

# Defining the Building Blocks and the Priority Areas for Cooperation Under the Belt and Road Initiative

**Yaktor Joshua Inusa**

Faculty of Built Environment and Surveying, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 81310 UTM Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia

**Doris Hooi Chyee Toe**

Faculty of Built Environment and Surveying, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 81310 UTM Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia

**Kum Weng Yong**

KW Yong Architect, 70300 Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

## ABSTRACT

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a China's endeavour to globally connect the countries along two major routes. This paper examines the keywords defining the building blocks and priority areas under the BRI and their relationship in order to foster a practical understanding of the BRI for enhancing regional cooperation and connectivity along the routes. The methodology employed was a systematic literature review involving four stages. Firstly, a broad search in the Scopus database (2016-2020) using BRI or similar terms returned  $n=1,710$  articles which were further limited using the keywords: building blocks, priority areas, policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people exchange. Other keywords considered were community and Silk Road. The articles were then screened and assessed resulting in 155 articles reviewed in this study. The review reveals that while the building blocks are the aim motivating the BRI, hence the spirit behind it, the five priority areas provide practical methods through which China and other countries along the Belt and Road routes will focus their collective development. The relationship between the two aspects owes to the fact that people are involved at all spheres of the initiative bringing about emphasis on the people-to-people exchange which is a core part of social dimension in sustainable development. In contribution, this paper presents a unique perspective for looking at the BRI for a focused discussion of its cooperative framework which could serve as a foundation for further research in various sectors.

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## Corresponding Author Contact:

doristhchyeec@utm.my

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## 1. Introduction

As a global project, the Belt and Road Initiative (also known as One Belt One Road) is a China's brain child to connect the countries along two major routes – the “Silk Road Economic Belt” and the “21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road” (Amighini, 2017a; Huang, 2016; Lagutina, 2017; Mingjiang Li, 2015; Youfa Wang et al., 2017). This also came to promote the globalization and mutual inclusiveness which are lacking due to growing gaps in development and rising

protectionist and nationalist stance (Kikuchi, 2018; Y. Li, 2017; W. Liu, 2016; Magri, 2017; Richet et al., 2017). It is a complete scheme for fostering socio-economic collaboration among countries along the Belt and Road region and it is beyond just constructing roads, railways and port facilities (W. Liu, 2016). Strategies similar to the Belt and Road Initiative can be perceived as a product of competitions between policy-makers on the local ground confronted by restrictions from home institutions and society and those in the global arena facing universal restrictions (Y. Li, 2017;

Ngoei, 2018; Y. Qi et al., 2018).

As one of major cornerstones of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the “Silk Road Economic Belt” (SREB) is a reaction to the long deliberated integration process in Eurasia via Russia and others among the largest republics in Central Asia, which eventually resulted in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) establishment in 2015 (Amighini, 2017b). The SREB has three routes: (1) Northwest China and Northeast China to Europe and the Baltic Sea through Central Asia and Russia; (2) Northwest China to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea, passing through Central Asia and West

Asia; and (3) Southwest China through the Indochina Peninsula to the Indian Ocean (Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative, 2017). With a population of about 3 billion, the SREB contains a total area of 50 million square kilometers (Xu et al., 2017).

Meanwhile, the “21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road” (MSR) which is the second of the two key pillars (D. Chen and Yang, 2018) starts from (1) coastal ports of China crossing the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean, stretching to Africa and Europe; and (2) coastal ports of China via the South China Sea to the Pacific Ocean (Huang, 2016).

**Table 1.** *Keywords defining the Belt and Road Initiative*

Keywords Category	Keyword	Source
A. Outline	1. “Silk Road Economic Belt”	(Amighini, 2017a; CCTV, 2017; Huang, 2016; Lagutina, 2017; Mingjiang Li, 2015; Na-Xi et al., 2019; Ying Wang and Chou, 2020; Youfa Wang et al., 2017)
	2. “21 <sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road”	
	3. “Spirit of the Silk Road”	
	4. “Silk Road Fund”	
	5. “Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank” (AIIB)	
	6. “Steering Group for BRI”	
	7. “Vision and Actions”	
	8. “Five-pronged approach”	
B. Building Blocks	1. “Community of shared interests”	(CCTV, 2017; Dunford and Liu, 2019; Khan et al., 2018; Zeng, 2016)
	2. “Community of shared responsibilities”	
	3. “Community with a shared future”	
	4. “Silk Road to green development”	
	5. “Silk Road for health cooperation”	
	6. “Silk Road to innovation”	
	7. “Silk Road to peace”	
C. Priority Areas for Cooperation	1. “Policy coordination”	(CCTV, 2017; Dunford and Liu, 2019; Huang, 2016; Teo et al., 2019; Valderrey et al., 2020; Ying Wang and Chou, 2020; Yin, 2019)
	2. “Infrastructure connectivity”	
	3. “Unimpeded trade”	
	4. “Financial integration”	
	5. “People-to-people exchange”	
D. Economic Corridors	1. “China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor” (CMREC)	(CCTV, 2017; Dunford and Liu, 2019; Hussain, 2017; Iqbal et al., 2019; Jeganaathan, 2017; Menhas et al., 2019; Pradhan, 2018)
	2. “New Eurasian Land Bridge” (NELB)	
	3. “China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor” (CCWAEC)	
	4. “China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor” (CICPEC)	
	5. “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor” (CPEC)	
	6. “Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor” (BCIMEC)	
E. Cooperation Mechanisms	1. “Shanghai Cooperation Organization” (SCO)	(Allison, 2018; CCTV, 2017; Han et al., 2018; Jeganaathan, 2017; Na-Xi et al., 2019; Pepermans, 2018; Svetlicinii, 2018; Zeng, 2016)
	2. “China-ASEAN (10+1) Cooperation”	
	3. “Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation” (APEC)	
	4. “Asia-Europe Meeting” (ASEM)	
	5. “Asia Cooperation Dialogue” (ACD)	
	6. “Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia” (CICA)	
	7. “China-Arab States Cooperation Forum” (CASCF)	
	8. “China-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Strategic Dialogue”	
	9. “Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Economic Cooperation”	

10. “Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation” (CAREC)
11. “Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries” (16+1)
12. “Forum on China-Africa Cooperation” (FOCAC)

#### F. Projects Underway

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “China-Belarus Industrial Park”</li> <li>2. “Gwadar Port Free Zone”</li> <li>3. “Colombo Port City”</li> <li>4. “China Railway Express to Europe”</li> <li>5. “Jakarta-Bandung railway”</li> <li>6. “China-Laos railway”</li> <li>7. “China-Thailand railway”</li> <li>8. “Mombasa-Nairobi railway”</li> <li>9. “Addis Ababa-Adama expressway”</li> <li>10. “Karot hydropower project”</li> </ol> | <p>(CCTV, 2017; M. H. T. Chan, 2018; Das, 2017; Dunford and Liu, 2019; Garlick, 2017; Hu, 2019; Iqbal et al., 2019; Lechner et al., 2018; Noel Dussort and Marchetti, 2019; Panthamit and Chaiboonsri, 2020; Rowedder, 2020)</p> |
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The Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative (2017) considers this description as two main routes of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century MSR. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century MSR will pass the Eastern shores of the Arabian Peninsula across the Red Sea and the Suez Canal to the Mediterranean Sea (Fasulo and Talbot, 2017).

Seeing China’s ambition of extending its reach globally through this initiative, it is important to ask; what are the building blocks, and the areas of focus of the BRI? And how are they related to foster the understanding of the BRI? Table 1 shows the keywords that describe the BRI. To some extent, these keywords give a comprehensive outlook of the initiative. These important keywords are grouped under six categories – outline, building blocks, priority areas for cooperation, economic corridors, cooperation mechanisms, and projects underway. Among these categories, the building blocks and the five priority areas for cooperation are fundamental to the understanding and implementation of the BRI as enshrined in NDRC (2015). So, it is important to focus on the “building blocks” and “priority areas” for cooperation to foster better understanding of the BRI. This paper seeks to examine the “building blocks” and the five “priority areas” for cooperation of the BRI and discuss their relationship.

## 2. Methodology

The methodology for this study employed a systematic literature review procedure as illustrated in Figure 1. This approach involved four stages. Firstly, a search was conducted using the broad topic and the Boolean operator as follows: “Belt and Road Initiative” OR BRI OR “One Belt One Road” OR OBOR from 2016 to 2020. This returned 1,710 (research, review, and conference) articles which were then further limited by keyword search within the result. These keywords employed were building blocks (n=9), priority

areas (n=3), policy coordination (n=20), infrastructure connectivity (n=4), unimpeded trade (n=12), financial integration (n=18) and people-to-people exchange (n=21).

Other keywords considered were community (n=320) and Silk Road (n=728) which were further narrowed by specific keyword search. These keywords returned results as follows: shared interests (n=3), shared responsibilities (n=1) and shared future (n=24) within the term community, and green development (n=12), health cooperation (n=6), innovation (n=145) and peace (n=106) within the term Silk Road. Overall, the first stage returned a total of n=384 articles.

Secondly, the next stage involved removal of duplicates and subsequent screening of the articles. Having removed the duplicates, the number of articles included were n=310. Furthermore, these articles were screened based on the related titles. Also, articles outside the search limit were screened. Therefore, the number of articles included based on related title and those screened outside the search limits were n=221 and n=27 respectively; these were further assessed.

In the third stage, these articles were assessed and included based on their relevance and contribution to this study. The articles included after the assessment were n=134 for those from Scopus database from 2016 to 2020 and n=21 for those outside the limit. Finally, the fourth stage involved the review of the articles. The total number of the articles reviewed were n=155 which distribution is presented in Figure 2; also, as shown in the figure, n=94 articles were cited.

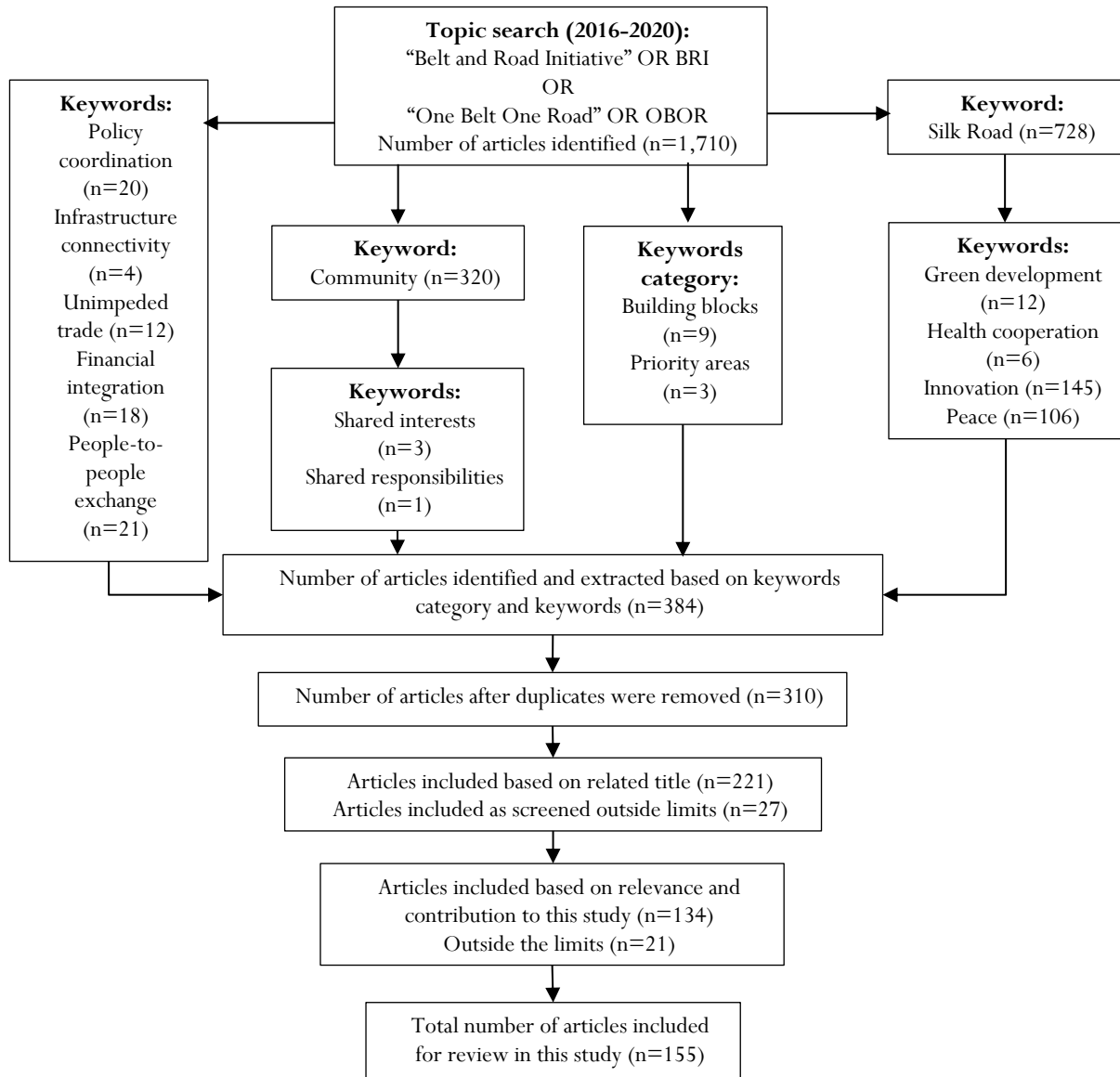


Figure 1. Stages of the review procedure

### 3. The Building Blocks Of The Belt And Road Initiative

The keywords that explain the building blocks of the BRI are as follows: “community of shared interests” (Dunford and Liu, 2019), “community of shared responsibilities”, “community with a shared future” (Akçay and Qingye, 2020; Dong et al., 2018; Hu, 2019; Khan et al., 2018; A. Liu and Guan, 2017; Nordin and Weissmann, 2018; Xiangyang, 2019; Zeng, 2016; Y.-J. Zhang et al., 2020), Silk Road to green development, Silk Road to innovation, Silk Road to peace, and Silk Road for health cooperation (CCTV 2017).

Figure 3 shows the connection of the building blocks with the initiative. As seen in the figure, BRI aimed at developing a global community of shared interests, responsibilities, and with a common future along the Silk Road with the attributes of green development, innovation, peace, and health cooperation. This relationship is considered to be the spirit behind the BRI (NDRC, 2015). When successfully implemented, the BRI is expected to impact the Silk Road and its interconnected regions and subsequently improving the quality of the settlements (Dong et al., 2018; Dunford and Liu, 2019; Hu, 2019; Khan et al., 2018; Zeng, 2016)

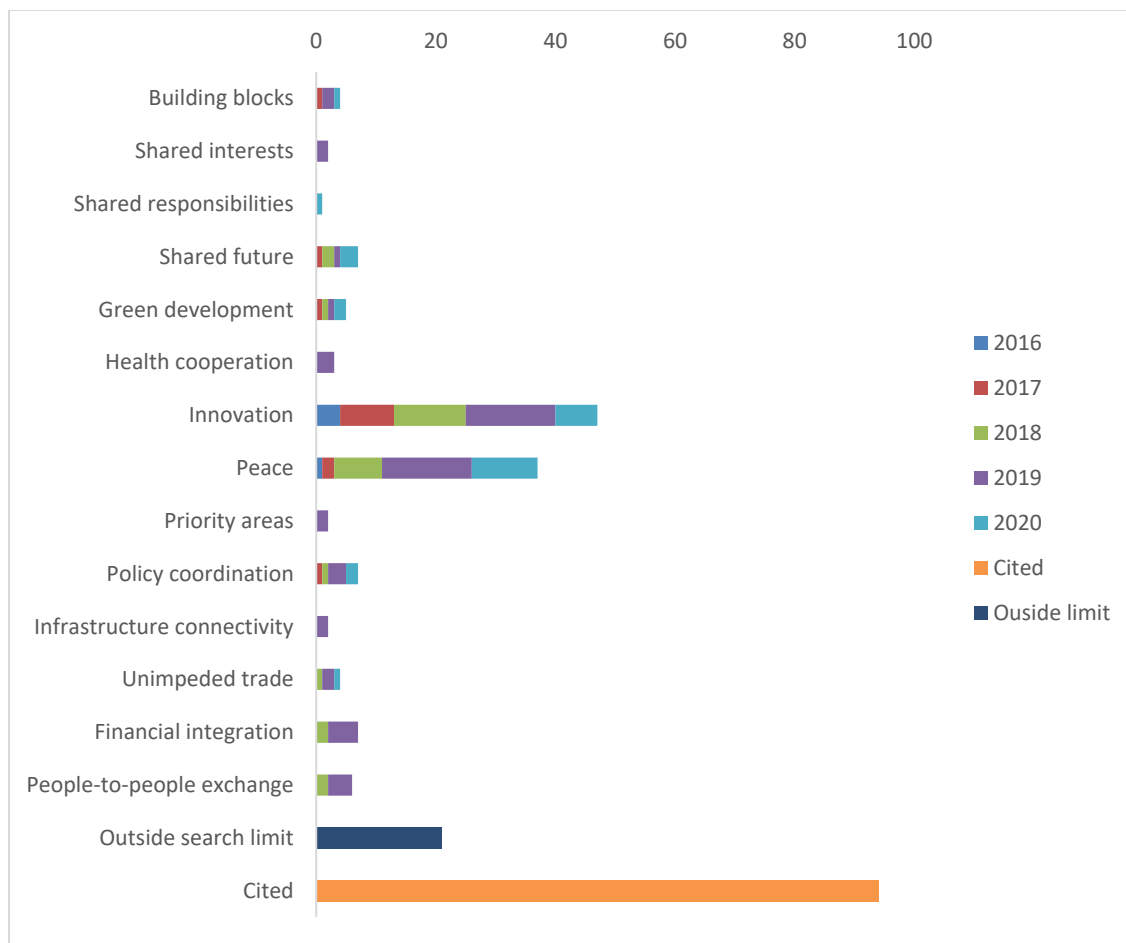


Figure 2. Distribution of articles reviewed and the number of cited articles in this study

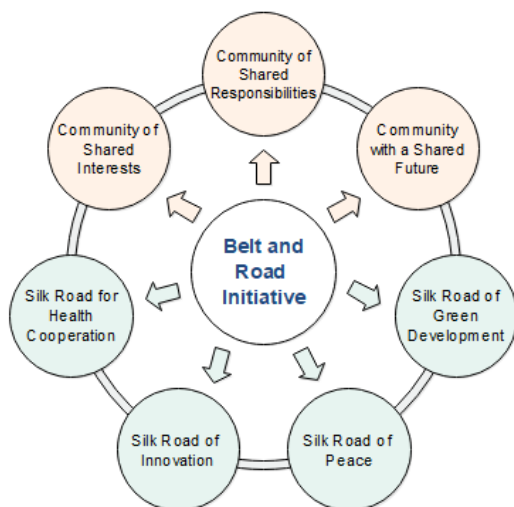


Figure 3. The building blocks of the Belt and Road Initiative

### 3.1 Community: Shared Interests, Responsibilities And Future

In terms of community, three building blocks are identified (Figure 3). Firstly, building a “community of shared interests” is one of the three targets of the BRI, which encourages joining hands to make a brighter future for all countries as the basic interests of mankind are necessary to each country (Liu, 2016; Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative, 2017; Khan *et al.*, 2018). Through the development of a high-speed railway, the network of the coordinated channel and additionally the limit and efficiency of transport would be enhanced, in this way elevating China to frame a “community of shared interests” alongside different countries and regions (Shao *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, the reciprocal interdependence among the individuals with division of labour results into a “community of shared interests” because the individual’s prosperity depends not only on the effort of each but on that of the participants collectively (Dunford and Liu, 2019).

Secondly, forming a “community of shared responsibilities” along with shared interests and common destiny (Zeng, 2016) highlight economic related coordination, socio-cultural extensiveness (A. Liu and Guan, 2017) and environmental control (W. Liu, 2016), which collectively make up the three pillars of sustainable development.

The BRI is a gigantic project from China, aiming at encouraging a base for diversified cooperation and achieving win-win outcomes through shared responsibilities (Y. Li, 2017). Although some exceptions may occur, globalisation is about shared standards which are basic bits of the World Trade Organization (WTO) talks and assertions (Richet et al., 2017).

Finally, the initiative gives new impulse to the building of a community with a shared future for humankind (Dong et al., 2018; Lagutina, 2017). It exhibits a positive vision that the “Chinese Dream” is interconnected with the world dream and all countries cooperate to produce a human community of shared destiny (Khan et al., 2018; Nordin and Weissmann, 2018; Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative, 2017; Pendrakowska, 2018; Xiangyang, 2019) and to attain reciprocal benefits and win-win outcomes (Hu, 2019). Parties might cooperate to make a brighter future for all countries as the regular interests of mankind are crucial to each country and nation and rely upon the advancement of a global community of shared future (Jones, 2020; Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative, 2017). Two core connected components, shared development and shared future, form the basis for this joint globalisation (Khan *et al.*, 2018). Likewise, a significant aspect of the Chinese model of building a community with a shared future for all people is global environmental cooperation (Dong et al., 2018). Energy collaboration is a crucial support and foundation for the BRI, and it is beneficial in promoting stable global energy market and the green energy revolution in BRI nations (Y.-J. Zhang et al., 2020).

### **3.2 Silk Road: Green Development, Innovation, Peace And Health Cooperation**

In terms of Silk Road, four building blocks are recognized (Figure 3). Firstly, tightening involvement on ecological and environmental protection (Minjie Li et al., 2019; Teo et al., 2019), China is committed to building a green Silk Road (Jones, 2020; Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative, 2017). To Belt and Road cooperation practices, China “applies a green development philosophy” which shares its newest ideas, technologies, ecological restoration and progress, environmental protection, and pollution prevention and control, thereby actively fulfilling its responsibilities on crucial matters like sustainability and climate change (Dong et al., 2018; Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative, 2017; Suocheng et al., 2017; Xiheng, 2019). Suocheng *et al.* (2017) suggest that activities relating to tourism be organised particularly at the settlement (city, town or municipal) level as “green development” element. China, with National Agency for International Development Cooperation (NAIDC), is to additionally advance “green development under BRI and environmental diplomacy” (Dong *et al.*, 2018, p. 6). For the unnecessary and mediocre investing nations, and to encourage the China’s thermal power green development, pertinent economic, political and environmental hazard preventive and safety procedures should be reinforced (Yao et al., 2019).

Secondly, it is clear that China is the “world’s second largest economy” with ability to move forward along the orbit of

innovation (Lagutina, 2017). Professional mobility from home and diaspora can be effective vehicles for skills exchange, and for a sending nation, diaspora can be a vital source as well as a driver of research and innovation, technology exchange (Khan et al., 2018; Teo et al., 2019), and skills enhancement (Broadman, 2007; Z. Liu and Xin, 2019). In addition, a path to innovation entails deepened collaboration in frontline disciplines like the artificial intelligence, digital economy, nanotechnology, quantum computing, cloud computing, big data and smart cities (Dunford and Liu, 2019; Feng et al., 2019; Gui et al., 2019). Likewise, modernizing industries through innovation as well as spatial change, and searching new local and global markets are two main solutions to China’s pursuit of new-normal period growth (W. Liu and Dunford, 2016; S.-Z. Qi et al., 2019; Saud et al., 2020). As the export market was hit after the beginning of the 2008-2012 global economic depression, joint policies were being implemented in line with innovation, and other similar development issues in China (Das, 2017; Durrani and Forbes, 2018; Jeganaathan, 2017). For example, “China already has an ambitious plan in its Industrial Masterplan 2025 [which] aimed at bringing at least 10 industries to world leadership” (Heiduk and Sakaki, 2019; Sheng, 2017). As a significant innovation in technology in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the high-speed rail emergence has substantially decreased the travelling time among regions, suggesting considerable improvements at the transportation infrastructural level (F. Li et al., 2020). Innovation and globalisation encourage an inclination towards cooperative alliance and strategic connections among countries (Rauf et al., 2018; Z. Zhang et al., 2019). However, the long-standing economic development factors like innovation in science and technology as well as investment in staff training have been overlooked, and the long-standing economic development of participating nations is influenced (Sun et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2020).

Thirdly, maintaining closer economic ties, and deepening political acceptance; enhancing cultural bonds; encouraging civilizations to learn from one another and develop together; and promoting “mutual understanding, peace and friendship among people of all countries” are the official objectives of the BRI (S. I. Chan and Song, 2020; Cheng, 2016; Khan et al., 2018; Zeng, 2016). Cardinal to the aforementioned, the design of BRI is to foster “regional peace and prosperity” and inhibit conflict between bordering countries (Blah, 2018; Dunford and Liu, 2019; Farooq et al., 2019; Pepermans, 2018). For example, the government of China published its earliest “China’s Arab Policy Paper” in January 2016; this appraised the development and demonstrated the driving principles of the Sino-Arab connection, while setting out a plan for win-win cooperation and restating “China’s dedication to peace and stability in the Middle East” (J. Chen et al., 2018). Similarly, the BRI must endeavor to change the “Euro-Asia Great Game” from one that risks another major war to a sequence of gradual moves towards peace for more growth for the future generation (Sheng, 2017). Until now, China has avoided countries that are not peaceful and safe but with the exception of a few which it had earlier established strategic alliance before the BRI was established; Pakistan is one of these countries (Cheng, 2016; Heiduk and Sakaki, 2019).

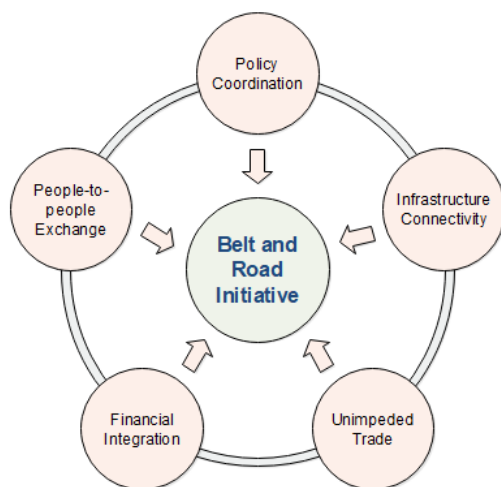
Lastly, added to the BRI, China places premium to advancing participation among the related countries in the anticipation and

control of infectious illnesses, restorative framework and approaches, healthcare education, staff training and interactions, and customary medicine (Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative, 2017; Youfa Wang et al., 2017). As the BRI has pursued developing a new center for health cooperation (branded the Healthy Silk Road), the justification to expand and strengthen connectivity globally will produce a substantial increase in people mobility which may heighten risk of spreading communicable diseases (Gostin, 2018; Gu and Qiu, 2019; J. Li et al., 2019; Murphy, 2018; Tang et al., 2017). Health cooperation among nations plays an essential role under the BRI (Qian et al., 2019). Health is a requisite requirement in promoting humanities in all development processes; it is an essential condition for socio-economic development (J. Li et al., 2019).

#### 4. The Priority Areas For Cooperation Under The Belt And Road Initiative

The priority areas for cooperation are five and they define the implementation methods of the BRI and at the same time give the BRI a focus (Ndzendze and Monyae, 2019). In NDRC (2015), countries along the Silk Road are encouraged to focus on these areas for their development and connectivity in line with the initiative (S. I. Chan and Song, 2020; Yinghui and Teng Teng, 2019).

Figure 4 shows the relationship of the five priority areas for cooperation and the BRI. Though the success of the initiative depends on the influence of the five priorities (Hughes et al., 2020; Jones, 2020), emphasis must be laid on the appropriate areas at a particular point in time according to contextual needs. When the priority areas are well articulated and implemented, they will impact the Belt and Road region, thereby exhibiting the success and quality of the BRI. By 2015, the implementation of the BRI had reached five years, “while the theoretical and empirical research on it is an emerging hot topic in current literature” (Y. Chen et al., 2019).



**Figure 4.** The five priority areas of the Belt and Road Initiative

#### 4.1 Policy Coordination

Policy coordination among the countries in the Silk Road regions (Cheng, 2016) provides serious stability to the major economic endeavors (D. Chen and Yang, 2018). It is also an important factor in facilitating the harmonization of the implementation of issues regarding the other priority areas (Jones, 2020; Song, 2019; Sun et al., 2020). Policy coordination expects that nations along the “Belt and Road corridor” collectively create plans for development and measures to advance cross-border or regional cooperation through equitable consultation to resolve difficulties arising from cooperative undertakings (Valderrey et al., 2020; Ying Wang and Chou, 2020). Furthermore, policy coordination with capacity building under the BRI agenda can support certain BRI nations with fragile governance capacities improve their capabilities in managing environmental threats (Xiheng, 2019).

#### 4.2 Infrastructure Connectivity

Infrastructure connectivity is a critical element of the BRI which is all-embracing in scope covering other areas (Huang, 2016; NDRC, 2015). The main focus of infrastructure connectivity are the “six means of communication” namely rail, highways, marine transport, aviation, pipelines, and aerospace integrated information network (Jones, 2020; Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative, 2017; Valderrey et al., 2020; Ying Wang and Chou, 2020). Infrastructure connectivity, being a “logistics-enabling factor”, encompasses establishing an infrastructure web linking several sub-regions in Asia with other Asian parts, Africa and Europe (Ying Wang and Chou, 2020). Also, infrastructure connectivity is the fundamental guarantor for improving the sustainable development level in the Belt and Road region (Yin, 2019). Therefore, one can suggest that policymakers engaged in the BRI should focus on collectively developing smooth, efficient and secured transportation routes, linking main ports along the Belt and Road, while recognising that facilities construction for infrastructure connectivity can boost “logistics networks” (Valderrey et al., 2020; Ying Wang and Chou, 2020).

#### 4.3 Unimpeded Trade

Trade facilitation, technical standards, improving customs regimes, and harmonization of regional trade agreements (Broadman, 2007) are main contributors for unimpeded trade (Yilmaz and Changming, 2019). Trade and investment cooperation is a “major task” in building the Belt and Road (Cheng, 2016), as well as driving force of the economy of the Silk Road countries (Wu et al., 2020). The institution of unimpeded trade along the Belt and Road is an important issue in the framework of aiding trade relationships; it was ranked the most important factor for logistics advancement under the BRI (Ying Wang and Chou, 2020). “Commissioning of new railway lines enhances trade facilitation in a more basic way” (Y. Li, 2017). Unimpeded trade is the keystone of the BRI and stands for trade liberalisation, trade barrier removal and free commerce promotion (Song, 2019; Taidong, 2019; Valderrey et al., 2020). Efforts to eradicate the trade environmental impact will be crucial to the enduring cooperation between China and nations along the Belt and Road while promoting unimpeded trade (Cuiyun and Chazhong,

2020).

#### 4.4 *Financial Integration*

Financial integration (Amighini, 2017b; D. Chen and Yang, 2018) serves as a cornerstone of the BRI (Cheng, 2016; Huang, 2016). The BRI will operate on a broad range of cross-border financial policy issues like currency convertibility and settlement, Asian bond market and China-ASEAN Banking Consortium. The initiative anticipates to enhance Asian monetary stability (Huang, 2016; Ying Wang and Chou, 2020). For instance, the Philippine Central Bank in October 2017 formally included the renminbi as to its international currency reserves thereby joining over 50% of BRI nations that have earlier adopted this approach (Rabena, 2018). Additionally, bilateral and multilateral cooperation financial system can be improved through finance institutions for regional development like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Silk Road Fund and the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) New Development Bank (Ying Wang and Chou, 2020). Financial integration, possibly, the most attractive BRI benefit is the prospective ease of obtaining finance from the funding institutions sustaining the initiative; member nations may be granted long-term loans under satisfactory situations for infrastructure and other project investments towards modernising facilities and improving the economy locally (Valderrey et al., 2020).

#### 4.5 *People-To-People Exchange*

As the BRI aims to improve connectivity among Asia, Europe, and parts of Africa in the five priority areas, people-to-people exchange is crucial (Amighini, 2017b; NDRC, 2015). In providing public support, infrastructure and facilities, it naturally relates to the two aspects of interactions among the people and governments within the regions to facilitate policy coordination (Cheng, 2016). Cross-border tourism, disease control, joint research facilities for laboratories and political parties and parliamentary ties are also crucial means of facilitating mutual agreement and trust (Huang, 2016; Valderrey et al., 2020). The authorities of BRI stress the need to establish people-to-people exchange (Valderrey et al., 2020; Yuniarto, 2019). People-to-people- exchange, for example, should take foreign communities or documented immigrants into cognisance as against the number of nations that a bearer of a particular passport may visit (Valderrey et al., 2020). In real situation, interaction is possibly the area with less outcomes to this day as many people are hesitant to accept immigrants in their countries, particularly because of cultural differences; also, there is a prevalent fear that immigrants may deny the locals jobs and opportunities (Valderrey et al., 2020).

### 5. *Discussion*

The questions in this research were “what are the building blocks, and the areas of focus of the BRI? And how are they related to foster the understanding of the BRI?” Having considered what the building blocks and the priority areas for cooperation of the BRI are, the question on how they are related to foster the understanding of the BRI is pertinent.

The aim of the BRI is to build a Silk Road community of shared interests, responsibilities and with a common future to exhibit the quality of green development, innovation, peace, and health cooperation. To achieve this, the BRI emphasises on focusing attention on the five priority areas for cooperation which can be considered as its implementation methods. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that when the five priority areas for cooperation are implemented appropriately, it will influence the BRI which will in turn affect the Silk Road regions as a global community to exhibit the qualities mentioned earlier.

These qualities are the indicators of the success of the BRI. Liu (2016) considers building a community of shared interests, responsibilities and with a shared future as “three targets,” which presents economic incorporation and cultural abundance. The Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative (2017) has stressed the need for all Silk Road countries to forge a closer community of a shared future-oriented development model, sustain the open universal economy, and search for fresh sources for progress. For example, “in building the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor, China has been working vigorously to raise awareness of green development” (Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative 2017, p 37). The advent of global production operations has changed the world market into a place where there is very rapid innovation with striking decreases in product prices, rapid improvements in qualities, quick replacement of older product with new ones, and a premium on the rapid digital communication ability (Broadman, 2007). As social and political instability has profound economic bases, finding new enduring growth facilitators is exigent for a sustainable revival of the global economy and lasting peace (Y. Li, 2017). “Health indicators and social, economic, and environmental factors” (Wang et al. 2017) are cardinal to the success of the BRI.

As the initiative’s aim is to strengthen infrastructure, achieve technical standardization and progressively form a facilities network to link the Silk Road regions in Asia, Europe and Africa (Huang, 2016), policy coordination is crucial for the successful implementation of the BRI. Removing barriers to facilitate investments is important to unimpeded trade. When financial cooperation and support are emphasized, economic growth is eminent (Huang, 2016). Policy coordination requires people’s cooperation to succeed. Therefore, people-to-people exchange must be encouraged as it is one of the “two aspects of relationships among the people and governments within the regions” (Cheng, 2016) to make the initiative successful.

The building blocks forming the composition of the BRI are the communities and the routes. By way of analogy, just as a blue print contains the details of the components for constructing a building, the BRI is the “blue print” with specifications of the communities and routes as its building blocks for developing the Silk Road. As the components of the building are joined by different means depending on the part, so the communities and the routes which are the building blocks of the BRI could be joined by means of transportation and communication. For these to be realized, countries along the Silk Road have to focus on the five priority areas for cooperation under the BRI. Looking at this from the point of sustainable development, the relationship between the building blocks and the five priority



areas (both within the confines of environmental and economic dimensions) can be seen in the involvement of people (social dimension) at all spheres of the initiative for various purposes.

The building blocks on the one hand include communities (inhabited by people) connected by routes through which people move and communicate. On the other hand, the five priority areas which include policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade and financial integration involve people's interactions as discussed earlier. Therefore, it is implied that people-to-people exchange of the five priority areas stands as an essential link between the building blocks and the priority areas. Furthermore, the significance of the people-to-people exchange has been demonstrated in a detailed and systematic content analysis of documentary videos (CCTV, 2016) comprising more than 200 episodes from 2016 to 2018. As part of a broader research along with this study, the detailed and systematic content analysis presents that although all of the five priority areas of the BRI were covered in the interviews with the locals, more than 80% of the documentary database focused on the core framework of people-to-people exchange in all continents.

## 6. Conclusions

Having examined community of shared interests, responsibilities and with a shared future along the Silk Road to green development, innovation, peace and for health cooperation as building blocks of the BRI, this paper also considered the initiative's five priority areas which are policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people exchange. While community and Silk Road as the building blocks remain the aim and likewise define the true spirit of the BRI, the five priority areas for cooperation are the implementation methods giving the BRI a focus for member countries to channel their resources in developing the region. Therefore, the building blocks and the five priority areas work together for the implementation of the BRI to bring about a win-win achievement, where emphasis is laid on making a green, peaceful and well-connected global community without deviation from the main agenda. The relationship between the two aspects owes to the fact that people are involved at all spheres of the initiative bringing about emphasis on the people-to-people exchange which is a core part of social dimension in sustainable development.

As a contribution, this paper explained the Belt and Road Initiative in a unique way from two main clusters of the keywords and their relationship in order to focus discussion on its cooperative framework which could serve as a basis for further research in various sectors. However, the extent to which the five priority areas are achieved is a subject of further research which could be done in the context of "projects underway". Also, the priority areas have potentials to drive the implementation of the BRI and require further research. This could be done by investigating the unique importance of people-to-people exchange to the BRI and its usefulness in modelling for the sustainable development of the Silk Road community.

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