

China's Belt and Road Towards Globalization with Chinese Characteristics?

Monday, September 18th, 2017 | 9h30-17h30 | Paris, France

Ifri–OCP Policy Center Roundtables

Brief - Agenda - Biographies

Monday September 18, 2017 | 9:30-17:30 | Paris, France

Ifri, 27 rue de la Procession, 75015 Paris - France

Seminar by Invitation Only

Seminar Brief

In 2013, Chinese president Xi Jinping first unveiled his broad vision to develop regional connectivity and infrastructure across Eurasia that would later be officially named the Belt and Road Initiative (or yi dai yi lu, One Belt, One Road, or OBOR). The initiative has emerged as a central narrative of Xi's foreign policy, and China has already committed an estimated \$300 billion in financing for infrastructure projects such as roads, railways, ports, power plants and telecommunications hardware across Asia to the Middle East, Europe and Africa. Some estimate the figure could reach \$1 trillion over the next decade. Moving beyond physical infrastructure, China hopes to make OBOR a catalyst for developing the so-called "five connectivities" to include infrastructure, finance, commerce, people-to-people exchanges and policy coordination – in effect taking on a more normative role in shaping the regional economic and social order. By now opening the initiative up to all countries and regions of the world, China is seemingly looking to develop OBOR into a broad-ranging platform for coordinating regional development and, possibly, global governance.

China is clearly seeking to articulate a more proactive stance in regional and global affairs, even staking out a leadership role for itself in a context where Western leadership has been faltering. Offering the promise of long-term economic development and growth, China is uniquely placed to drive the regional economic agenda, or perhaps even a new wave of globalization with Chinese characteristics. But China will not go unchallenged in its efforts, as other regional players such as India, Japan and Russia seek to position themselves in a rapidly changing geopolitical environment. China's own internal challenges, to include a profound economic transformation and rapidly rising debt, help to shape the OBOR narrative, but also risk derailing the initiative.

This conference will explore many of the drivers, challenges and implications of OBOR, analyzing first the project in a Chinese context before delving into the regional implications for South and Southeast Asia, Russia and Central Asia, and Africa.

Agenda

09:30-09:45

WELCOME REMARKS

Thomas Gomart, Director, Ifri

Karim El Aynaoui, Managing Director, OCP Policy Center

09:45-11:30

CHINA'S NEW SILK ROADS – DRIVERS AND IMPLICATIONS

More than four years have already passed since China's Belt and Road was launched by President Xi Jinping. When he first mentioned the idea in an autumn 2013 speech in Kazakhstan, questions quickly emerged on the meaning of this general concept, which soon became widely promoted through a large-scale and well-coordinated public diplomacy strategy both in and outside China. But is it just about communication? What drives China, and how is it promoting and implementing OBOR in concrete terms, from a broad economic perspective and in the energy sector in particular?

SPEAKERS

SHI Yan, Assistant Research Fellow, Department of European Studies, CIIS

Alice Ekman, Head of China Research, Center for Asian Studies, Ifri

Françoise Nicolas, Director, Center for Asian Studies, Ifri

John Seaman, Research Fellow, Center for Asian Studies, Ifri

11:30-11:45

Coffee Break

11:45-12:45

PANEL I: EXPLAINING INDIA'S PERCEPTION OF THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

In May 2017, China hosted the high profile Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. While representatives from about 160 states reportedly attended the forum, one country was conspicuously absent: India. Various factors account for India's opposition to BRI. China stated that its "doors will always remain open". But it remains to be seen whether New Delhi may be amenable to changing its position, especially as its priority so far has been to push its own connectivity initiatives in the Indian Ocean Region.

CHAIR

Françoise Nicolas, Director, Center for Asian Studies, Ifri

SPEAKERS

Isabelle Saint-Mézard, Associate Research Fellow, Center for Asian Studies, Ifri

Ritika Passi, Associate Fellow and Project Editor and, ORF

12:45-14:00

Lunch Break

14:00 -15:00

PANEL II: REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS: SOUTH EAST ASIA

Southeast Asia is a primary focus of China's maritime Silk Road. The region is in dire need of infrastructure funding and some countries also welcome Chinese investment as a way of rekindling economic growth. However, the risk of an overreliance on China cannot be excluded, leading some countries to meet China's initiative with suspicion. This ambivalent stance may also be the source of internal tensions within ASEAN.

CHAIR

Françoise Nicolas, Director, Center for Asian Studies, Ifri

SPEAKERS

Sophie Boisseau du Rocher, Associate Research Fellow, Center for Asian Studies, Ifri

WANG Xin, Researcher in Chinese Policies, IDDRI, Sciences Po

15:00-15:10

Coffee Break

15:10-16:10

PANEL III: CHINA'S NEW SILK ROADS: RUSSIA'S INTERESTS AND MOTIVATIONS

After first reactions of mistrust, Russia seems to perceive China's Silk Road initiative as an economic and geopolitical opportunity. In the context of confrontation with the West, the latter dimension has gained particular importance. After launching the idea of the coordination between OBOR and the Eurasian Economic Union in May 2015, Russia is now promoting the concept of "Greater Eurasia". What kind of real benefits is Russia expecting from these new Eurasian projects?

CHAIR

Thomas Gomart, Director, Ifri

SPEAKERS

Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean, Director, Russia/NIS Center, Ifri

Olivier de Boysson, Head of Emerging Countries Research, Société Générale

16:10-16:20

Coffee Break

16:20-17:20

PANEL IV: IS THE OBOR INITIATIVE SPREADING ACROSS AFRICA?

Africa appears of secondary importance for China's OBOR project, but it is nevertheless causing a stir across the continent. An increasing number of official declarations across Africa highlight the project's attractiveness, but also the risks of dependence and regional competition to join the OBOR wave have already begun. What do these reactions reveal about African and Chinese ambitions and expectations?

CHAIR

Karim El Aynaoui, Managing Director, OCP Policy Center

SPEAKERS

Clélie Nallet, Research Fellow, Sub-Saharan Africa Program, Ifri

El Mostapha Rezzazi, Board member, China-Morocco OBOR Research Group, President, Moroccan Association for Asian Studies

Fathallah Oualalou, Senior Fellow, OCP Policy Center