

2019. "The Belt and Road five years on: international interview with Pascale Massot" ("一带一路"五年评估全球访谈: 马思佳), FTChinese (中文网), March 20  
<http://www.ftchinese.com/story/001081940?full=y>

The screenshot shows the FT Chinese website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'FT中文网' and '登录 | 免费注册'. Below it are various category links like '首页', '中国', '全球', '经济', '金融市场', etc. The main content area features a large banner for the 'Belt and Road International Cooperation Summit Forum' (BRF) held in Beijing, China, on May 14, 2017. The article title is '“一带一路”五年评估全球访谈: 马思佳'. The text below the title discusses the interview with Pascale Massot, an assistant professor at the University of Ottawa, who was interviewed on December 15, 2018. The article includes a list of related topics such as '一带一路', '加拿大', '中加关系', and '海外投资'. There are also social media sharing icons and a '收藏' (Bookmark) button.

## English language interview transcript

Interviewee: Pascale Massot (马思佳), Assistant Professor, School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa, former Senior Advisor to the Minister of International Trade and Policy Advisor responsible for Asia to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada.

Interviewer, Xue Li, professor for University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (UCASS)

Site: The Royal Oak, Ottawa

Day: December 15, 2018

Assistant to work out the recordings: Liu He, Graduate Student for Chinese Foreign Affairs University.  
Proofreader, Xue Li

This copy has been verified by Pascale Massot

**Q1. In your personal opinion, what is the main reason for Xi Jinping to propose BRI at that time?**

This question can be answered in a few different ways. I do believe that to a large degree, Xi Jinping wanted to devise a project or a plan that expressed a coherent vision for China internationally. It marks a shift from a more passive to a more ambitious position. At the same time, it denotes more self-assured and multifaceted regional behaviour. There is also a component where it allows China to solve some domestic overcapacity issues. It gives China a bit of a room for maneuver in terms of exporting some of their overcapacity to countries that need infrastructure building. There is also an economic component, as connectivity should facilitate commercial exchanges along the Belt and Road. In addition, it serves to position China as a regional shaper of relations – economic, financial, human, even security – in the region.

**Xue: Which is the most important one, economically or politically or culturally?**

I think the components are all related. It's an expression of a multifaceted vision for China in the region.

**Q2. What are the main advantages and disadvantages of BRI for China?**

As for advantages, I think that China does want to have influence, it does want to shape its immediate neighborhood and it also wants to

exercise leadership. The BRI allows China to do these things. It also gives coherence to a vision. Instead of doing these things separately, it shows ambition, leadership and coherence. Another potentially positive side is that there are very serious infrastructure needs that need to be fulfilled in the region. In many of these cases, if China was not there, nobody else would be investing. Central Asia needs infrastructure building, there is no question about that. So I think that is one of the number one benefits. Obviously, it also helps China strategically. It can be a benefit to China, because it helps position China across the Road, and across the Belt in the way where it can increase its presence, and deepen its relationships.

**Xue: What is the disadvantage?**

It is interesting because every component, every potential advantage has its own potential drawback. And so, for example, the coherent vision, the leadership, can be a positive thing, but if it is perceived as a little bit too strategic and too assertive, then it becomes a disadvantage. In one sense, it is a perception issue; it depends on where one sits. But in another sense, it is also about the way in which China chooses to deliver the BRI. China can pursue projects in a way that is mostly good for everybody or maybe it can become a little bit of a burden. It is agreed that there are infrastructure needs. But if projects are not delivered sensitively, if local economies are burdened with too much debt, if local populations are not consulted and involved, then the risks to the local economy and to China are really high.

Essentially, I think one of the risks for China is to do too much too quickly, to cause some resentment in the local population and to fund some projects that maybe should not have been funded. The BRI has already run into some challenges in many countries. I think China realizes some of this is happening and there is a little bit of learning that is occurring. This is a new initiative, and it is normal for there to be lessons learned and readjustments.

**Q3. Do you know some typical cases related to BRI in Canada?**

The geographical limits of the BRI are unclear. Canadian stakeholders can participate in different ways, but it is unclear whether Canadian projects per se can be formally part of the BRI.

**Xue: No agreement in Canada, a general agreement between governments?**

Following the Economic and Financial Strategic Dialogue in Beijing in November 2018, Canada agreed to “send a high-level delegation to attend the second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2019”. Both sides also agreed to “enhance practical cooperation on investment and financing, to promote collaboration among financial institutions, to encourage private sector participation, and to explore financing cooperation opportunities in third markets, including those participating in the Belt and Road Initiative.”

**Q4. Did you observe any kind of the change of Chinese foreign policy after Xi proposed the BRI?**

I think the shift in foreign policy happened at the same time as the BRI. In many ways, the BRI is one of the main embodiments of it. It is part of the Xi Jinping era. The shift is a foreign policy that is a little bit more assertive, and a little bit less “Tao Guang Yang Hui”(韬光养晦, hide one’s capacities and bide one’s time). The general understanding is that China has arrived at a space where it feels like it can be a little bit more assertive internationally, although there are debates about this in China itself.

**Q5. How does BRI affect China’s national image? better, worse or no change?**

If we are speaking about the impact of the BRI on China’s image in Canada, I would say that Canadian people still don’t know very much about the BRI.

**Xue: Even the businessman and scholars?**

General knowledge about the BRI is low. Even some of the businesspeople who have visited China don’t know very much about it. Those who do know about it, and think they can benefit from it, probably perceive it positively. Some people know about it and do think that there are many risks, and so they may have mixed feelings. But I think most Canadians would have no opinion at this point. Depending on how you go about explaining to Canadians what it consists of, I think many Canadians would be open about it.

I think that the basic argument that China is providing infrastructure

to countries that need it is pretty strong. There are other kinds of concerns and there are potential risks, but I think most Canadians will recognize that investment in infrastructure in countries that are developing is important.

**Q7. Xi said BRI will be a Century Project. In your point of view, is BRI sustainable in general?**

It's a very good question. I think that is potential to learn and readjust. If we call the first five years, 2013 to now, the first phase of the BRI, what should the second phase look like? I don't think anyone would argue that the way that everything was done was perfect. It is normal for a big initiative like this to need some re-adjustments. And I think that in terms of the environment, but also in terms of economic sustainability and sustainability of the relationships, China has encountered a few challenges along the way, challenges in Myanmar, challenges in Pakistan, challenges in Malaysia, challenges in the Maldives...And so probably China needs to reflect on how to go forward. If it is truly going to be win-win, when there are setbacks, you have to understand why. How can initiatives be better accepted by local populations? It is normal for every large country involved abroad, like the US before and like China now, to face some challenges. The true testament to the future of the BRI I think will be China's capacity to adapt, learn and improve.

**Q 8. When China try propose BRI overseas, do you agree SOE works**

**with foreigners or private enterprises works better? Is there a big difference?**

I think that in China there are very many different types of SOEs, and many different types of private companies. There are SOEs who are used to working overseas. They have good governance practices, and they are actually quite experienced in delivering big projects. They have started to work on developing better relationships with local populations. In Canada, for example, we have CNOOC here, a SOE. It has developed a program where every year it takes dozens of Canadian Small and Medium Enterprises who work in the environmental sector back to China to connect with potential partners.

**Xue: What do you mean by environmental companies?**

Companies involved in green technologies. It is a very interesting initiative and it is quite very well received in Canada. So different Chinese SOEs have different track records. I would say the same for private Chinese companies. Some are doing well, others not so well. Some smaller private companies or smaller SOEs have less experience working abroad for instance. I think beyond ownership type, what is important is whether the company has developed practices that enable it to deal overseas in a way that is sophisticated and adapted to the local environment and with modern best practices. I think that state enterprises can do that. And I think private enterprises can do that. But not all enterprises do it.

**Q 10 Do you think Canada government will make a decision to connect BRI or make better use of it?**

As mentioned above, regarding the BRI, in November 2018 the Canadian and Chinese governments agreed to cooperate on investment, financing and private sector participation, as well as to explore financing cooperation opportunities in third markets. The business community is starting to raise awareness. Another component is Canada's participation in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which opens the door to more opportunities for engagement down the road.