

## Narrating the 'new silk road': Chinese 'huayuquan' (discourse power) in OBOR/BRI externally-directed propaganda

### Project Goal:

This project aims to map the ways in which China, the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) and their international agenda, are represented in Chinese externally-directed propaganda (so called 'exoprop') regarding the Belt & Road Initiative (OBOR / BRI). This project will also explore the way this is perceived and interpreted by audiences beyond China's borders, to consider how, why or to what extent, this exoprop is effective.

To achieve these aims, this project will use mixed methods. It will analyse a sample of Chinese exoprop concerning the BRI (including CGTN's six-part documentary series, as well as China Daily's children-oriented 'Belt and Road Bedtime Stories' series), in order to explore what, and how, they communicate. To explore how this is perceived, this project will analyse online comments discussing these series, but also conduct surveys and focus groups in seven countries (Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Poland, Czechia, Germany, Ireland, UK). These are countries with very different relationships with China and the BRI.

### Reasons for attempting this research:

In the wider context of concern over the use of propaganda in service of militarism and nationalism (as can be seen in Russia's control of its own media in the context of the war against Ukraine), it is vitally important to explore the ways in which national images and international agendas are sculpted in state propaganda – perhaps particularly examples which seek to garner support in global audiences. There has also been increased interest in 'persuasive media' in the context of the Covid-19 'infodemic'. This has led to more attention to 'persuasion', but also, why people reject, not simply accept, media messages they may encounter.

Though there is a vast amount of research on Chinese propaganda, most focuses upon internally-directed media, and there is almost no research on examples constructed primarily for external audiences. Given the extent to which China is concerned with sculpting a particular national image in a global context, this absence is striking. There has, however, been an increase in English-language Chinese media produced in the past decade. This has been officially framed as 'discourse power' (*huayuquan*), which is seen in China as being an important means of offering a 'more accurate' depiction of China as a nation, and its political program, by challenging mainstream western media.

Connecting these, this research proposes to analyse examples of Chinese exoprop on the BRI project, but also to explore how it is perceived and interpreted by people in different social and cultural contexts.

### Substantial Results Expected:

Firstly, this research aims to address the significant gap around Chinese externally-directed propaganda, and secondly, to contribute to the discussion and understanding of how people respond to 'persuasive media'.

The examination both of the tactics of persuasion used, but also the ways in which audiences across diverse countries / cultural contexts perceive this, serves to offer an important contribution to the study of Chinese propaganda, but also communications studies focusing on persuasion in the digital age, media effects, and the ways people critically engage with media.