

6TH ANNUAL HELSINKI SUMMER SESSION

GEOSTRATEGIC COMPETITION IN THE FIELDS OF CONNECTIVITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mirror Room, Kämp Hotel (Kluuvikatu 2), Helsinki
August 28th, 2019, 15.00–17.00

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) focuses on infrastructure development and investments in over 80 countries, including in Europe. The initiative has been increasingly attracting attention and even causing concern at regional as well as global levels. It is occasionally seen as being at the core of China's geo-economic and geostrategic attempt to establish a Sinocentric regional order. Even so, there are calls for a precise definition of the initiative, both in terms of the resources invested, as well as those projects that explicitly fall under the BRI banner. Is criticism of China-funded connectivity projects justified, and are fears of China's growing political influence in Europe warranted? How should Europe respond following the EU's own connectivity strategy of September 2018? Will the future be marked by competition or cooperation with China?

Speakers:

Xing Li, Professor, Aalborg University

Ville Varjola, Ministerial Adviser, Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Gudrun Wacker, Senior Fellow, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik

Comments:

Julie Chen, Professor, University of Helsinki

*Chair & concluding
remarks:*

Mika Aaltola, Programme Director, Finnish Institute of International Affairs

Speakers' biographies



Li Xing has a PhD in Development and International relations. Currently he is a Professor of international relations at Aalborg University, Denmark. His other current academic responsibilities include the positions of Director, Research Centre on Development and International Relations (DIR), Aalborg University and the Editor in Chief, Journal of China and International Relations. His research interests include international political economy, international relations, emerging powers and world order. In recent years, apart from publishing numerous international and Chinese journal articles, he has edited a number of book series on the theme of the rise of China/emerging powers and the existing world order. Four of his recent publications are the edited volumes: *Emerging Powers, Emerging Markets, and Emerging Societies: Global Responses* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); *Mapping China's One Belt One Road Initiative* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); *The International Political Economy of the BRICS* (Routledge 2019); *China-Latin American Relations in the 21st Century: the Dual Complexities of Opportunities and Challenges* (Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming, 2019–2020). Professor Li Xing is Honorary Professor appointed by a number of Chinese universities, and he is visiting and lecturing in China on a regular basis.



Ville Varjola is currently at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland as Adviser on Connectivity and Geoeconomics. He has worked extensively on the subject, particularly at the European External Action Service, as a Connectivity Adviser at the Office of the Secretary General and as the Economic Adviser to the Managing Director of the Asia and Pacific Department. Previously, he has held posts in EU Delegations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya as well as the Political Department of the Finnish Foreign Ministry.



Gudrun Wacker is at present Senior Fellow in the Asia Division at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP) in Berlin, a think tank providing political advice to the German government and parliament. Her research focuses on Chinese foreign and security policy, especially EU-China relations, China and the Asia-Pacific region and security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific more generally. She is currently a member of the Steering Committee of CSCAP EU and EU delegate to the Experts and Eminent Persons Group of the ASEAN Regional Forum.



Julie Yu-Wen CHEN is Professor of Chinese Studies at the University of Helsinki. Dr. Chen edits *Asian Ethnicity* (Routledge) and is assistant editor of the *Journal of Chinese Political Science* (Springer). She currently serves as the chair of the board of Nordic Association for China Studies as well as representing Finland in “COST ACTION: China in Europe Research Network” funded by EU's Horizon 2020. Dr. Chen is the academic liaison for the University of Helsinki at the Nordic Center in Fudan University as well as at the Nordic NIAS Council to promote Nordic cooperation in Asian studies. She formerly held academic positions at Nazarbayev University, University College Cork and Academia Sinica. She was also visiting scholar at La Trobe University, University of Virginia, University of Tokyo, University of Tübingen, University of Nottingham, and University of Macau. In 2011, she provided testimony in the public hearing of the U.S. -China Economic and Security Review Commission on “China's Foreign Policy: Challenges and Players” in Washington D.C.

Speakers' biographies



Mika Aaltola is the Programme Director of the Global Security research programme at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs. His areas of expertise are US foreign and domestic policies as well as the international system and major-power relations. Dr Aaltola is a visiting professor at the Tallinn University since 2011 and he holds the rank of docent from the University of Tampere. He has been a visiting researcher at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (fall 2013) and at the CERI Sciences Po (fall 2011). He obtained his PhD in social sciences from the University of Tampere in 1999.