Article:
Apostolopoulou, E., Cheng, H., Silver, J. et al. (2024) Cities on the new silk road: the global urban geographies of China's belt and road initiative. Urban Geography, 45 (6). pp. 1095-1114. ISSN: 0272-3638

https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2023.2247283

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Urban Geography on 06 September 2023, available online: http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/02723638.2023.2247283.

Cities on the New Silk Road: The global urban geographies of China's Belt and Road Initiative (AUTHOR ACCEPTED VERSION)

Elia Apostolopoulou, Han Cheng, Jonathan Silver & Alan Wiig

To cite this article: Elia Apostolopoulou, Han Cheng, Jonathan Silver & Alan Wiig (2024) Cities on the new silk road: the global urban geographies of China's belt and road initiative, Urban Geography, 45:6, 1095-1114, DOI: 10.1080/02723638.2023.2247283

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2023.2247283

Abstract

Over the last decade, scholarship on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also called the New Silk Road, has burgeoned. However, it is only recently that analysis has interrogated the BRI as a driver of global urban transformation. In this paper, we advance an in-depth review of literature generated since 2013 that has critically examined relations between the BRI and urban-scale processes. Based on a categorization of studies into three areas, staging of the urban BRI, the building of BRI cities and living in BRI cities, we suggest that, a decade since the New Silk Road was launched, the role of the urban is integral to the scope and impacts of the initiative. As the BRI goes into its second decade, we argue that BRI's infrastructural spaces can be seen as new landscapes where novel kinds of urbanisation are emerging, influencing patterns of social, spatial, and environmental contestation and demanding new narratives of urban and social change to make sense of 21st century cityscapes and urban futures worldwide.

Keywords: Urban geography, Belt and Road Initiative, New Silk Road, Infrastructure-led development, China

Introduction: the BRI as a force of global urban transformation Over the last decade, scholarship on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has burgeoned (Cheng & Apostolopoulou, 2023). Studies have developed many entry points and disciplinary perspectives focusing on the role the BRI plays in infrastructure-led development, geopolitical diplomacy and geoeconomic restructuring, its impact on the uneven geographies of globalization and global production networks, new financial (ised) geographies and actors, sustainability

and energy agendas, debt implications and much more (Flint & Zhu, 2019; Liu et al., 2018; Schindler et al., 2022). However, it is only relatively recently that analysis has interrogated the BRI as a driver of global urban transformation, and concurrently the importance of centering the urban in analysis of broader debates concerned with the New Silk Road (Apostolopoulou, 2021a; Bunnell, 2022; Shinn et al., 2022). Studies focused on cities and urbanization provide a way to interrogate the material change being promised and enacted by this "world-changing" "project of the century" (Hillman, 2020).

In this paper, we advance a critical review of literature generated over the last decade that has documented and interrogated relations between the BRI, specific cities, and urban-scale processes more generally to consolidate existing scholarship and knowledge. Despite the recent increase in publications that address BRI's urban aspects, geographic perspectives on the urban BRI across different scales and territories have been relatively limited (see Apostolopoulou, 2021a, 2021b; Smith, 2022; Wiig & Silver, 2019; Williams et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2023), and comparative approaches focusing on cities are still in their infancy (for an exception see Ni et al., 2017). This lacuna has led researchers to talk about an "anti-urban" bias (Zheng et al., 2023) that prevents a more comprehensive understanding of BRI's scope and implications. While there will inevitably be literature that is left out and we do not claim that our review is exhaustive, we tried to draw and build out from papers that explicitly explore the BRI from the perspective of urban geography. We also draw on disparate studies in which the urban is not the focus but which help to consider the role of cities in the BRI. We do so to argue that understanding the BRI a decade into its implementation is now critical to studies of urbanization, the growth and restructuring of urban space and urban natures, and the reshaping of urban life. From Latin America to Africa, and Central Asia to Europe, over 140 memoranda of understanding have been signed between China and "partner" countries (Hillman, 2020). Through many of these national-level agreements, towns and cities are heavily integrated into the ways in which the BRI is targeted, planned, and implemented. Given the scope of projects proposed or underway we consider both the role of the urban to the BRI and the impact of the BRI on global urbanization patterns, urban geographies, and societal issues, such as urban inequality, poverty alleviation, and environmental injustice. We have previously argued that the BRI has become a global force of massive urban transformation since its inception by articulating BRI-driven transformation across urban space as "Silk Road urbanism" (Wiig & Silver, 2019) or "Silk Road urbanisation" (Apostolopoulou, 2021a), emphasizing the ways it transforms urban life and the urban experience, and highlighting how it intersects with patterns of growth and the restructuring of urban-regional space. Approaching the BRI through its urban geographies necessitates a range of approaches, with studies variously

examining the discursive as well as political-economic, material, and experiential aspects via empirical and conceptual foci. In this paper, we present a critical review of the academic literature and analysis of key policy documents that have emerged since 2013, as well as by drawing on our own engagements with fieldwork in several cities where BRI projects materialize. Incorporating these multiple intersections of the BRI and the urban is relevant for scholarship within urban geography, urban studies and urban political ecology because of the BRI's growing influence on urbanism and urbanization, and for broader global debates about the initiative given the critical role of cities and urban space in the actual investments, politics, experiences and possible futures. In what follows, we therefore assess how the BRI, as a vehicle of infrastructure-led development, shapes new global urban geographies at a scale and rapidity that has no precedent in recent history, influencing the uneven patterns of urbanization in an increasing number of cities worldwide. To address this aim, we have assembled and categorized scholarly research, policy reports and other outputs into a tripartite analytical framework. First, we consider the staging of the urban BRI, second, the building of BRI cities and third, living in cities that are being profoundly transformed by the BRI. This framing synthesizes studies on the urban dimensions of the BRI while also advancing this scholarship by identifying three specific ways in which it can help better understand how the New Silk Road is transforming cities. Our critical review is focused on firstly the socioeconomic, environmental, and infrastructural inequalities in and between cities, and secondly on addressing how these inequalities are created, replicated and/or reinforced by the BRI itself. These three categories, and the underlying focus on compounding inequalities, were chosen because of their capacity to synthesize the non-linear chronology of the BRI as infrastructure-led development with urban implications. BRI (mega)projects have moved from geopolitical and geoeconomic speculation, to planning and financing, and to construction that, if the circulatory ambition aligns, will foster novel trans-national economic connections. Alongside these capitalist flows are the cities that have had areas delineated as part of the BRI within, alongside, or between them and other cities, city-regions, or hinterlands, which we discuss within staging the BRI. Building BRI cities includes the alignment of particular cities and their economies with China's ambitions and expectations for/from the BRI. Living in BRI cities encapsulates the ways that these globalized, infrastructural and territorial pivots toward China impact particular places in uneven ways. The emphasis on identifying the inequities produced and/or exacerbated by the BRI stems from the urban theorisations we utilize in this paper, as discussed in the next paragraph, from which we argue that the capitalist economic potential of infrastructure-led development via the BRI must be tempered by recognizing who – and where – benefits from these investments, and who – and where – is left out. Our conceptualization of cities on the New Silk Road as a distinct

phenomenon is situated within and can offer a jumping off point across ongoing debates in urban geography and urban studies. These include four interrelated strands: comparative, postcolonial, planetary, and splintered urbanism. Relational comparison considers the overarching similarities and differences of cities worldwide (Hart, 2018; McFarlane & Robinson, 2012; Schmid et al., 2018). This is useful as the New Silk Road generates particular sets of relations, connections and flows between urban spaces which require analytical attention, alongside the need to think about how the BRI plays out in different ways across different places and spaces. Postcolonial urbanism articulates the uniqueness of and importance of "ordinary" cities in the "majority world" that while peripheral and provincial to much urban theory-making, are where the majority of the world's population lives (Robinson & Roy, 2016; Sheppard et al., 2013). Here, analysis may focus both on those cities "off-the-map" of urban theory and yet critical to emerging New Silk Road geographies and urban spatial transformations and the everyday urbanisms that spin out from the restructuring of urban space. Planetary urbanization recognizes how cities extend their economic reach into hinterlands that stretch across continents, creating capitalist "operational landscapes" that are intensifying urbanization trajectories in formerly non-urban regions (Brenner & Schmid, 2015). The approach is therefore well set up to analyze and connect the global ambitions of the BRI and the massive, stretched geographies of corridors and nodes that accompany New Silk Road investments often across international borders, into extractive hinterlands and along new resource frontiers. Lastly, splintered urbanism (Graham & Marvin, 2001) advocates for a grounded perspective on cities that emphasizes the role that infrastructural technologies play in connecting some areas and fragmenting others. Given much of the on-the-ground transformation that unfolds along the New Silk Road is infrastructure investment that prioritizes economic growth and logistical circulation over basic needs and social reproduction, attention to this splintering is critical to urban geography approaches. Conceptually, we loosely draw on all these traditions and debates to frame our review: considering the BRI as urban inherently requires relational comparison, especially given that the BRI's impact extends across the Global South and North and it is (in)directly driving extended urbanization worldwide. Of these four strands, splintering urbanism is most closely aligned to our purposes with its emphasis on how infrastructures both connect certain areas and uses of the urban and at the same time divide cities in order to facilitate capitalist circulations (Graham & Marvin, 2001). Applying each of these theories in detail is beyond the scope of this review (though certainly a worthwhile approach); given our overall focus on the BRI as urban nodes and infrastructural corridors (Apostolopoulou, 2021a, 2021b; Wiig & Silver, 2019), we adopt an analytical approach that emphasizes the material geographies of cities to comprehend the BRI's infrastructure-led development agenda. Staging the urban BRI There is literature that has examined both

discursive and political economic understandings in the staging of the urban BRI, especially in relation to the changing patterns of global capital accumulation. The Chinese government responded to the 2008 economic crisis with a state-funded economic stimulus package (Tooze, 2018) that supported largescale infrastructural development (Jiang, 2015) and led to the so-called post-2008 construction boom. The response also coincided with China's existing major regional development initiatives such as the Great Western Development since 1999, the Northeast Area Revitalization since 2003, and the Rise of Central China since 2006 (Liu & Liu, 2017). The construction boom soon resulted in major oversupplies and excess productive capacity in industrial sectors (Furlong, 2022). The gradual decline in demand, also linked to the financial crash in EU and the United States markets, eventually led to a contraction of China's exports. In light of these developments, the BRI has been theorized as a major "spatial fix" (Clarke, 2018; Harvey, 2016; Summers, 2016; Zhang, 2017) to capital's overaccumulation crisis due to its potential to revitalize economic growth by facilitating geographical expansion and spatial reorganization in which the urban figures heavily. The notion of urban-regional development features prominently in the first official Chinese government document on the BRI, published in 2015 and entitled Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the twenty-first Century Maritime Silk Road (Chinese Government, 2015). On land (the Silk Road Economic Belt), "core cities" are envisaged as the key nodes that underpin the construction of connectivity-oriented international economic corridors; at sea (the twenty-first Century Maritime Silk Road), major port cities are positioned as pivotal for "jointly building smooth, secure and efficient transport routes" (Chinese Government, 2015). Cities are therefore at the heart of the BRI's vision of transnational logistics, production and trade networks that are geared toward the "orderly and free flow of economic factors, highly efficient allocation of resources and deep integration of markets" (Chinese Government, 2015). In this vein, the BRI's physical and virtual communications and infrastructural linkages are made possible by and through specific urban hubs, whether inland or coastal, and integrated into these cities' urbanization and industrialization processes, especially in the form of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), logistics complexes, and industrial clusters. By facilitating nodal, infrastructural connectivity especially – but not only – among erstwhile peripheral cities, the BRI engenders new urban frontiers, boundaries and enclosures (Mayer & Zhang, 2021). BRI cities constitute a key component of the emergent regime of infrastructure-led development and associated territorial reconfiguration, designated for "extracting resources, producing commodities, and moving goods to manufacturing facilities and finally to market" (Schindler & Kanai, 2021, p. 1). Following the Vision and Actions document, a burgeoning body of applied academic and policy literature in Chinese has emerged to develop the urban BRI agenda. While much of it is focused on domestic China, two themes

are of particular interest to our discussion here. The first is the increasingly extensive mapping of BRI cities outside of China and their urbanization "levels" based on broad assessment of various indicators, such as population growth and mobility, land use and poverty (Chen et al., 2019; Gao & Alimujiang, 2017; Hai et al., 2020; Li et al., 2017). These studies mostly adopt empirically-driven, quantitative and geospatial approaches, such as geographic information systems (GIS) and remote sensing, to attempt to capture the Earthly realities of BRI cities, and explicate their spatial flows, patterns and relations from above and afar (Bennet, 2020). The visual power of maps and satellite imagery is productive for representing the BRI as necessarily an urban project. The utilization of night-time light data in the aforementioned Chinese studies as a proxy for socioeconomic dynamics, for instance, highlights both literally and figuratively the centrality of urban hubs and their nodal connectivity for understanding the global impact of the BRI. The second theme concerns BRI cities and urban linkages as territorial arrangements for the strategic coupling of economic activities through Sino-centric global production networks (China Center for Urban Development, 2020; Li, 2021; Su & Yang, 2017). The main focus of these studies is to measure the network connection of BRI cities (e.g. spatial form and density) and identify nodal cities, aided by network analysis and modeling. From this perspective, BRI cities with their sociospatial restructuring provide placespecific settings wherein different "spatial fixes" territorialize the processes of global capitalism, and Chinese firms are enabled by state and sub-state goals and actions to engage in strategic coupling (Glassman, 2011). BRI cities are constructed as a connected geographic arena for the materialization and maintenance of global production networks which in turn generate new urban geographies (Flint & Zhu, 2019). The BRI can be read as the latest round of internationalization and re-territorialization of the capitalist Chinese state, wherein city leaders coordinate public-private investment partnerships that mobilize public resources and state power to facilitate transnational (urban) growth coalitions (Gonzalez-Vicente, 2019). Given the focus of this literature and associated policy documents, we find it useful to characterize two types of BRI-led urban restructuring in how studies have understood the New Silk Road. Firstly, in direct relation to the Sino-centric global production networks described above, are cities in which investments in the built environment and infrastructure are directly, territorially connected and integrated into China's economy and its cities through the BRI's six international economic corridors and various off-shoots. For instance the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor connects the Chinese city infrastructural linkages are made possible by and through specific urban hubs, whether inland or coastal, and integrated into these cities' urbanization and industrialization processes, especially in the form of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), logistics complexes, and industrial clusters. By facilitating nodal, infrastructural connectivity especially – but not only – among

erstwhile peripheral cities, the BRI engenders new urban frontiers, boundaries and enclosures (Mayer & Zhang, 2021). BRI cities constitute a key component of the emergent regime of infrastructure-led development and associated territorial reconfiguration, designated for "extracting resources, producing commodities, and moving goods to manufacturing facilities and finally to market" (Schindler & Kanai, 2021, p. 1). Following the Vision and Actions document, a burgeoning body of applied academic and policy literature in Chinese has emerged to develop the urban BRI agenda. While much of it is focused on domestic China, two themes are of particular interest to our discussion here. The first is the increasingly extensive mapping of BRI cities outside of China and their urbanization "levels" based on broad assessment of various indicators, such as population growth and mobility, land use and poverty (Chen et al., 2019; Gao & Alimujiang, 2017; Hai et al., 2020; Li et al., 2017). These studies mostly adopt empirically-driven, quantitative and geospatial approaches, such as geographic information systems (GIS) and remote sensing, to attempt to capture the Earthly realities of BRI cities, and explicate their spatial flows, patterns and relations from above and afar (Bennet, 2020). The visual power of maps and satellite imagery is productive for representing the BRI as necessarily an urban project. The utilization of night-time light data in the aforementioned Chinese studies as a proxy for socioeconomic dynamics, for instance, highlights both literally and figuratively the centrality of urban hubs and their nodal connectivity for understanding the global impact of the BRI. The second theme concerns BRI cities and urban linkages as territorial arrangements for the strategic coupling of economic activities through Sino-centric global production networks (China Center for Urban Development, 2020; Li, 2021; Su & Yang, 2017). The main focus of these studies is to measure the network connection of BRI cities (e.g. spatial form and density) and identify nodal cities, aided by network analysis and modeling. From this perspective, BRI cities with their sociospatial restructuring provide placespecific settings wherein different "spatial fixes" territorialize the processes of global capitalism, and Chinese firms are enabled by state and sub-state goals and actions to engage in strategic coupling (Glassman, 2011). BRI cities are constructed as a connected geographic arena for the materialization and maintenance of global production networks which in turn generate new urban geographies (Flint & Zhu, 2019). The BRI can be read as the latest round of internationalization and re-territorialization of the capitalist Chinese state, wherein city leaders coordinate public-private investment partnerships that mobilize public resources and state power to facilitate transnational (urban) growth coalitions (Gonzalez-Vicente, 2019). Given the focus of this literature and associated policy documents, we find it useful to characterize two types of BRI-led urban restructuring in how studies have understood the New Silk Road. Firstly, in direct relation to the Sino-centric global production networks described above, are cities in which investments in the

built environment and infrastructure are directly, territorially connected and integrated into China's economy and its cities through the BRI's six international economic corridors and various off-shoots. For instance the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor connects the Chinese city an entirely new set of economic and spatial strategies. The LAPSSET project, for example, restructured the port city of Lamu and some of Kenya's "secondary" cities, such as Isiolo (Bremner, 2013; Elliott, 2020). However, as studies have demonstrated, much of the spatial planning for LAPSSET has previously been bound up in the Kenyan Vision 2030 plan (Aalders et al., 2021). This does not mean that the BRI is having a minor impact on national and urban scale politics, power dynamics and associated geopolitical relations. It rather emphasizes the need to understand the interplay of previously existing national/urban plans and policies and diverse national, local, private and state interests with Chinese-led interests, BRI projects and MOUs. This also suggests that a close reading of longer histories of these plans, going back to the colonial era in the case of Kenya, can help analyze the ever-shifting and evolving urban geographies and unequal power relations of projects such as LAPSSET (Kimari & Ernstson, 2020). In this case, the BRI is best understood as a contextual and contingent cross-scale more-thanurban geography, the simultaneous product of changing geopolitical logics, global capital accumulation patterns, and complex dialectical interrelationships between people, places, socionatures, ideas, practices, and processes that in their assemblage produce BRI's multiple social spaces (Cheng & Apostolopoulou, 2023). Building BRI cities In addition to the above-mentioned scholarship on staging the BRI, there are studies that advance a grounded understanding of the BRI at an urban scale. This literature has focused on material transformations and the ways in which urban built environments are reconfigured. Here we again highlight the evolution of BRI cities within China and beyond its borders (Chen, 2018). For instance, Smith (2022, p. 2) argues that the "urban origins" of the BRI can be traced to "nationally-endorsed policy experiments" in Chongqing as this landlocked region attempted to become a "global city" through building economic connections via transnational infrastructure across Eurasia. BRIinduced urban transformation within China (Zhang & He, 2021) shaped export models of urban planning that were adopted by "partner" countries. This BRI-exporting connects into the rising global hegemony of infrastructure-led planning and development in the deployment of the BRI across, within and between cities (Hildyard & Sol, 2017; Schindler & Kanai, 2021) and has been crucial to the intensification of various urban spatial forms such as ports and special economic zones. With this section, we emphasize how building BRI cities constitutes the replication and evolution of Chinese models of economic and infrastructural planning as well as financial imperatives aligned to goals and priorities set by Chinese actors, rather than the more established development actors like the EU, the UK, or the US. Ports act as "nodes of trade" and "global

conduits" (Khalili, 2021, p. 5) and have played a critical role in the New Silk Road (Liu et al., 2020). China has already signed at least 38 bilateral and regional shipping agreements with 47 Belt and Road countries (National Development and Reform Commission of the PRC [NRDC], 2019). Chinese investments into new and expanded ports extend from Kuantan, Malaysia (Yean, 2019), and Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, to Khalifa Port in the United Arab Emirates, Chancay in Peru and Piraeus in Greece (Apostolopoulou, 2021b). The involvement of Chinese companies, such as COSCO, in these ports has proceeded in four ways: acquisition joint venture, concession and build-operate-transfer (Huo et al., 2019), predicated on integration into new ocean spanning logistical geographies, primarily via the Maritime Silk Road. For instance the emergence of Djibouti as a key node in these oceanic geographies (Styan, 2020) reshaped urban geographies through acceding to the needs of global shipping and logistics (e.g. the Port of Djibouti, Doraleh Multipurpose Port, Dolareh Container Terminal and the Djibouti International Free Trade Zone). The initial maritime-focused restructuring of these urban spaces is also understood as a critical component in the development of cross-border infrastructure corridors that connect port cities to their hinterlands (e.g. into the Chinese-financed and constructed, US$3.4 billion Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway line [Demissie, 2018]). A second key spatial form integrated across urban space through the BRI are special economic zones (typically abbreviated SEZs) (Goodburn & Knoerich, 2022; Halsall et al., 2022) which act as spaces often outside of tax jurisdictions and with extraterritorial legal protections for logistics, manufacturing and storage uses (Slobodian, 2023). These zones are located close to ports, usually on the edge of urban areas, and incorporate a range of built environment forms from industrial parks (e.g. Yean & Negara, 2020), such as the Indonesian-Morowali Industrial Park, or the Malaysia-China Industrial Park in Kuantan, to office complexes and coal power plants. The importance of SEZs is evident in a recent publication by China's Leading Group for Promoting the BRI that emphasizes the key role of new business and industrial models for the initiative, where the strategic link between ports and SEZs is evident in a number of cases, such as in Pakistan's Gwadar Port and Gwadar Free Trade Zone, Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port Special Economic Zone, and the Port of Piraeus in Greece (NDRC, 2019). An emblematic example of the above is the SEZ in Sihanoukville (SSEZ), Cambodia. Sihanoukville is the first SEZ based on the principles of the Shenzhen Model, and led to the establishment of various foreign businesses, from factories to casinos, that took advantage of the city's maritime location, ease-of-business adjustments, and cheap production and labor costs. Shenzhen's transition into an urban center of accumulation is a feature that Cambodia attempted to replicate in Sihanoukville (Apostolopoulou, 2021b) with the Sihanoukville SEZ considered as a flagship BRI project even though it originated in 2006 (Ferchen, 2021; Loughlin & Grimsditch, 2021). Sihanoukville

SEZ is strategically linked to existing and new energy systems (e.g. dams, power plants) and transport networks, such as National Road 4, Sihanoukville Airport and Cambodia's only deepwater port (IDI, 2021; Loughlin & Grimsditch, 2021), and the planned automobile expressway from Phnom Penh to Sihanoukville. Other urban planning models and spatial forms have been constructed and financed through the BRI, even if these remain under-explored in the literature. These include the creation of artificial islands and urban green spaces, ocean reclamation projects, gated urban communities, consumerism-driven, gentrifying enclaves, coal – and industrialization-centric urbanization processes and grandiose, futuristic urban projects expressed through neologisms, such as an "aerotropolis" in the case of Zhengzhou (Apostolopoulou, 2021a). Another example is the case of Forest City in Malaysia, which is emblematic of the way BRI-driven urban transformation affects an entire urban landscape, raising major issues of social and environmental justice. Here, a joint Chinese-Malaysian venture is building a luxury "green" and "smart" futuristic city comprising four man-made islands and many of the urban spatial forms we mention above. As Koh et al. (2022) have shown, the project is being advertised as being in line with the "ecological civilization" agenda of the Chinese government. Nonetheless, its green and smart aspects have been primarily used for marketing and branding purposes along the lines of speculative city-making. Although much of the development is complete, Forest City remains largely vacant, a proverbial ghost town on the New Silk Road (Descalsota, 2022). The new city is not only based on an exclusive urban development model that targets the upper class, but has also caused the destruction of local habitats and the unsustainable consumption of environmental resources, directly threatening the livelihoods of vulnerable groups in the area. Similarly, in Colombo Port City in Sri Lanka, the construction of an artificial island based on an ocean reclamation project and extensive sand excavation has caused major impacts to Colombo's coastline, coral reefs and fish breeding areas, posing threats of erosion and flooding while directly affecting people's means of support, especially fishing communities (Apostolopoulou, 2021b). These emerging spatial forms show the phenomenal change to the urban landscape initiated by BRI projects. They also highlight the contested nature of BRI-driven, infrastructural and material restructuring of urban space on the contours of urban lives, places and socionatures as well as the patterns of urban inequality, as we discuss in more detail in the next section. This often reflects the BRI's grandiose spatial interventions within China which are now being exported across the globe as, for example, in the case of Lanzhou New Area in the west of China, where "mountains have been flattened and villages bulldozed" to build it, and an artificial lake has been created in arid soil (Phillips, 2017, no page) as part of China's regional development initiatives. On the other hand, these interventions also reproduce the aesthetics and models of neoliberal global urbanism and neoliberal environmentalism, green and un-green

gentrification and speculative, neocolonial urban imaginaries deepening social-environmental injustice. It is indicative that in the discourse surrounding Silk Road cities, it is typical to rename places according to the cities or neighborhoods they wish to resemble (i.e. Djibouti and Colombo as "new Dubais"; Piraeus as the "new London Docklands"), ignoring long-standing local histories, tensions and social needs while denying more inclusive imaginaries of urban futures. New technologies and information infrastructures are also integrated across all of these spatial forms being exported as urban planning models via the BRI. Digital urbanism and smart cities are a critical focus in urban studies and geography even as this scholarship has yet to fully address the massive transformations that will accompany the New Silk Road. Intersections of the urban and digital have primarily been configured through the Digital Silk Road (Shen, 2018) that includes the global expansion of Chinese technologies to reach either new markets in countries that are now experiencing technological development, or markets that have been dominated so far by local or Western firms. This ranges from 5G networks, cloud facilities and data centers, surveillance cameras, and e-commerce, to smart cities, satellite systems, fintech (financial technology) and edtech (education technology). For instance, in 2020, Huawei signed a US $172 million contract as part of the Konza Data Centre and Smart Cities project, the high tech new city outside Nairobi discussed in the previous section (Triolo et al., 2020). In 2019, Huawei agreed on an MOU with the Kuwaiti government as part of its US$100 billion Silk City and Boubyan Island mega projects (Chaziza, 2020). The geographic scope of the Digital Silk Road and the central role of Huawei in the urban BRI are further demonstrated by an agreement with the German city of Duisburg's local public utility to transform the area into the "Rhine Cloud" (Pascha, 2021), building on the operation of the China-EU transcontinental railway. These deals exemplify the ways that Chinese tech companies have followed the investment flows and diplomacy of the BRI and become part of the city-building process. Living in BRI cities Finally, a growing number of studies emphasize the need to move beyond seeing the BRI as primarily a static top-down, state-centric strategy originating in Beijing, and towards conceptualizing it as a flexible, relational process with uncertain outcomes subject to the spatial embeddedness of each project's local political and fiscal conditions (Alff, 2020; Han & Webber, 2020). Calls to explore the initiative "from the ground" (de LT Oliveira et al., 2020; Murton & Lord, 2020) emphasize the unequal and contingent geographies of BRI projects and the way local places, natures and communities are profoundly affected. This has included empirical reflections on land speculation and the uneven and gendered vulnerabilities marginalized social groups face (e.g. women, migrant laborers) living and working in BRI cities (Beazley & Lassoie, 2017; Murton & Lord, 2020); the exclusion of vulnerable populations from mitigation programs of infrastructure construction (Dwyer, 2020); processes of accumulation,

dispossession, and exploitation related to the privatization of strategic infrastructure (Neilson, 2019); the creation of logistical spaces (Gambino, 2019), infrastructural hubs, free industrial zones, manufacturing areas and commercial projects that alter public space and the geographies of everyday lives by turning the places where BRI projects are materialized into industrial enclaves and transit corridors (Apostolopoulou, 2021b; Silver, 2021; Wiig, 2022). Despite the major importance of these analyses for unraveling emerging inequalities, an explicit focus on the urban and/or on cities remains under-studied in contemporary BRI scholarship, reflecting a broader gap in grounded scholarship on specific BRI projects (Oakes, 2021). Nonetheless, the literature that examines the effects of BRI-driven urban transformation through specific case studies offers several important insights that show quite clearly the immense impacts on the people who live in BRI cities. Through the deployment of multiple new infrastructure systems, the establishment of SEZs and the construction of myriad new urban spaces, from real estate projects and smart cities through to new transportation hubs and grandiose urban development projects, the BRI is transforming the entire urban fabric at a scale and rapidity that may have no recent precedent. Here we offer a grounded view of the implications of how the BRI is staged and built that we described in the previous sections by drawing attention to the multiple, controversial ways that the initiative is shaping urban lives, space, socionatures, and the urban experience more broadly. By urban lives, we refer to issues ranging from lost livelihoods, workers' rights violations, and non-secure working conditions, to labor and housing precarity. By urban space, we refer to issues ranging from privatisations, enclosures, land acquisition and land grabbing, to social segregation and displacements. And by urban socionatures, we refer to issues ranging from land use changes, environmental hazards, biodiversity loss and climate change, to toxic pollution, green grabbing, and environmental injustice.

Starting with urban lives, the need to consider the downgrading of labor relations, standards and conditions of employment initiated through BRI projects across cities is prescient given wider debates about how the New Silk Road is transforming the international division of labor (Defraigne, 2020; Driessen, 2019). For instance, growing labor insecurity has been linked to the privatization of significant ports, including the Port of Piraeus and Colombo's International Container Terminal. In both cases, the acquisition of the ports by Chinese companies and the subsequent integration into the logistical geographies of the BRI led to increasing labor insecurity and exploitation due to the combination of direct hiring with subcontracting that led to a sharp reduction of the workforce and workers being hired at lower wages and with fewer labor rights (Apostolopoulou, 2021b; Hatzopoulos & Kambouri, 2018; Neilson, 2019). Halegua (2020) also shows how immigration and labor laws were violated as Chinese

construction firms built a casino-centred enclave in Saipan, drawing attention to the need to further consider exploitation by construction companies of both Chinese and local workers. Similarly, in Nepal there is violation of workers' rights on the Butwal-Narayanghat road improvement project that is promoted by Nepal's government as key for connecting urban centers and establishing ten "model cities" along it (Apostolopoulou & Pant, 2022). The China State Construction Engineering Corporation Ltd., with the support of Nepal-based GCE Group, began the contract in 2018 but until January 2021 only 2% of the work has been completed due to labor strikes demanding a minimum wage. In March 2021, the conflict escalated leading to a clash between the contractors and the laborers (Apostolopoulou & Pant, 2022). Work on urban displacement has long explored the impacts of megaprojects on cities and more recently how resource-poor communities are forcibly moved by the state to make way for new BRI projects (Lesutis, 2020). For instance, in Lamu the port expansion and LAPSSET project were predicated on the displacement of local people including farming and fishing communities, as rural land was transformed into global urban and logistical space (Alden et al., 2021). The deployment of new inter – and intra-urban roads and railways have also (re)produced various forms of displacements as land is transformed from spaces of housing and livelihoods to trade and logistics (Enns & Bersaglio, 2020). In Uganda, the Central Corridor project precipitated displacement of resource-poor communities living on Uganda Railway land in Kampala, in connection to the Port of Dar es Salaam (Wiig & Silver, 2019). In Lahore, the BRI financed Orange-Line metro led to the displacement of poor communities (Glekas & Ibrahim, 2020). Ethnographic work by Maqsood and Sajjad (2021, p. 1003) has documented how the building of the Orange Line affects one particular individual named Hassan, highlighting how even though he was able to "obtain fair compensation, he continues to live in a state of precarity and uncertainty, with limited means to access the state". This type of study is integral to unfolding knowledge about the living of BRI cities because it offers detailed examinations of the implications that these vast top-down projects have on people's lives. Similarly, ethnographic work in Chancay city, Peru shows that after the agreement for the construction of a US $3 billion port by the Chinese COSCO Shipping company and the Peruvian mining company Volcan, the companies used explosives to destroy a hill that is home to more than 50 families, with no plans for relocation nor compensation to mitigate the damages to the houses and the effects of noise and dust (Apostolopoulou & Pizarro, under review). Chancay is the first port in the Americas completely managed by a Chinese state-owned shipping company and will be fully private, not a public-private partnership as with other BRI ports in the region. Debates in urban geography and urban studies around planetary urbanization (Brenner & Schmid, 2015) have helped to denote the way infrastructural systems incorporate historically marginal urban spaces into

circuits of capital, establishing new spatial frontiers of global capitalism (Smith, 1996). In considering the living of BRI cities by stressing the need to approach city and non-city landscapes, or hinterlands, as dialectically co-produced (Brenner & Katsikis, 2020), this theory might help to expand the understanding of displacement pressures outside the boundaries of the city. Doing so allows us to consider the ways that BRI projects in one place can transform far-away but connected spaces and communities, demonstrating how rural displacement of peasant and Indigenous peoples (e.g. Enns & Bersaglio, 2020) can be understood as intimately linked to the urban, and to the BRI. An indicative case of the latter is found in Nepal, where a number of road improvement projects that have as their primary goal either to improve the infrastructural and trade connectivity of its capital city Kathmandu, or to link new smart cities to former rural areas that have now been reclassified to urban, have caused the displacement of rural populations (Apostolopoulou & Pant, 2022). For example, the Butwal-Narayanghat road improvement project mentioned above is expected to impact 36 households, including Indigenous people, and to forcibly displace local people who will lose land, residential and commercial structures. However, urban displacement does not go uncontested, as social movements can resist BRI-led projects. This is evident both in the case of Nepal and Chancay mentioned before but also in a number of other cases. Chome (2020), for example, explores how Save Lamu has contested displacement caused by LAPSSET, especially the plans to build a coal fired power station in the port city. In Gwadar, with the emergence of the Gwadar Ko Huqooq Do Tehreek (Give Rights to Gwadar Movement), Wolf (2021) connects massive street protests to longer histories of political marginalization of the Baloch people, with the ways in which the China Pakistan Economic Corridor precipitates new resource extractions while failing to address long-standing poverty and exclusion. Conclusion: a decade of global urban transformation In this paper we have reviewed literature that either explicitly focuses on the urban dimensions of the BRI or indirectly highlights the role of, or implications for, cities on the New Silk Road. By bringing about novel combinations of large-scale infrastructure with industrial projects and major investments in urban built environments, the New Silk Road, like its ancient predecessor, transforms cities, profoundly reconfiguring how the urban is produced, perceived, and experienced by those who live and work in the places where BRI projects materialize. The key role of cities for the initiative leads us to agree with Smith (2022, p. 15) that the BRI is, “first and foremost, a network of cities connected through global infrastructure”. Indeed, our categorization of studies into three areas, staging of the urban BRI, building of BRI cities and living with BRI cities, is suggestive that a decade since the New Silk Road was Considering the overtly geopolitical framing of the BRI in scholarly, policy and popular accounts, a focus on the urban can advance material, grounded understandings of the initiative. It can also show the unique

urban trajectories and novel urban development pathways that are emerging in the cities where BRI projects materialize. China's urban development has distinct characteristics that are adapted in complex ways across different cities, most notably the fast-tracked remaking of urban space, the extensive privatisations of public land, and the displacements of local communities. In turn, these urban development pathways interact or collide with local and national contexts and circumstances, ranging from postcolonial policies, under-development and ongoing forms of neo-colonial control in the South to austerity regimes, post-industrial decline and infrastructural decay in the North. This dynamic perspective is essential to developing a more nuanced reading that brings the BRI's contingent developmental logics in dialogue with local political economies, historical-geographical conditions, social contestation, and the lasting social and economic upheaval brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic (which has run alongside a significant period of the BRI). Indeed, as Oakes (2021, p. 284) highlights, what is at stake here is "not a snapshot, but a dialectic. And the BRI has been nothing if not evolutionary". Silk Road urbanism/ urbanization is therefore an emergent, relational process shaping and shaped by complex and contentious development encounters, relations of power and emerging global geographies of the urban. Cities on the New Silk Road are not singular or homogeneous: we do not claim any unifying coherence with our naming as such nor discount a range of other unfolding processes within these urban spaces. However, with this paper we have attempted to argue that the BRI's trans-continental and trans-oceanic connections have localized, distinct, and geographic implications in and between cities integrated into the New Silk Road. So far, the open, dynamic processes of assembling ideas, capital investment and power across space and in an impressive variety of places across the South and North seem to reorient spatial-temporal imaginaries and materialities of urban development towards more uncertain, speculative and uneven urban futures. Moreover, even though here we have primarily focused on the role and implications for cities on the New Silk Road, as the BRI extends across city boundaries in peri-urban and rural areas perforating the urban-rural divide. Scholars must also consider how Chinese trajectories of urbanization differ or align with existing urbanization patterns and how they drive a rural-to-urban transition in several places across the globe. As the BRI goes into its second decade, we suggest that BRI's infrastructural spaces can be seen as new landscapes where novel kinds of urbanization are emerging, demanding new narratives of urban and social change to make sense of twenty-first century cityscapes and the urban experience more broadly. Lefebvre (1970 [2003]) argued that urbanization is a historical process of changing social relations - as those historical conditions are changing, different spatial outcomes beyond the classical city might result. The unique characteristics of Silk Road urbanization and especially the emergence of a new form of urban space that is using

infrastructure as a medium to create the city itself, highlight the need for future geographical research that goes beyond Western notions of urbanization (Apostolopoulou, 2021a). This is essential if geographers wish to recognize the impact of BRI-related developments on the emerging global geographies of the urban, provincialize urban knowledge, and develop postcolonial urban theory that is grounded in diverse place-based histories. The proposal to consider the New Silk Road as a generative, dynamic and dialectical site of theory-building requires our attention as urban geographers to both relational multiplicities and to leaving space for understanding and theorizing emerging urban spaces that exist in a state of ambiguity between the traditional concepts of the "urban" and the "rural" (and "city"/"countryside"), and whose unique features are the promise of connectivity via global infrastructure (Apostolopoulou, 2021a). We argue that the BRI is today driving these changing historical conditions, promising and enacting infrastructure-led development and urban-regional transformation at a scale and rapidity not seen before in modern history. In light of the economic downturn driven by the Covid-19 pandemic, China's domestic economy faces turbulence and uncertainty, the cases of defaulting BRI projects have increased, and some recipient countries have started renegotiating the terms of BRI loans (Carmody et al., 2022). As such, it remains to be seen whether financing the BRI will continue as a key policy goal for China given that its foreign lending started to slow down beginning in 2016 (Ghiretti, 2022). The 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party held in October 2022 confirms that while far from disappearing, the BRI has gone from being China's foremost foreign policy, to being one of many important tools including the Global Development Initiative (GDI) and the Global Security Initiative (GSI) respectively launched in 2021 and 2022 (Ghiretti, 2022.). But even in the unlikely scenario that over the coming decade some (or all) of the BRI's next era of megaprojects remain unbuilt, the vision for global, infrastructural connection with China has already had a profound material, political and discursive impact across the globe. The BRI has inscribed new purpose and connections between urban regions and restructured existing towns and cities alongside the construction of entirely new built environments, remaking the urban fabric and reshaping social geographies, including local-global inequalities, at a historically unparalleled, trans-continental scale. Importantly, Silk Road urbanism/urbanization unfolds not in standardized, replicable ways but as a heterogeneous and diverse process of urban transformation encountering particular cities' multifaceted social, political, environmental, cultural and economic turbulence. Such complex investments into and between cities that emerge from the BRI's global-local restructuring demand close attention and grounded material analysis into the future as its intended outcomes remain both highly contested and uncertain. Approaching the BRI's profound remaking of the urban fabric and reshaping of social geographies and political ecologies over the last decade, including the

exacerbation of local-global inequalities, has, as we have shown, demanded a range of diverse methodological and theoretical approaches from across the social sciences. The BRI increasingly marks a new global era where infrastructure, industrialization and urbanization are more complementary than ever. As these uncertain urban futures continue to be assembled. How cities along the New Silk Road will forge an inclusive, socially-ecologically just, and sustainable urban development trajectory may well be the challenge of the century.

Funding This study has been supported by a Ramon y Cajal Fellowship [grant number RYC2020-028925-I/ AEI/10.13039/501100011033] awarded to Elia Apostolopoulou, and the European Research Council funded "GlobalCORRIDOR: Urbanization, everyday life and techno-social differentiation" [grant number 947779] awarded to Jonathan Silver. Meanwhile, Han Cheng's work was supported by a Max Weber Foundation Research Fellowship and the National Natural Science Foundation of China [grant number 42201189].

References Aalders, J. T., Bachmann, J., Knutsson, P., & Musembi Kilaka, B. (2021). The making and unmaking of a megaproject: Contesting temporalities along the LAPSSET corridor in Kenya. Antipode, 53(5), 1273–1293. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12720 Alden, C., Chichava, S., Jiang, L., Murg, B., & Lim, G. (2021). China-driven port development: Lessons from Kenya and Malaysia. Africa Portal. https://www.africaportal.org/publications/ china-driven-port-development-lessons-kenya-and-malaysia/. Alff, H. (2020). Belts and roads every- and nowhere: Conceptualizing infrastructural corridorization in the Indian ocean. Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space, 38(5), 815–819. https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654420911410c Al-Shammari, T. (2017, August 14). Dubai and Gwadar: The silent economic war in the Gulf of Oman. Open Democracy. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/dubaiand-gwadar-silent-economic-war-in-gulf-of-oman/. Apostolopoulou, E. (2021). A novel geographical research agenda on Silk Road urbanisation. The Geographical Journal, 187(4), 386–393. https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12412 Apostolopoulou, E. (2021). Tracing the links between infrastructure-led development, urban transformation, and inequality in China's belt and road initiative. Antipode, 53(3), 831–858. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12699 Apostolopoulou, E., & Pant, H. (2022). "Silk road here we come": Infrastructural myths, post-disaster politics, and the shifting urban geographies of Nepal. Political Geography, 98, 102704. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102704 Apostolopoulou, E., & Pizarro, A. (under review). Contesting the anticipated infrastructural city: A grounded analysis of Silk Road Urbanization in the multipurpose port terminal in Chancay, Peru. Beazley, R., & Lassoie, J. P. (2017).

Himalayan mobilities: An exploration of the impact of expanding rural road networks on social and ecological systems in the Nepalese Himalaya. Springer International. Bennet, M. (2020). Is a pixel worth 1000 words? Critical remote sensing and China's Belt and Road Initiative. Political Geography, 78, 102127. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.102127 Bremner, L. (2013). Towards a minor global architecture at Lamu, Kenya. Social Dynamics, 39(3), 397–413. https://doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2013.842340 Brenner, N. (2019). New urban spaces: Urban theory and the scale question. Oxford University Press. Brenner, N., & Katsikis, N. (2020). Operational landscapes: Hinterlands of the Capitalocene. Architectural Design, 90(1), 22–31. https://doi.org/10.1002/ad.2521 Brenner, N., & Schmid, C. (2015). Towards a new epistemology of the urban? City, 19(2-3), 151–182. https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2015.1014712

Bunnell, T. (2022). China at large, chinas for comparative conversation: A commentary on "urbanizing dynamics of global China". Urban Geography, 43(10), 1565–1571. https://doi.org/10. 1080/02723638.2022.2140968 Carmody, P., Taylor, I., & Zajontz, T. (2022). China's spatial fix and 'debt diplomacy' in Africa: Constraining belt or road to economic transformation? Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des études Africaines, 56(1), 57–77. https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2020. 1868014 Chaziza, M. (2020). China's strategic partnership with Kuwait: New opportunities for the Belt and Road Initiative. Contemporary Review of the Middle East, 7(4), 501–519. https://doi.org/10. 1177/2347798920940081 Chen, M., Sui, Y., Liu, W., Liu, H., & Huang, Y. (2019). Urbanization patterns and poverty reduction: A new perspective to explore the countries along the Belt and Road. Habitat International, 84, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2018.12.001 Chen, X. (2018). Globalisation redux: Can China's inside-out strategy catalyse economic development and integration across its Asian borderlands and beyond? Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society, 11(1), 35–58. https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsy003 Cheng, H., & Apostolopoulou, E. (2023). Locating the Belt and Road Initiative's spatial trilectics. Geography Compass, 17(4), e12683. https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12683 China Center for Urban Development. (2020). Research on urban cooperation development along the Belt and Road. www.efchina.org/Reports-en/report-lccp-20210430-2-en. Chinese Government. (2015). Visions and actions on jointly building the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st century Maritime Silk Road. http://2017.beltandroadforum.org/english/n100/2017/ 0410/c22-45.html. Chome, N. (2020). Land, livelihoods and belonging: Negotiating change and anticipating LAPSSET in Kenya's Lamu county. Journal of Eastern African Studies, 14(2), 310–331. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2020.1743068 Clarke, M. (2018). The Belt and Road Initiative: Exploring Beijing's motivations and challenges for its New Silk Road. Strategic Analysis, 42(2), 84–102. https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2018.

1439326 Defraigne, J. C. (2020). The Belt and Road Initiative, the economic integration of the Eurasian continent and the international division of labour. In M. A. Carrai, J.-C. Defraigne, & J. Wouters (Eds.), The Belt and Road Initiative and global governance (pp. 34–75). Edward Elgar Publishing. de LT Oliveira, G., Murton, G., Rippa, A., Harlan, T., & Yang, Y. (2020). China's Belt and Road Initiative: Views from the ground. Political Geography, 82, 102225. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102225 Demissie, A. (2018). Special economic zones: Integrating African countries in China's Belt and Road Initiative. In M. Mayer (Ed.), Rethinking the Silk Road (pp. 69–84). Palgrave Macmillan. Descalsota, M. (2022, June 6). Malaysia's $100 billion luxury estate was supposed to be a 'living paradise.' Instead, 6 years into development, it's a ghost town full of empty skyscrapers and deserted roads — take a look. Insider. https://www.insider.com/ghost-town-malaysia-forestcity-china-developer-estate-photos-2022-6. Driessen, M. (2019). Tales of hope, tastes of bitterness: Chinese road builders in Ethiopia. Hong Kong University Press. Dwyer, M. B. (2020). "They will not automatically benefit": The politics of infrastructure development in Laos's northern economic corridor. Political Geography, 78, 102118. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.102118 Elliott, H. (2020). Town-making at the gateway to Kenya's 'new frontier'. In J. Lind, D. Okenwa, & I. Scoones (Eds.), Land, investment and politics: Reconfiguring Eastern Africa's pastoral drylands (pp. 43–54). James Currey. Enns, C., & Bersaglio, B. (2020). On the coloniality of "new" mega-infrastructure projects in East Africa. Antipode, 52(1), 101–123. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12582 Ferchen, M. (2021). The two faces of the China model. In F. Schneider (Ed.), Global p Flint, C., & Zhu, C. (2019). The geopolitics of connectivity, cooperation, and hegemonic competition: The Belt and Road Initiative. Geoforum, 99, 95–101. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum. 2018.12.008 Furlong, K. (2022). Geographies of infrastructure III: Infrastructure with Chinese characteristics. Progress in Human Geography, 46(3), 915–925. https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325211033652 Gambino, E. (2019). The Georgian logistics revolution: Questioning seamlessness across the New Silk Road. Work Organisation, Labour & Globalisation, 13(1), 190–206. https://doi.org/10.13169/workorgalaboglob.13.1.0190 Gao, Q., & Alimujiang, K. (2017). Research on the urban expansion of Xinjiang in China, Central Asia and West Asia along the Belt and Road (in Chinese). Economic Geography, 37(5), 51–57. https://doi.org/10.15957/j.cnki.jjdl.2017.05.007 Ghiretti, F. (2022, November 1). After the party congress, where is the Belt and Road Initiative going? King's College London. https://www.kcl.ac.uk/after-the-party-congress-where-is-thebelt-and-road-initiative-going. Glassman, J. (2011). The geo-political economy of global production networks. Geography Compass, 5(4), 154–164. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2011.00416.x Glekas, E., & Ibrahim, K. (2020). Heritage and urban development in Pakistan. In D. Kopec, & A. M. Bliss (Eds.), Place meaning and attachment: Authenticity, heritage and preservation (pp.

105– 117). Routledge. Gonzalez-Vicente, R. (2019). Make development great again? Accumulation regimes, spaces of sovereign exception and the elite development paradigm of China's Belt and Road Initiative. Business and Politics, 21(4), 487–513. https://doi.org/10.1017/bap.2019.20 Goodburn, C., & Knoerich, J. (2022). Importing export zones: Processes and impacts of replicating a Chinese model of urbanization in rural south India. Urban Geography, 43(10), 1496–1518. https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2021.2014669 Graham, S., & Marvin, S. (2001). Splintering urbanism: Networked infrastructures, technological mobilities and the urban condition. Routledge. Graham, S., & Marvin, S. (2022). Splintering urbanismat 20 and the "infrastructural turn". Journal of Urban Technology, 29(1), 169–175. https://doi.org/10.1080/10630732.2021.2005934 Hai, K., Wang, S., Ma, S., Yang, R., & Tu, P. (2020). Urban expansion and form changes along the Belt and Road Initiative (in Chinese). Acta Geographica Sinica, 75(10), 2092–2108. https://doi. org/10.11821/dlxb202010005 Halegua, A. (2020). Where is the Belt and Road Initiative taking international labour rights? An examination of worker abuse by Chinese firms in Saipan. In M. A. Carrai, J.-C. Defraigne, & J. Wouters (Eds.), The Belt and Road Initiative and global governance (pp. 225–257). Edward Elgar Publishing. Halsall, J. P., Cook, I. G., & Oberoi, R. (2022). Connecting the world: China's Belt and Road Initiative. In P. G. Figueiredo, F. J. Leandro, & Y. Li (Eds.), Handbook of research on special economic zones as regional development enablers (pp. 1–20). IGI Global. Han, X., & Webber, M. (2020). From Chinese dam building in Africa to the Belt and Road Initiative: Assembling infrastructure projects and their linkages. Political Geography, 77, 102102. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.102102 Hart, G. (2018). Relational comparison revisited. Progress in Human Geography, 42(3), 371–394. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132516681388 Harvey, D. (2016). The ways of the world. Oxford University Press. Hatzopoulos, P., & Kambouri, N. (2018). Piraeus Port as a machinic assemblage: Labour, precarity, and struggles. In B. Neilson, N. Rossiter, & R. Samaddar (Eds.), Logistical Asia (pp. 155–174). Palgrave Macmillan. Hildyard, N., & Sol, X. (2017). How infrastructure is shaping the world: A critical introduction to infrastructure mega-corridors. Counter Balance. http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/resource/ how-infrastructure-shaping-world. Hillman, J. E. (2020). The emperor's new road: China and the project of the century. Yale University Press.

Huo, W., Chen, P. S. L., Zhang, W., & Li, K. X. (2019). International port investment of Chinese port-related companies. International Journal of Shipping and Transport Logistics, 11(5), 430– 454. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJSTL.2019.102145 IDI. (2021). Sihanoukville special economic zone. The People's Map of China. https:// thepeoplesmap.net/project/sihanoukville-special-economic-zone/. Jiang, Y. (2015). Vulgarisation of Keynesianism in China's response to the global financial crisis. Review of International Political Economy, 22(2), 360–390.

https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290. 2014.915227 Khalili, L. (2021). Sinews of war and trade: Shipping and capitalism in the Arabian peninsula. Verso Books. Kimari, W., & Ernstson, H. (2020). Imperial remains and imperial invitations: Centering race within the contemporary large-scale infrastructures of east Africa. Antipode, 52(3), 825–846. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12623 Koh, S. Y., Zhao, Y., & Shin, H. B. (2022). Moving the mountain and greening the sea: The micropolitics of speculative green urbanism at Forest City, Iskandar Malaysia. Urban Geography, 43 (10), 1469–1495. https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2021.1999725 Lefebvre, H. (1970 [2003]). The urban revolution. University of Minnesota Press. Lesutis, G. (2020). How to understand a development corridor? The case of lamu port–South Sudan–Ethiopia-transport corridor in Kenya. Area, 52(3), 600–608. https://doi.org/10.1111/ area.12601 Li, D., Yu, H., & Li, X. (2017). The spatial-temporal pattern analysis of city development in countries along the Belt and Road Initiative based on nighttime light data (in Chinese). Geomatics and Information Science of Wuhan University, 42(6), 711–720. https://doi.org/10. 13203/j.whugis20170100 Li, J. (2021). The hypothesis, meaning and development of Silk Road metropolitan corridor (in Chinese). Urban Development Studies, 28(8), 85–92. https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:CSFY.0.2021- 08-012 Liu, H., & Liu, W. (2017). Study on relationship between the Belt and Road Initiative and regional development strategies of China (in Chinese). Bulletin of Chinese Academy of Sciences, 32(4), 340–347. https://doi.org/10.16418/j.issn.1000-3045.2017.04.002 Liu, W., Song, Z., Liu, Z., Yeerken, W., Song, T., Niu, F., & Han, M. (2018). Progress on studies of the Belt and Road Initiative (in Chinese). Acta Geographica Sinica, 73(4), 620–636. https://doi. org/10.11821/dlxb201804003 Liu, Z., Schindler, S., & Liu, W. (2020). Demystifying Chinese overseas investment in infrastructure: Port development, the Belt and Road Initiative and regional development. Journal of Transport Geography, 87, 102812. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2020.102812 Loughlin, N., & Grimsditch, M. (2021). How local political economy dynamics are shaping the Belt and Road Initiative. Third World Quarterly, 42(10), 2334–2352. https://doi.org/10.1080/ 01436597.2021.1950528 Malik, A. R. (2018). The China-Pakistan economic corridor (CPEC): A game changer for Pakistan's economy. In B. R. Deepak (Ed.), China's global rebalancing and the New Silk Road (pp. 69–83). Springer. Maqsood, A., & Sajjad, F. (2021). Victim, broker, activist, fixer: Surviving dispossession in working class Lahore. Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 39(6), 994–1008. https://doi.org/ 10.1177/02637758211029290 Mayer, M., & Zhang, X. (2021). Theorizing China-world integration: Sociospatial reconfigurations and the modern silk roads. Review of International Political Economy, 28(4), 974–1003. https:// doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2020.1741424 McFarlane, C., & Robinson, J. (2012). Introduction—experiments in comparative urbanism. Urban Geography, 33(6), 765–773. https://doi.org/10.2747/0272-3638.33.6.765 Murton, G., & Lord, A. (2020). Trans-Himalayan power corridors:

Infrastructural politics and China's Belt and Road Initiative in Nepal. Political Geography, 77, 102100. https://doi.org/10. 1016/j.polgeo.2019.102100

NDRC. (2019). The Belt and Road Initiative: Progress, contributions and prospects. Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative. http://wb.beijing.gov.cn/en/ policy_release/belt_road/202007/P020200727556630061915.pdf. Neilson, B. (2019). Precarious in Piraeus: On the making of labour insecurity in a port concession. Globalizations, 16(4), 559–574. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2018.1463755 Ni, P., Kamiya, M., & Ding, R. (2017). Cities network along the Silk Road. Springer. Oakes, T. (2021). The Belt and Road as method: Geopolitics, technopolitics and power through an infrastructure lens. Asia Pacific Viewpoint, 62(3), 281–285. https://doi.org/10.1111/apv.12319 Pascha, W. (2021). Duisburg and its port, endpoint of China's Silk Road: Opportunities and risks (Report No. 2021-1). Ordnungspolitische Diskurse. Perveen, S., & Khalil, J. (2015). Gwadar-Kashgar economic corridor: Challenges and imperatives for Pakistan and China. Journal of Political Studies, 22(2), 351. http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/ pols/pdf-files/1%20-%20SAIMA_v22_2_wint2015.pdf. Phillips, T. (2017, March 21). China goes west: A ghost city in the sand comes to life. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/mar/21/china-west-ghost-city-comes-tolife-lanzhou-new-area. Robinson, J., & Roy, A. (2016). Debate on global urbanisms and the nature of urban theory. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 40(1), 181–186. https://doi.org/10. 1111/1468-2427.12272 Safina, A., Ramondetti, L., & Governa, F. (2023). Rescaling the Belt and Road Initiative in urban China: The local complexities of a global project. Area Development and Policy, https://doi.org/ 10.1080/23792949.2023.217488 Schindler, S., DiCarlo, J., & Paudel, D. (2022). The new cold war and the rise of the 21st-century infrastructure state. Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 47(2), 331–346. https:// doi.org/10.1111/tran.12480 Schindler, S., & Kanai, J. M. (2021). Getting the territory right: Infrastructure-led development and the re-emergence of spatial planning strategies. Regional Studies, 55(1), 40–51. https://doi.org/ 10.1080/00343404.2019.1661984 Schmid, C., Karaman, O., Hanakata, N., Kallenberger, P., Kockelkorn, A., Sawyer, L., Streule, M., & Wong, K. P. (2018). Towards a new vocabulary of urbanisation processes: A comparative approach. Urban Studies, 55(1), 19–52. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098017739750 Shen, H. (2018). Building a digital silk road? Situating the internet in China's Belt and Road Initiative. International Journal of Communication, 12, 2683–2701. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ ijoc/article/view/8405. Sheppard, E., Leitner, H., & Maringanti, A. (2013). Provincializing global urbanism: A manifesto. Urban Geography, 34(7), 893–900. https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2013.807977 Shinn, H. B., Zhao, Y. M., & Koh, S.

Y. (2022). The urbanising dynamics of global China: Speculation, articulation, and translation in global capitalism. Urban Geography, 43(10), 1457–1468. https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2022.2141491 Silver, J. (2021). Corridor urbanism. In M. Lancione, & C. McFarlane (Eds.), Global urbanism (pp. 251–258). Routledge. Slobodian, Q. (2023). Crack-up capitalism: Market radicals and the dream of a world without democracy. Metropolitan Books. Smith, N. (1996). The new urban frontier: Gentrification and the revanchist city. Routledge. Smith, N. R. (2022). Continental metropolitanization: Chongqing and the urban origins of China's Belt and Road Initiative. Urban Geography, 43(10), 1544–1564. https://doi.org/10.1080/ 02723638.2021.2014670 Song, T., Chahine, T., & Sun, M. (2020). Ruili, China: The China-Myanmar nexus hub at the crossroads. Cities, 104, 102766. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2020.102766 Styan, D. (2020). China's Maritime Silk Road and small states: Lessons from the case of Djibouti. Journal of Su, N., & Yang, C. K. (2017). Silk Road city: The characteristics and development trends of urban pivots in the Belt and Road region (in Chinese). World Economy Studies, (8), 74–83 +136. https://doi.org/10.13516/j.cnki.wes.2017.08.007. Summers, T. (2016). China's 'New Silk Roads': Sub-national regions and networks of global political economy. Third World Quarterly, 37(9), 1628–1643. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597. 2016.1153415 Tooze, A. (2018). Crashed: How a decade of financial crises changed the world. Allen Lane. Triolo, P., Allison, K., Brown, C., & Broderick, K. (2020). The digital silk road: Expanding China's digital footprint. Eurasia Group. https://www.eurasiagroup.net/files/upload/Digital-Silk-RoadExpanding-China-Digital-Footprint.pdf. Vorobyev, N. V., Emelyanova, N. V., & Rykov, P. V. (2018). The urbanization and development of urban agglomerations in Siberia and North China in the context of the new silk road. Problems of Economic Transition, 60(8-9), 597–613. https://doi.org/10.1080/10611991.2018.1595830 Wan, C., Zhao, Y., Zhang, D., & Yip, T. L. (2021). Identifying important ports in maritime container shipping networks along the Maritime Silk Road. Ocean & Coastal Management, 211, 105738. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2021.105738 Wiig, A. (2022). Inside the zone, outside the commons: London's waterfront redevelopment as enclosure. In M. Mahdavi, & L. Wang (Eds.), New geographies 12: Commons (pp. 178–186). Harvard Graduate School of Design. Wiig, A., & Silver, J. (2019). Turbulent presents, precarious futures: Urbanization and the deployment of global infrastructure. Regional Studies, 53(6), 912–923. https://doi.org/10.1080/ 00343404.2019.1566703 Williams, J., Robinson, C., & Bouzarovski, S. (2020). China's Belt and Road Initiative and the emerging geographies of global urbanisation. The Geographical Journal, 186(1), 128–140. https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12332 Wolf, S. O. (2021). Gwadar protests and the peculiar role of Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan. SSRN. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id = 4007938. Yean, S. (2019). The Belt and Road Initiative in Malaysia: Case of the Kuantan Port. ISEAS

Yusof Ishak Institute.
https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2019_3.pdf. Yean, S., & Negara, D. (2020). Chinese investments in industrial parks: Indonesia and Malaysia compared. ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute. https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/ 09/ISEAS_EWP_2020-08_Tham_Negara.pdf. Zhang, M., & He, S. (2021). From dissensus to consensus: State rescaling and modalities of power under the Belt and Road Initiative in Western China. Annals of the American Association of Geographers, 111(5), 1519–1538. https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2020.1823808 Zhang, X. (2017). Chinese capitalism and the maritime silk road: A world-systems perspective. Geopolitics, 22(2), 310–331. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2017.1289371 Zheng, H., Bouzarovski, S., Knuth, S., Panteli, M., Schindler, S., Ward, K., & Williams, J. (2023). Interrogating China's global urban presence. Geopolitics, 28(1), 310–332. https://doi.org/10. 1080/14650045.2021.1901084