(Im)mobility Infrastructures.' Up to now, the migration infrastructure theory has been only applied to international migration or transnational cross-border mobilities. The '(im)mobility infrastructure' framework applies the migration infrastructure theory in a more permanent type of mobility: *development-induced internal displacement*. This paper has scrutinized complicated narratives of the resettled who aspired and were capable to move and work outside the new settlement during my fieldwork, such as the international cross-border, urban, and intra and/or inter- provincial migrant laborers, as well as the students pursuing higher education within Laos or abroad. It has also examined typologies of stayers in the resettlement community—e.g., voluntary stayers, acquiescent immobile actors, involuntary stayers, and reluctant stayers—and various infrastructures that influence their aspirations and capabilities to be immobile. To explore these 'immobility infrastructures'—set of interconnected technologies, actors, and institutions that improve one's desires and capacities to be immobile—reduces 'mobility bias' (Schewel 2020, 329). I argue that the identification of various 'immobility infrastructures' in the context of development-induced resettlement has practical implications. While it pinpoints sources of disillusionment of some villagers who left the new settlement, it also helps to identify some infrastructures that need to be changed or improved to increase the aspirations and capabilities of the displaced to stay in the resettlement community.

Floramante SJ Ponce is a lecturer at the Martin Luther University's (Halle, Germany) Institute of Anthropology and Philosophy. Ponce completed his PhD in Social Anthropology at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology (Germany). His research focuses on how Chinese BRI Projects in Laos engender experiences of modernity, market integration, and geographical, socioeconomic, and metaphorical (im)mobilities. He published some of his works in *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, and *Social Transformations: Journal of the Global South* (forthcoming).

The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway and The Production of Enclaved Mobility

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The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway is a key infrastructure project for Indonesia and a vital Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project for China. Thus far, research on the railway has focused on the geopolitics, elite politics, and state-led speculation underlying the project. Based on qualitative research that began in January 2023 and will continue until July 2024 in the Bandung Metropolitan Area (BMA) near the high-speed railway stations, this paper contributes to China studies, urban studies, and infrastructure studies with its concept of enclaved mobility. More precisely, how the railway's production of increased mobility for certain people and forms of capital and immobility for others has created enclave-like development without physical barriers. This paper examines how the changes, or lack thereof, to residents' economic and social lives is intertwined with the materiality of the infrastructure and transportation projects supporting the development of the BMA. This analysis connects this paper's finding to other research on regional infrastructure-led urbanization, especially in the global south, that is meant to make regional urbanization possible through improved infrastructural connectivity. However, as this paper shows, the increased mobility for some in the BMA created immobility and isolation for others through their inability to access these improved flows of people and capital. This paper as a case study of a renowned BRI project furthers understanding of the local impacts of Chinese overseas infrastructure projects and the connections that can be made between research on the BRI and Chinese overseas development with research beyond the BRI.

David Fernando Bachrach is a PhD Candidate in the University of Colorado Boulder's Department of Geography. His research interests are in Development Geography, Urban Geography, and infrastructure studies within the contexts of Indonesia and Global China. For his dissertation, he is studying the multi-scalar effects produced by the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway for the stakeholders in the project—Indonesian and Chinese governments, Kereta Cepat Indonesia China (KCIC), the consortium of state-owned enterprises undertaking the project, and local communities. Furthermore, he will be researching how the materialities that make up the integration of the Jakarta-Bandung Corridor are reshaping local communities' relations with the state and their economic livelihoods. He will continue his research in Indonesia, which he began in January 2023, until August 2024, with the support of a Fulbright Research Award.

Transborder State-Building: Digital Infrastructures of China's Diaspora Governance During the Pandemic

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Previous research on state-building focuses primarily on the domestic reach of state power, overlooking how states govern their citizens overseas and deliver civil services abroad. This article broadens the purview of political sociology by examining the emerging phenomenon of *transborder state-building*. Drawing upon fieldwork conducted in China during the COVID-19 pandemic, I discover that the Chinese government leveraged information and communication technologies (ICTs) as digital infrastructures to expand its governance to Chinese emigrants overseas. Through WeChat, a social media platform, hometown officials in China conducted digital censuses, established an overseas grid architecture, offered telehealth welfare, and adjudicated legal cases in online courts. However, China's efforts of transborder state-building were not absolute or always successful. I highlight emigrants' subtle online resistance, such as transmitting voice messages in an untranscribable dialect and flooding political communications with irrelevant messages. By rethinking state-citizen relations through the dual lenses of digital technology and global migration, this article unveils the evolving mechanisms of control and contestation despite the techno-authoritarian expansion of Global China.

Jiaqi Liu is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Singapore Management University and a Postdoctoral Associate at Princeton University. His research lies at the intersection of political sociology, international migration, law, human rights, and digital technologies. In an ongoing book project, "The Homeland's Long Arm: Diaspora Politics and the Limits of Global China," Liu examines the complex dynamics between Chinese diasporas and an increasingly ambitious homeland state in the context of China's global rise. His work has been recognized with five Best Article Awards or Honorable Mentions from the American Sociological Association sections on International Migration (twice), Political Sociology, Human Rights, and Political Economy of the World-System. Liu holds a PhD from the University of California San Diego, a JD from the University of Arizona, and a Master of International Affairs degree from Sciences Po Paris.

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