

**Official and unofficial discourses
on China's "Belt and Road
Initiative"
Comparing Chinese and European
conversations**

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China's New Silk Roads

Transport infrastructures



The BRI thought in Chinese eyes: which content for which object?

Wang Yiwei (2017):

1. policy communication;
2. infrastructure connectivity;
3. trade link;
4. capital flow
5. understanding among people.

Shi Wei, former responsible for the BRI at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Interview, Brussels, April 19, 2018, Brussels)

- Connectivity, by road, sea, and by telecommunication.

Two theoretical frameworks and methodologies

1. Regionalism and International relations
2. Framing and narrative

Corpus

- C. January 1, 2016, to February 28, 2018
- D. four leading European newspapers: Le Monde (France), The Guardian (United Kingdom), Sueddeutsche Zeitung (Germany), El País (Spain) - Platforms “*Factiva*” and “*Europresse*”, and key words in English, French, German, Spanish and Chinese: “Belt and Road initiative”, “one belt, one road”, “silk road”, “21st-Century Maritime Silk Road”, “OBOR”, “BRI”, “Seidenstrasse”, “Neue Seidenstrasse”, “El cinturón v la ruta”. “Iniciativa del cinturón v ruta de la seda”. 400

From the BRICS to the Belt and Road initiative (BRI), China's hybrid competitive regionalism

- “One belt one road” (OBOR) (*yi dai yi lu* in Chinese)
- In 2017, relabeled “Belt and road initiative” (BRI).

The BRICS organization (2009)

- positivist perspective: a concrete cooperative project elaborated by its five members to change the international order
- Or a symbolic construction elaborated under political pressure by its most active members (Hermès n°79, 2017)
- Can the BRI be seen under the same perspective as the BRICS?

The BRI in the European press

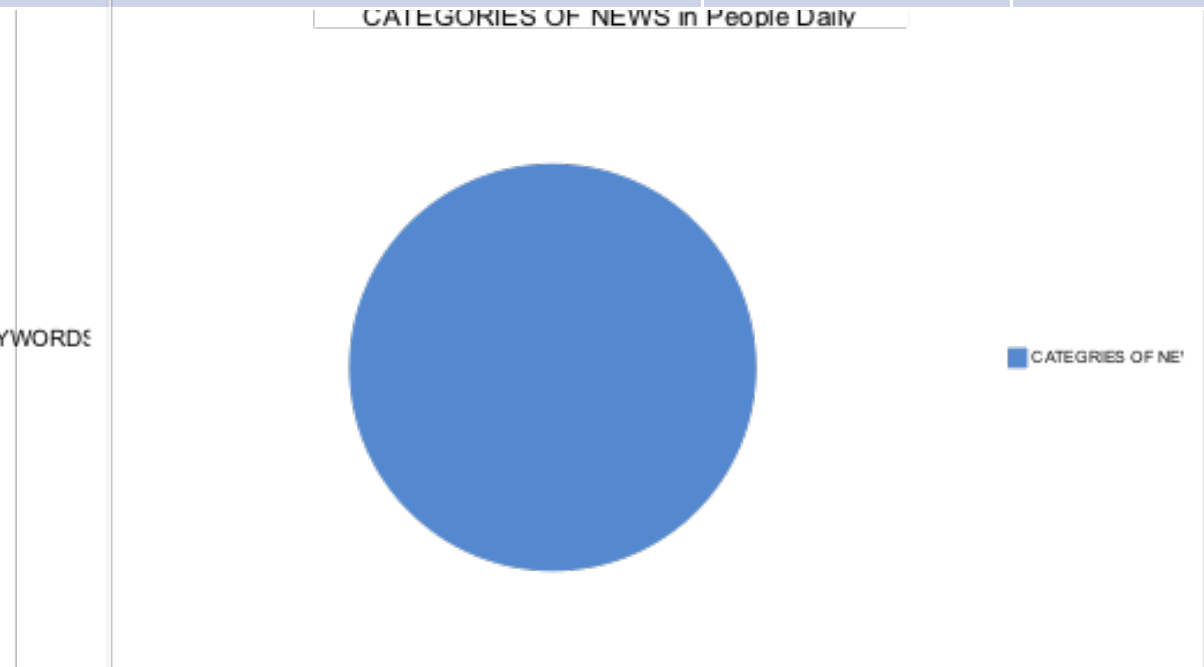
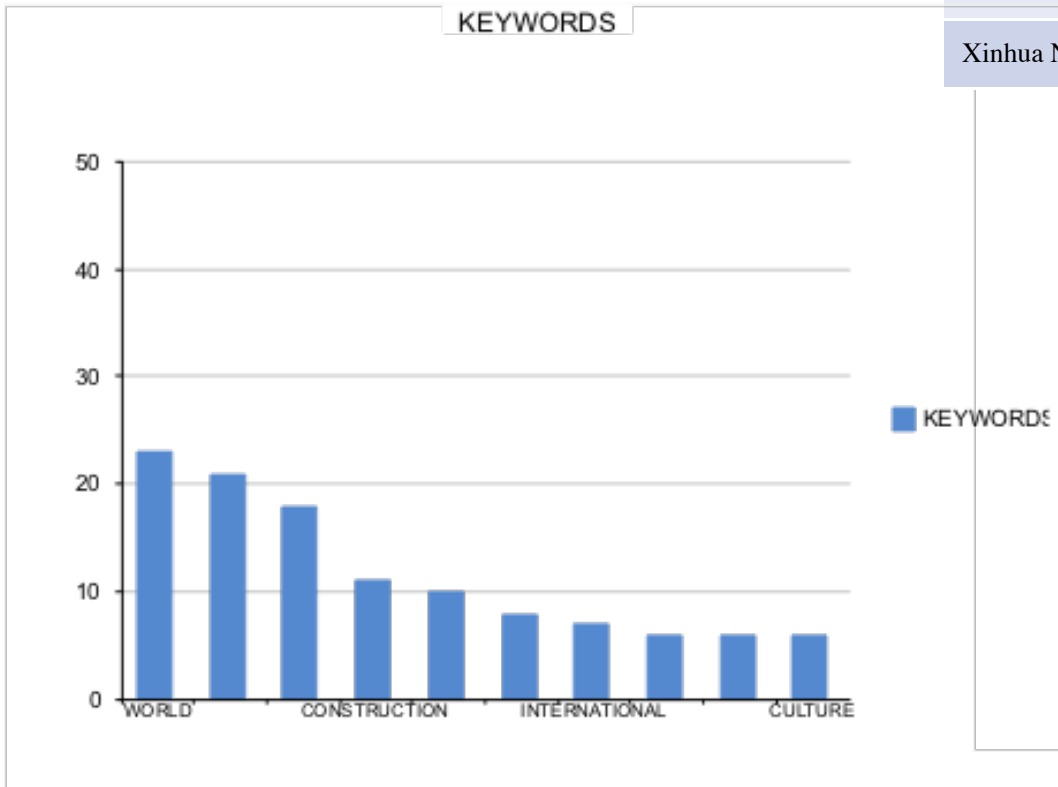
1. **Geopolitical concerns:** will it help China become the dominant country in Asia and the world? Will China take over the USA as the first global power, and if so, what will happen to Europe?
2. **Strategic concerns:** Fear of Chinese strategic domination of key geographical points on land and sea, notably the Balkans (port of Athens, railways in ex-Yugoslavia), but also Africa and Central Asia.
3. **Economic concerns:** Worry over BRI's economic influence in partner countries: many countries will be borrowing money from China; China would have access to markets that were Europe's before.

The BRI in the European press

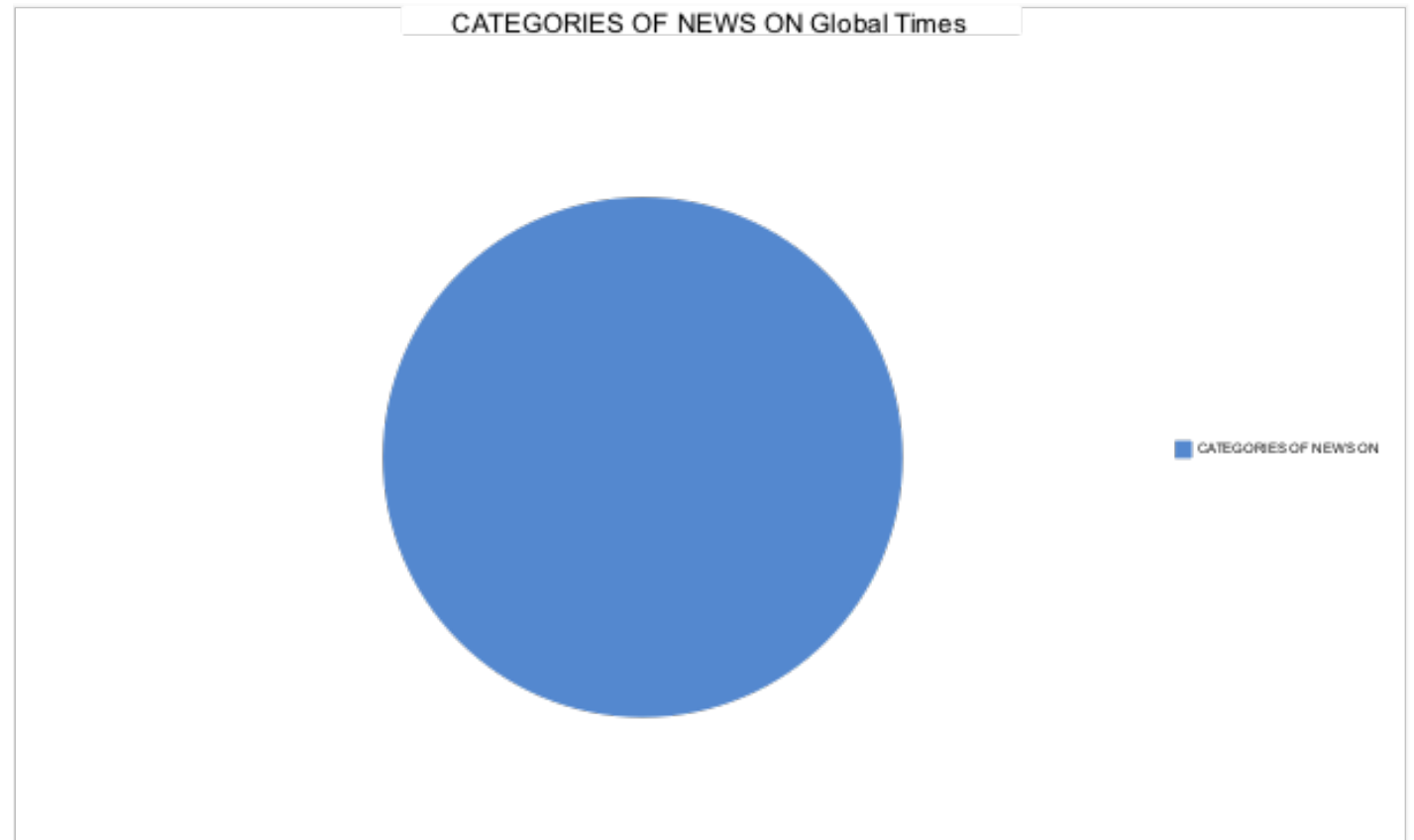
1. **Political issues:** Wariness over BRI's political designs, objectives and impact:
2. **European dimension:** Fear of Europe being torn apart: China 16 + 1 is trying to take advantage of infrastructure needs in Central Europe and of its countries' diverging interests with Western Europe.
3. **Discourse and realization:**
 - Unease over the contents of BRI: purposes, detailed projects and operating rules are unclear.
 - Doubt over the capacity and of China for achieving all of its projects.
 - Suspicion over China's official discourse on BRI: despite China's effort to present BRI as a peaceful and win-win project, the European press largely sees it as a discourse.

The BRI in the Chinese press

News Organizations	2016-2017	2017-2018
People's Daily (Overseas Edition)	110	91
Global Times (English Edition)	249	690
Xinhua News	12,575	18,767



The BRI in the Global Times

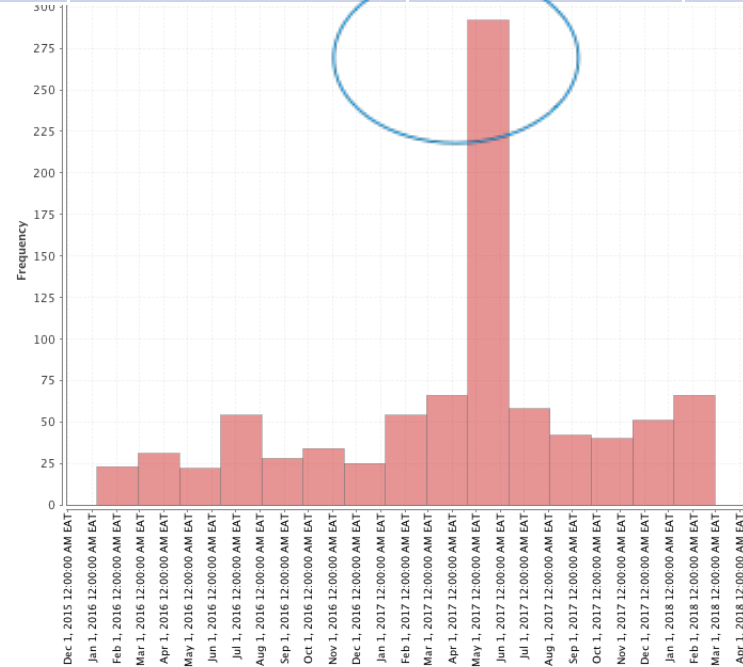


The BRI in the Chinese press

- China intends:
 - to promote the BRI in a spirit of openness, inclusiveness and equality.
 - to avoid confrontations with other countries: “world”, “cooperation” and “win-win”.
- The controversial terms or ideology-loaded references are not seen.
- China’s discourse seems to be focusing on showing the world as an integrated whole in which all countries co-exist, cooperate and prosper together.
- Words and topics are about general issues, calling for agreement and support, which are not persuasive enough.
- Semi-specified sources which only give ambiguous or partial origin of the quotation are high in the news reports.

Chinese official discourses analysis on BRI on Twitter

Account	@XHNews	@ChinaEUMissio n	@CGTNOffici al	@Chinamission2u n	@ChinaMissionG va	Total
Tweets	398	237	209	15	7	886



Frequency of Twitter publication

Chinese official discourses analysis on BRI on Twitter

- For the EU: the bilateral and multilateral relations between China and countries along the “Silk Road”. Plus economic information for pointing out the benefits of the Chinese-EU cooperation.

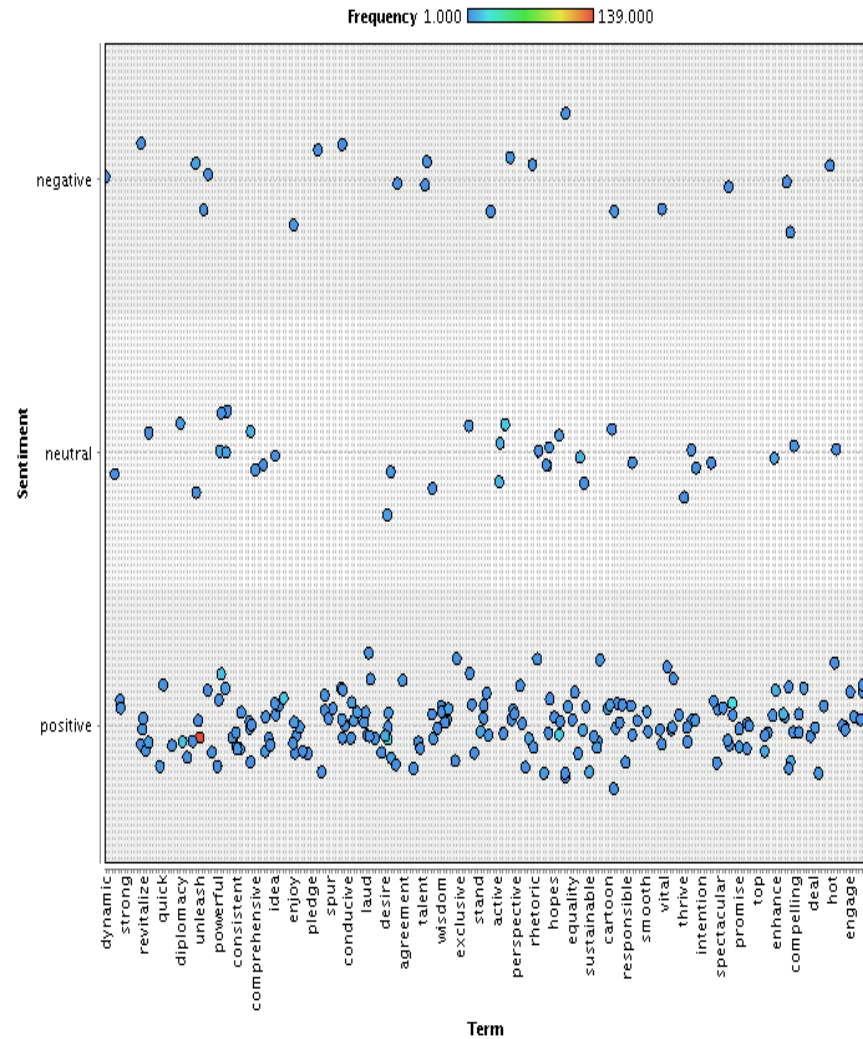
Term	Frequency
China	952
#BeltandRoad	752
Initiative	281
Mission	259
initiative	132
cooperation	124
#China	114
countries	89
President	79
chinese	76
Forum	75
#beltandroad	73
Road	72
Xi	50
development	50
global	42
#Xijinping	40

Corpus Statistic – Term Frequency

Chinese official discourses analysis on BRI on Twitter

The terms most common: (□ 10 times): cooperation (positive, 139); boost (positive, 22); great (positive, 21); benefit (positive, 17); support (positive, 15); central (neutral, 15); benefits (positives, 14); important (positive, 13); key (neutral, 11); open (positive, 11); relations (neutral, 10).

Frequency of sentiment analysis



The BRI, China's solo dance in international media communication

1- Regionalism: analysis on the BRI as a hybrid competitive regionalism cannot be discussed properly.

- Similar trends, approaches and questions emerge.
 - the German newspaper Handelsblatt underlines the question raised in terms of unbalanced trade,
 - topics confirmed during an interview at the European Action external service on April 2018.
- A narrative seems dominant, same as the one used by the BRICS leaders.

The BRI, China's solo dance in international media communication

2 - Framing in European Press

- Majority of articles are underlying the enormous dimensions of the project, sometimes considered as hegemonic, questions about rules and standards, the importance of finances and debts.
- The European press is mostly controversial and reflects a certain fear of China among the journalists and the citizens.
- Two exceptions: some authors, mostly consultants, and some articles primarily German ones (7 among 40), are underlying the benefits of the BRI for the economic and liberal dimensions.
- Interviews with European civil servants in charge of the BRI at DG MOVE (mobility and transports) confirms it: discussing with their Chinese counterparts. they face difficulties to have more detailed data

The BRI, China's solo dance in international media communication

3 - Framing in Chinese media:

- The content, framed by the party, cannot be challenged by the media.
- Dominant statements guide the way media are authorized to reports officials' statements issued by the government.
- Chinese media and Twitter accounts reveals similar findings: glossary and register are the same

Conclusion

4 - Narrative: “the Globalization developed under the Euro-American dominated world and their rules are not successful. The BRI will a positive solution for all the partners involved.”

- China realizes a solo dance with one voice.