

Narratives on the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative: Myth or Reality?

Pompeo Della Posta (*Beijing Normal University*)

Seminar within the course "Innovation, Digital Economy and the Environment"
(prof. Elena Vallino)



The main narrative on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) suggests that it is primarily motivated by China's geopolitical ambitions. Several corollaries follow, including those that the initiative creates "debt traps" for developing countries, with the final aim of seizing the infrastructure it builds ("asset seizure") or that China hides the true size of the debt with the ultimate goal of obtaining a privileged position in the repayment of its credits ("secrecy narrative").

This seminar challenges those claims by reviewing critically the existing literature on the BRI and by observing, among other things, that some of those narratives are discordant and incompatible with each other. China's primary motivations have been to promote the development of its western provinces — transforming landlocked areas into land-linked ones — to ensure the supply of raw materials for the country, and to arrange convenient routes for its international trade. Moreover, the need for infrastructure development across various continents is well documented by respective regional banks.

If anything, geopolitical motivations (particularly tensions between the US and China) are at the root of the negatively biased narrative surrounding the BRI, rather than at the origin of the BRI itself.

Thursday, May 21st 2026 | 11 am - 1.30 pm (CEST)

Aula verde, 2nd Floor, Corso Regina Margherita 60, Campus Luigi Einaudi

Online at <https://unito.webex.com/meet/elena.vallino>