

A review of the literature on the Belt and Road Initiative with factors influencing the transport and logistics

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Abstract: This paper reviews the literature concerning transport and logistics in the context of the Belt and Road initiative. The relevant literature has been collected systematically from the Scopus database over a period of 7 years since the Belt and Road initiative was initiated by the Chinese government in 2013. We adopt a content analysis methodology involving a four-step process. The aims of this study are fivefold: first, to analyze the collected studies according to the year of publication, the publication outlet, the countries of the corresponding author's institution, etc.; second, to analyze the distribution of papers among different topics—including transport, logistics and related factors, which can have a significant effect on transport and logistics—along with the distribution of papers according to the methodology used to study these topics; third, to classify the attitudes of the reviewed papers on the Belt and Road initiative (BRI) and its impact on transport and logistics and to examine these views in relation to the countries discussed in these papers; fourth, to interpret why it is important to involve the BRI in each paper and how the BRI can influence transport and logistics; and finally, to identify research gaps and further research opportunities.

Keywords: Literature review, the Belt and Road initiative (BRI); transport and logistics; content analysis; research opportunities

1. Introduction

The Belt and Road initiative (BRI) was announced by the Chinese government in 2013. It is a global development program to connect Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks with the aim of improving regional integration, increasing trade and stimulating economic growth. The initiative defines five major priorities: policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds (State Information Center, 2019). There are two wings within the BRI: the Silk Road Economic Belt

(SREB) and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR). The former is concerned with overland routes for road and rail transport along the SREB, while the latter refers to the sea routes for maritime transport along the MSR (Lee et al., 2017).

The physical foundation of BRI is to establish regional connectivity involving infrastructure development and investments. Connectivity is directly associated with transport demand and logistics supply. There has been a significant impact of BRI on transport and logistics in the following aspects:

First, the BRI can influence transport directly by investing in the transportation infrastructure. In the context of the BRI, financial support will be offered to promote investment and trade in the region through financing platforms (Chen and Yang, 2018). As the BRI will promote the transport infrastructure along the BRI, including railways, ports, etc. (PRC State Council, 2019). For example, on December 12, 2016, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) claimed the loan for Oman, a country along the MSR, to construct the port infrastructure of Dukum (AIIB, 2016).

Second, in the context of BRI, Chinese enterprises have entered into foreign markets and the surplus capacity produced by China will be exported. These increasing exports due to BRI will boost the transport demand from China to countries along the MSR and promote port investment accordingly. For example, the world-leading CRTSIII high-speed rail track developed by Yinlong Co., Ltd. will represent the core technology of China's high-speed rail. With the BRI entering the international market, this will create demand for approximately \$5.8 billion during the "13th Five-Year" period, and Shanghai Hugong actively followed up the development of the BRI, focusing the growth of the economy along the MSR. In 2016, the sales in the countries along the BRI increased by 22.52% (Eastmoney, 2019). China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC) has made smooth progress in overseas projects such as the Cambodian Vehicle Passive Monitoring and Location System and Brunei Intelligent Public Transport System. The company's electric power equipment has also won the bid for Nepal Electric Power Test Station, and its business has spread into more than 30 countries around the world (Eastmoney, 2019).

Third, the global expansion of industries and the transfer of industries to the countries along the MSR will also affect the pattern of transportation demand. In the context of the BRI, many companies have accelerated the process of globalization. For example, JEISAI Technology Co., Ltd. responded to the call of the state, and actively set up subsidiaries in Southeast Asia. By replicating the successful experience of JEISAI Indonesia, the company has developed other international telecommunication technology services and sales of telecommunication equipment in Southeast Asia, such as Thailand, The Philippines, etc. (Eastmoney, 2019); In response to the BRI, XCMG Construction Machinery, based in the Indian market has entered the market of construction machinery in South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia and East Africa, and achieved

the globalization strategy of the company. In 2016, the company announced that it would spend 250 million dollars to construct a machinery manufacturing base in Chennai, India. Due to the relocation of these manufactory industries, there will be an increase in export from countries along the MSR to countries around the world, which will boost the port/shipping demand along the MSR.

There are only a small number of literature reviews on the BRI, especially the ones focused on the effect of the BRI on transport and logistics, among which, Blanchard (2016) comprehensively reviewed documents, speeches by decision makers, official Chinese government media, academic journal articles, pieces in leading policy publications, think tank studies, blogs and Op-Ed pieces by academics, researchers and policymakers, and international mass media on China's twenty-first-century Maritime Silk Road initiative (MSRI) to highlight the narratives surrounding it, its central features, its potential objectives, and the challenges affecting its implementation. Similarly, Lim (2016) gathered, consolidated and reviewed the current level of information, and presented different interpretations of the BRI, the economic and political implications of the BRI and possible challenges that it would encounter. Saleh et al. (2018) reviewed the academic papers published over a period from 2015 to 2018 with the aim to determine the nature and goals of the BRI. Lin et al. (2018) reviewed all the relevant funded projects in China from the year of 2014 to 2016 to reveal the pattern and trend of research on BRI, e.g., the degree of centralization of research institutions and provinces of the funded projects; the number of funded projects of each principal investigator; and the topics of projects supported by the funds. Sidaway and Woon (2017) reviewed Chinese-language writings on the ideas of the Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road that have proliferated in the last few years. The above five literature reviews mainly discuss the aim, purposes, development, and challenges of the BRI, which can help readers to have a better understanding about the BRI but is less related to transport and logistics.

There are some literature reviews which are related to transport and logistics in the context of the BRI. Wan et al. (2017) presented a systematic review on transportation resilience with the emphasis on its definitions, characteristics, research methods in the context of BRI and established new horizons for relevant research topics within the context of the BRI. However, their work only concentrated on the transportation resilience. Lee et al. (2017) provided an overview of the BRI, focusing on its key structural elements, such as transport corridors, city clusters, dry ports, infrastructure, zoning, and area development and identified the expected impacts of the BRI on trade and the implications on structural changes in transportation systems, port networks, and international logistics. However, they only searched the literature from China's CSSCI journals, which appeared to have a relatively limited number of papers on the BRI published in English. In addition, they focused on maritime transport rather than broad transport and logistics subjects. Thurer et al. (2019) conducted a broad systematic review of the literature to assess how China's

BRI is portrayed, based on which, this paper also analyzed the likely impact of the BRI on the location decisions and supply chain flows by reviewing papers related to supply chain configuration, supply chain resilience, sustainable SCM, and cross-border SCM. These reviewed papers are not limited to those in the context of the BRI. However, they have not analyzed the trend of methodologies used in the existing research or the trend of the impact which can influence the supply chain in the context of the BRI.

It can be concluded that there is lack of comprehensive literature review about the impacts of BRI on transport and logistics such as port, shipping, road/rail/air transport, trade demand, and value chain, analyzing the trend of the existing studies and the providing future research opportunities.

Additionally, there is no research on the attitude on BRI and the effect of the attitude on transport and logistics. This paper attempts to fill the research gap. The aims of this review were fivefold: first, to study the major research trends by categorizing papers according to year of publication, topics, method used (such as text description, model establishment & numerical study, or empirical analysis), and the number of citations; second, to discuss the research gaps and research opportunities, which will contribute to enriching the existing literature; third, to analyze how the influences of the BRI on the transport and logistics were considered; fourth, to identify the degree of recognition and the attitudes of researchers from different regions and different institutions toward the influence of the BRI and the trend of the recognition and attitudes by classifying the papers on the basis of the geographic region and year of publication; e.g., some of the existing papers consider the influence of the BRI itself by analyzing how the transportation demand will change due to the policies and others study the problem of transport and logistics by considering the current improvement of infrastructure such as the New Eurasian Land Bridge rail services and newly invested ports along Maritime Silk Road; and finally, to indicate research gaps and research opportunities in the Section 5.6.

2. Methodology

The objective of this paper is to provide a comprehensive literature review on the influence of the BRI on transport and logistics. Specifically, we would like to analyze the trend of relevant studies, the coverage of the topics, the attitudes of international researchers to the BRI, and the future research opportunities. These purposes can be achieved by applying the content analysis methodology (Mayring, 2004), which is commonly used for reviewing literature in the field of operations management (OM) (Shukla and Jharkharia, 2013; Narayanamurthy and Gurumurthy, 2016), supply chain management (Fredriksson and Liljestrand, 2015; Wu et al., 2016; Oliveira et al., 2016; Behzadia et al., 2018), etc. Thus, we adopt the content analysis methodology in this paper.

There are four key steps in the content analysis methodology, including:

Step 1: Material Collection: to collect suitable literature that is related to the BRI and transport and logistics.

Step 2: Descriptive Analysis: to perform statistical analysis on the collected papers from various aspects, e.g., the year of publication, publication outlet, the countries of the corresponding author's institution, and the recognition degree of the BRI among authors working in different countries.

Step 3: Category Selection: to identify structural attributes and corresponding analytic categories, such as topic and methodology, and categorize the collected material. We will also map the attitudes toward the BRI, analyze how transport and logistics will be influenced, and interpret how and why the BRI was taken into consideration in each paper.

Step 4: Material evaluation: to find the trends and gaps based on the collected papers. This is to provide opportunities and directions for scholars in the future in the area of the BRI and its impact on transport and logistics.

The detailed application of the above four steps in our research context will be presented in Section 3.5.

3. Material Collection

The process of collecting the papers is shown as follows:

Step 1-1: research articles published from 2013 are collected from the Scopus database (February 22nd, 2019), which was launched by Elsevier in November 2004 and is the largest abstract and citation (A&I) database in the world. The database contains more than 20,500 peer-reviewed publications from 5,000 publishing houses worldwide (including all periodicals published by publishers such as Elsevier, Springer/Kluwer, Nature, Science, etc.). Conference papers, book series, patents, etc. date back to 1823 at the earliest. The keywords: One Belt One Road, Belt and Road initiative, the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) are used to search the reviewed studies.

Step 1-2: to restrict the search to articles relevant to the scope of this study, the following inclusion criteria were used: papers published in journals and conferences, papers in the fields which are related to transport and logistics directly or the fields which could influence transport and logistics. We classify the papers by using 12 factors: geopolitics, international relationship, cooperation, diplomacy, investment & financial services, economy, industry, trade, infrastructure, logistics & supply chain (shipping, transport, port), and place them into 3 groups: politics & policy (PP), environmental dimensions (ED) and transport and logistics (TL). As is shown in Figure 1, the factors in the left-side dashed-line box are related to PP, which can influence the factors in the middle dashed-line box, which are regarded as ED. Then, the ED can further influence the demand and supply of TL. As is shown in the right-side dashed-line box, we separate the transport and logistics into 5 categories, including port/warehouse, shipping, road/rail/air, trade demand and

value chain according to the keywords that commonly appeared in the reviewed papers.

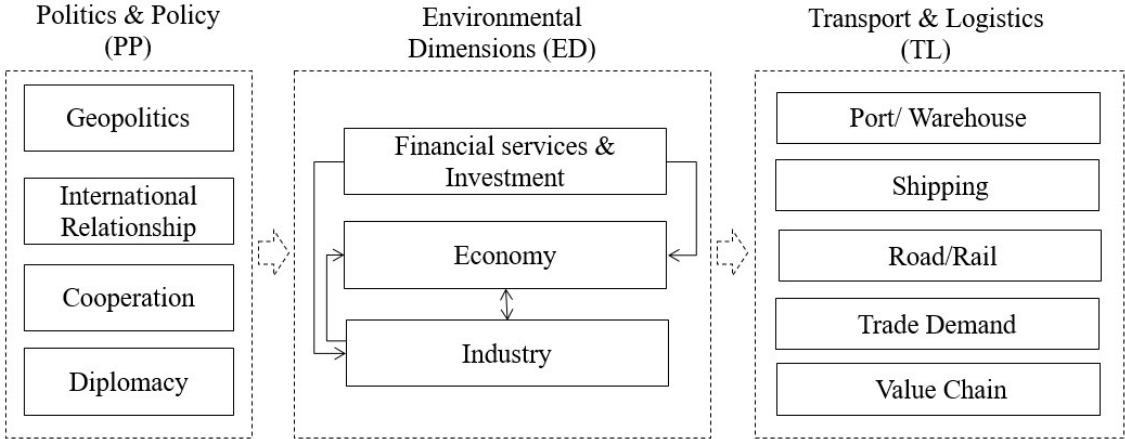


Figure 1 Factors influencing transport and logistics in the context of the BRI

The studies which are related to this review topic of transport and supply chain, such as history (Benedictow, 2013), culture and the ecological environment of countries along the MSR, etc. are removed from the reviewed list. In addition, we reduced the papers which are without English abstracts. Then, we can obtain the initial literature list that will be reviewed in this paper. Thus, the literature can be reduced from 227 to 174.

Step 1-3: we collect all the references cited by the papers above and add all the papers collected that contain the keywords mentioned in step 1 and are related to the factors shown in Figure 1 into the paper list obtained in step 2, then remove duplicates and obtain the updated paper list.

4. Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis was carried out on the literature that was gathered in step 1. In this section, we classify the collected studies and perform a statistical analysis to provide the basis for a clustering analysis according to the type of documents, the number of studies from each journal, the timeline distribution, the region of the first author's affiliation, the cooperation among authors whose affiliations are not in the same countries, the number of studies published by each author, the publishers of the reviewed studies, etc.

First, we classify 174 studies based on the document type. As is shown in Figure 2, 127 studies reviewed in the paper are journal papers, accounting for 74.03% of the reviewed studies.

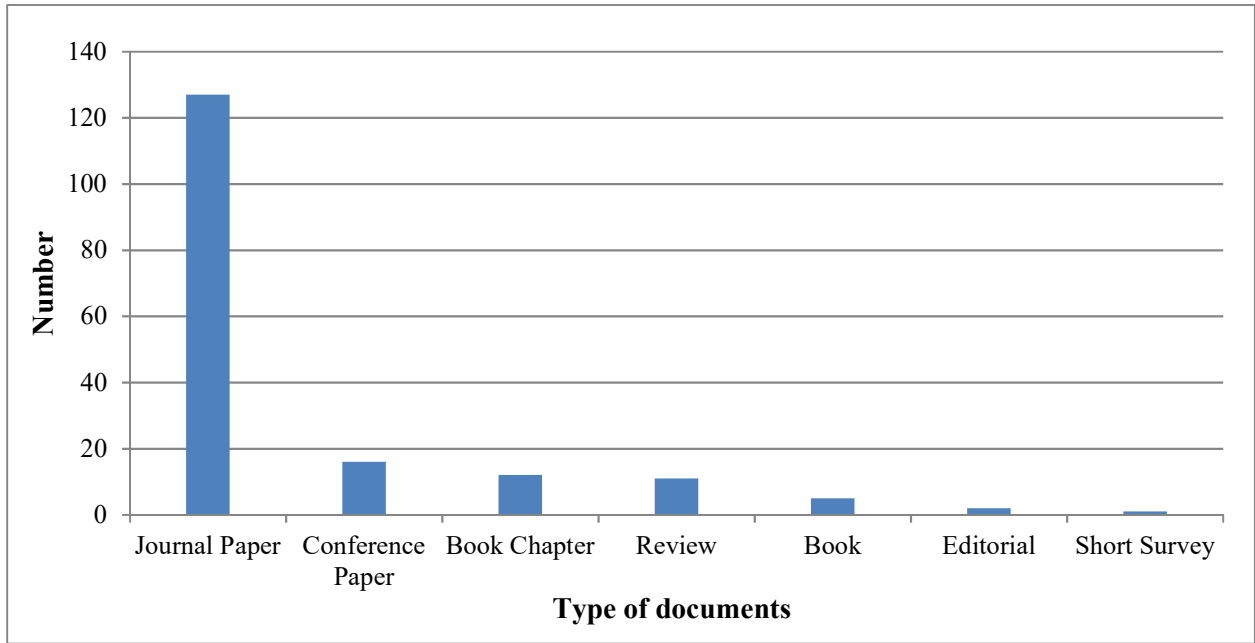


Figure 2. The number of studies of each document

In addition, we analyze the journals that have published at least 2 of the 127 papers, and the results are shown in Figure 3.

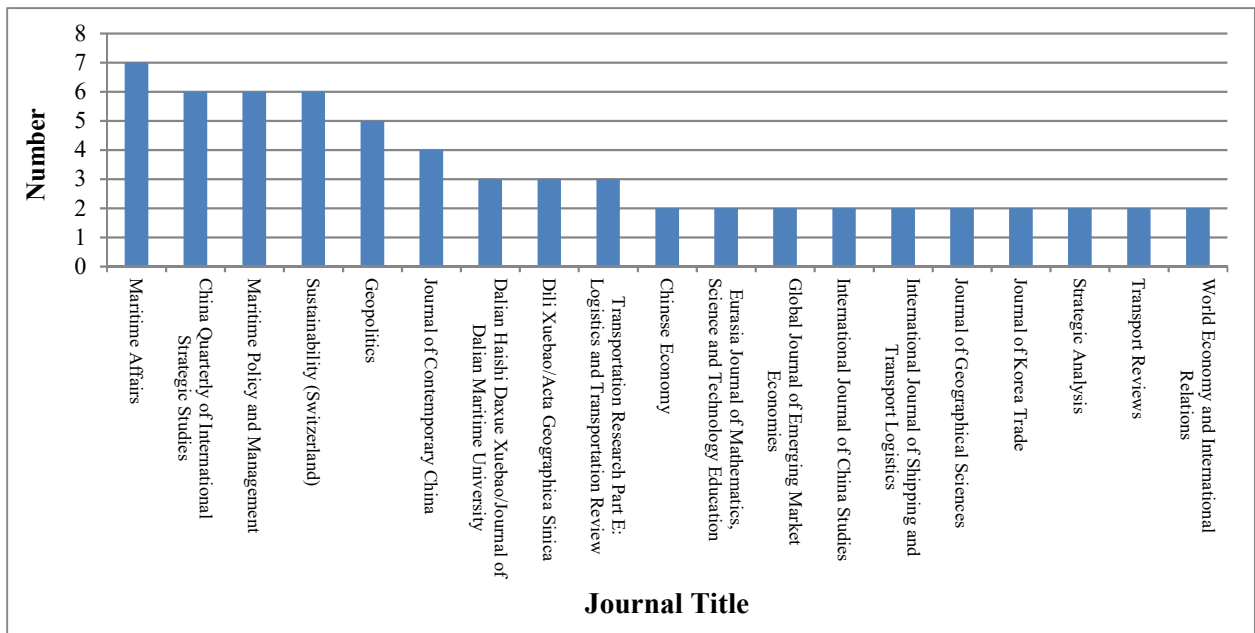


Figure 3. The number of studies of each journal

Second, we analyze the timeline distribution of these studies. Figure 4 plots the timeline distribution of reviewed studies from 2013 to 2018. It is evident that the BRI has become a topic of interest, and the amount of related literature has been increasing in recent years. The reason for this trend could be that: 1) as more news reports about the cooperation, policy and development due to the BRI have been released, the BRI has garnered a great deal of attention. Moreover, the earlier papers in this field pointed out the significance of the Maritime Silk Road, which helped in

understanding how the MSR influenced the economy, politics, transport, the supply chain, etc., which pushed more scholars to do more research in this field; 2) with the implementation of the BRI, there are large amounts of data about investment, trade, etc. being released, based on which, scholars can do more research on the effect of the BRI.

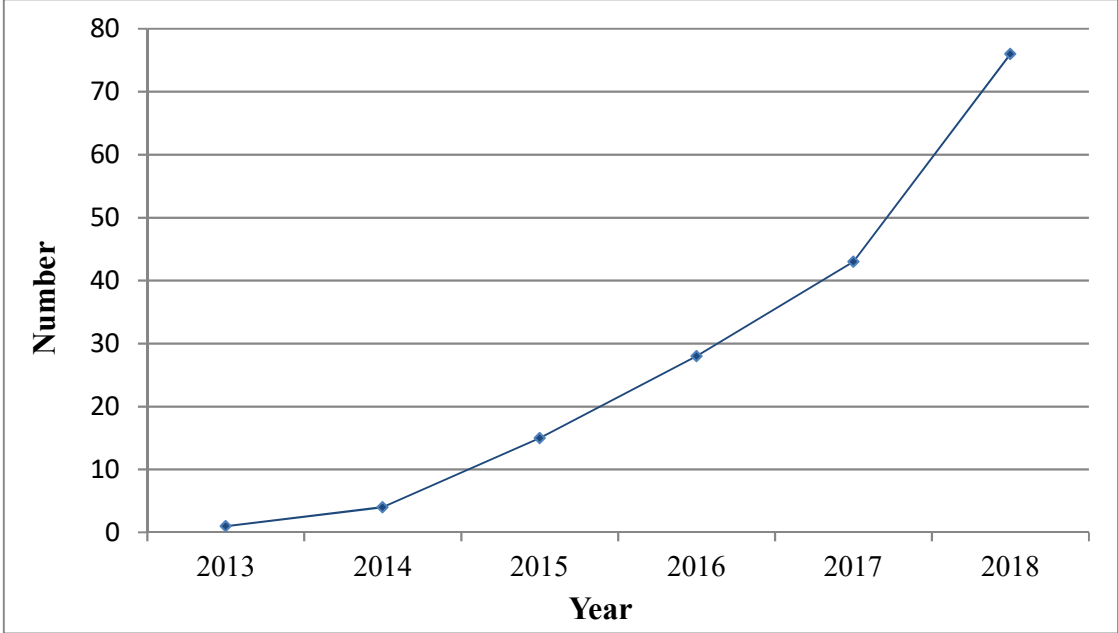


Figure 4. The Timeline distribution of reviewed studies

Third, studies are also classified based on the number of authors (Figure 5 and Figure 6). Studies with one author accounted for 43.6%, and 80% of the literature was completed by 3 authors or less.

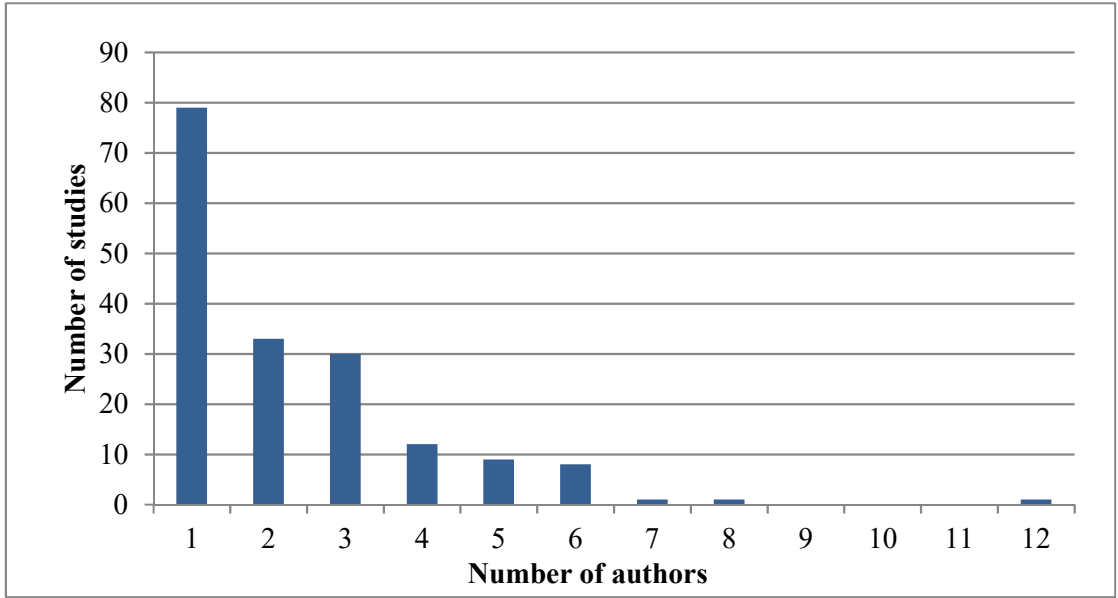


Figure 5. Number based on count of authorships per study

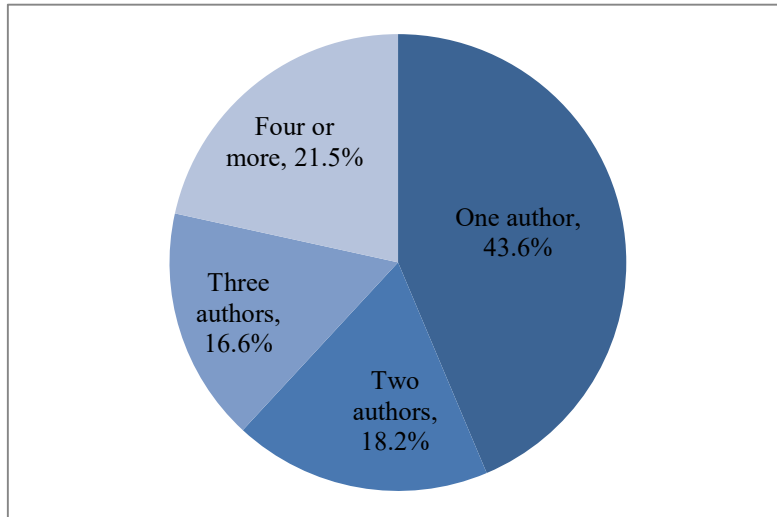


Figure 6. Percentage based on count of authorships per study

Fourth, we also analyze the countries of the first author's affiliation. As is shown in Figure 7, among the regions of the first author's affiliation for 171 studies (affiliation information of another 3 studies among the 174 reviewed cannot be found), 98 affiliations are in China. This is most likely because the MSR is proposed by the Chinese government. Consequently, there are more news, statements, and other information being published or on screen in Chinese. This information will arouse more interest for scholars who are working with Chinese affiliations and it will be easier for authors in China to find some basic data/information to do research in this field. In addition, there are large amounts of funds provided by the Chinese government to support studies related to the MSR.

The number of studies published by India and the United States are the second and third largest. This indicates that these two countries might pay more attention to the BRI than other countries. This might be because these two countries are concerned that the BRI will influence the geopolitics and threaten the power or rights of their countries.

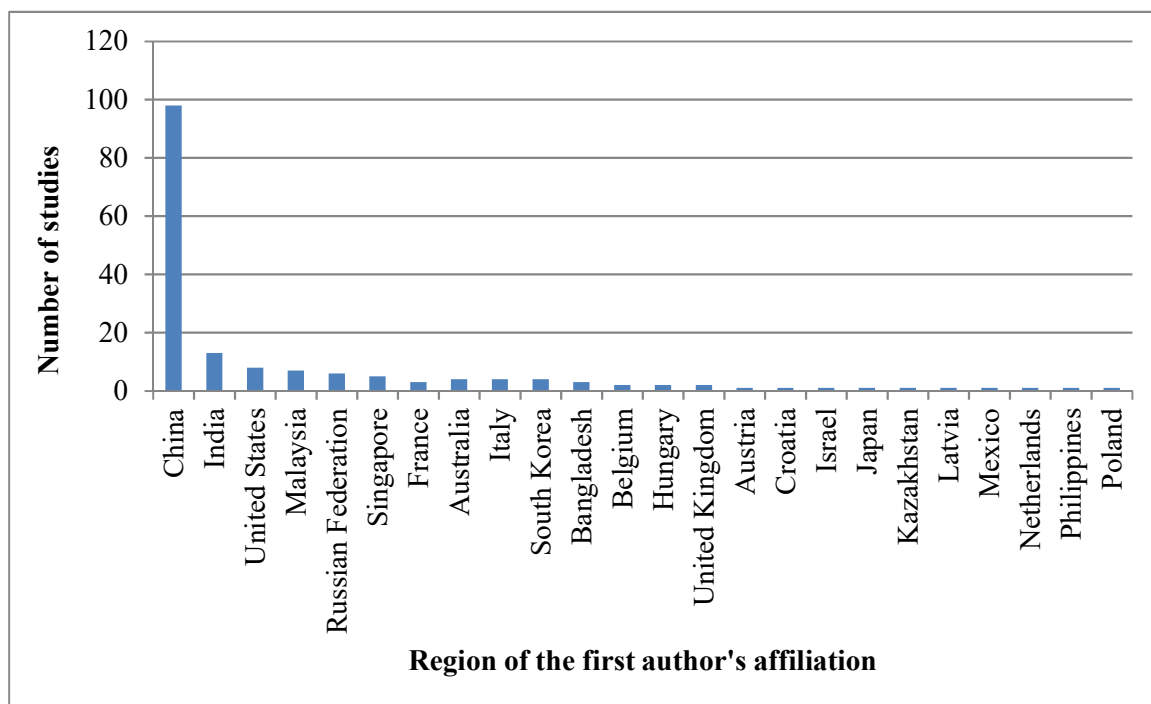


Figure 7. The Region of the first author's affiliation

Additionally, according to Figure 5, 95 studies were completed by at least 2 authors, among which, 13 were completed by authors whose affiliations were not from the same countries. The countries of affiliation of the coauthors of these 13 studies are shown in Table 1. For the first 11 studies in Table 1, at least one affiliation of the coauthors is in China.

Table 1. The countries of affiliations of coauthors

No.	Countries of affiliations of coauthors in order
1	China, China, United States, China
2	China, United States
3	France, Myanmar, Myanmar, Myanmar, United Kingdom, France, United States, Philippines, Japan, France, France, China, France
4	China, United States, China, South Korea
5	South Korea, South Korea, South Korea, China
6	China, China, South Korea
7	China, South Korea, China, China, South Korea, South Korea
8	Australia, China
9	Singapore, Sweden, China
10	United Kingdom, United Kingdom, China, China, China
11	China, China, South Korea, China, China
12	Canada, Netherlands
13	Poland, Germany

Fifth, the total number of researchers who have published studies in this field is

approximately 342, among which, 8 authors have published at least 3 studies without considering the possibility that more than one author has the same name, is from the same institution and does research in the same field. (shown in Figure 8).

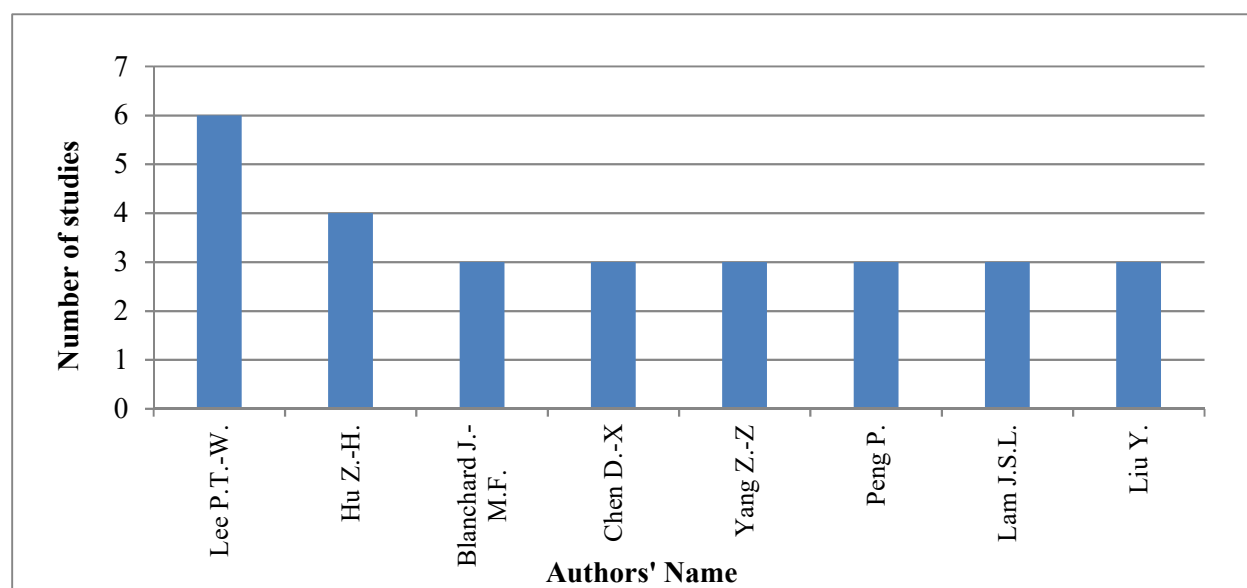


Figure 8. The authors and the number of studies published by each author

Among these authors, Lee P T-W (Full name: Paul Tae-Woo Lee) from Ocean College, Zhejiang University, China, is the scholar who has made the most significant contribution in this field so far. He has published 6 papers in the context of BRI and is the first author for two of these 6 papers, including Lam et al.(2018), Wei et al.(2017), Chen et al.(2018), Kim et al.(2018), Lee et al.(2017b), Lee et al.(2018). Based on the title, keyword and abstract of these papers, it is evident that he is a scholar who studies port/shipping/transport in the context of the BRI. The author with the second largest number papers in this field is Hu Z.-H (Full name: Hu Zhihua) from Shanghai Maritime University, China. He has published 4 papers in this field including Yao et al.(2018), Chen and Hu (2016), Lee et al.(2017b), Lee et al.(2018) and he is also a coauthor of 2 of Lee’s 6 papers.

Sixth, studies are also classified based on the publishers. The publishers which published more than two studies are shown in Table 2. Routledge, World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte Ltd, Elsevier, Springer are the 4 main publishers. Studies published by these four publishers account for 45.4% of all the studies reviewed in this paper.

Table 2. The Publishers of reviewed studies

Publishers	Number of studies
Routledge	40
World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte Ltd	15
Elsevier	13
Springer	11

SAGE Publications	7
MDPI AG	6
Taylor and Francis	6
Science Press	5
Cambridge University Press	4
Inderscience Enterprises Ltd.	4
Institute of China and Asia-Pacific Studies - National Sun Yat-sen University	4
Editorial Office of Journal of Dalian Maritime University	3

Finally, we count the number of times each reviewed study has been cited. As is shown in Figure 9, these studies have been cited 485 times in total. Two of the studies have been cited more than 50 times, which are “The new silk road: Xi Jinping’s grand strategy for Eurasia, Fallon (2015)” and “China’s ‘New Silk Roads’: subnational regions and networks of global political economy, Summers (2016)”. 43.6% of the studies have been cited at least once. Studies that have been cited one to three times account for 22.7%.

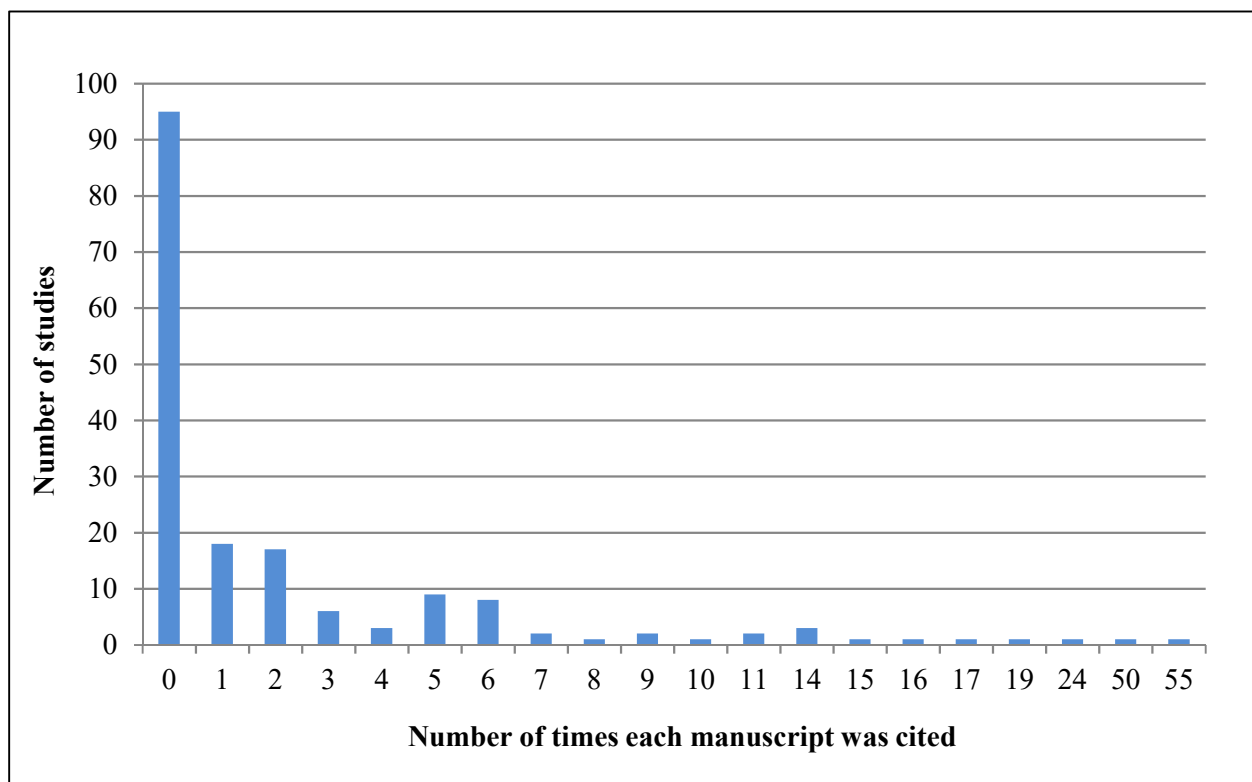


Figure 9. Distribution of times being cited for each manuscript

5. Category Selection and Material Evaluation

In this section, categorical analysis will be performed on the collected literature. To ensure the reliability and availability of the studies, we only focus on the journal papers in this section.

This section is organized as follow: first, we map the existing papers based on topics; second,

we analyze the methodologies used in papers with different topics; in the third and fourth parts, we analyze the attitude of each paper toward the BRI and the countries which are mentioned as examples in the papers to support their attitudes toward the BRI, and how the transport and logistics will be influenced; then, we discuss why and how the BRI is considered in each paper; finally, we evaluate the existing papers reviewed in this paper and discuss the research gaps and the future research opportunities.

5.1 Classification based on topics

According to Figure 1, we analyze the topic distribution of the existing studies for all the topics. When one paper involves a few of the factors mentioned in Figure 1, it will be sorted as the group closer to the research related to transport and logistics.

As is shown in Figure 10, first, the number of literature reviews collected from the Scopus database is shown in the first column, which has been previously discussed in detail in “1. Introduction”.

Second, the second to the fifth columns are the number of studies with topics in the field of PP, which accounts for 33.9% of all the reviewed studies. This shows that PP is a main topic in the context of the MSR, which has garnered a large amount of interest among the scholars. In addition, these papers concluded that the international relationship can have a significant impact on the results or the performance of the BRI, which cannot be ignored. For example, Blanchard and Flint (2017) stated that geopolitics will play an important role in whether the practices of investment, trade, etc., that will together constitute the MSRI, are able to be completed. Hence, geopolitical practices and representations are essential and related parts of a project such as the MSR.

Third, the sixth to eighth columns are the number of studies in the field of ED having a significant and direct influence on transport and logistics, which accounts for 18.9% of all the reviewed studies.

Fourth, the last five columns are the number of studies in the field of TL, which account for 43.3% of all the reviewed studies. Moreover, the ninth to eleventh columns are the papers that study the transport directly with keywords including port/warehouse, shipping, road/rail/air, which accounts for 33.9%. 7.9% of the existing papers studied trade, which is the main demand for TL along the BRI. Apart from transport and trade, there is, however, no existing collected paper that studied the primary components warehousing and inventory. The other two papers in the field of logistics were studied from the viewpoint of the value chain (Bao and Ma, 2017; Chan and Reiner, 2019)

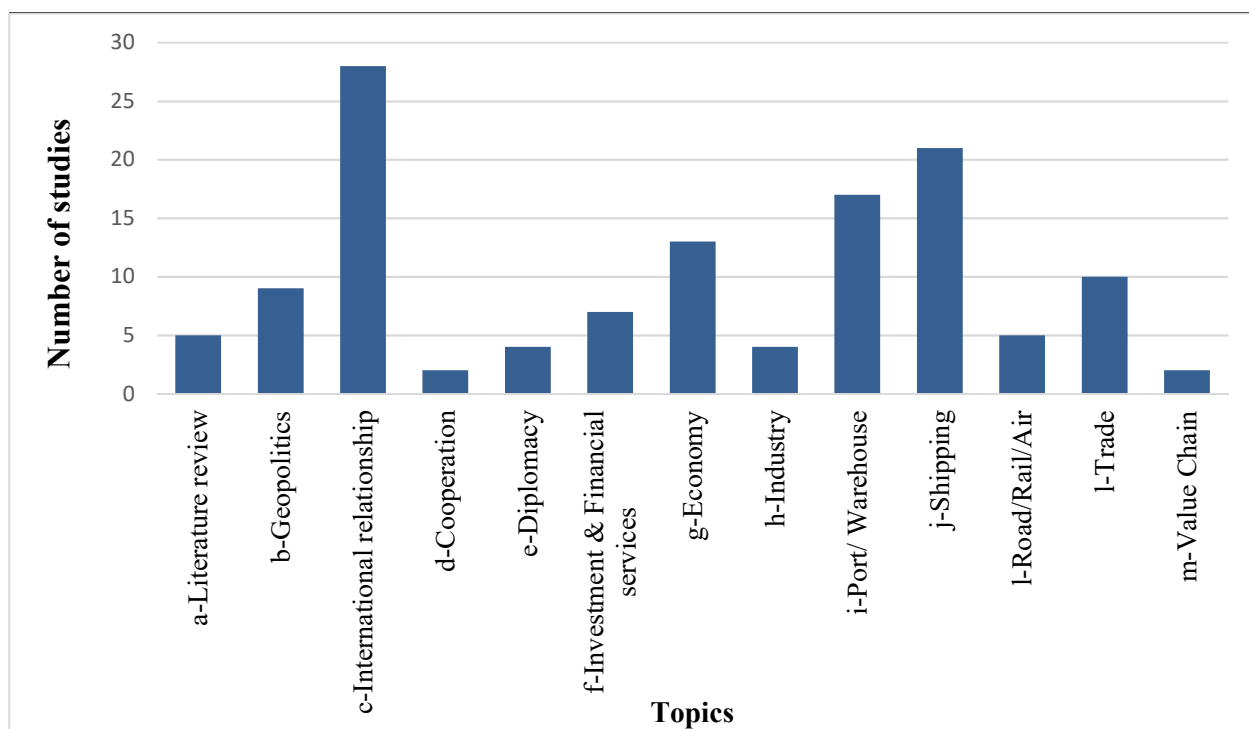


Figure 10. The topics of the reviewed studies

5.2 Classification based on methodology

This section maps the methodology used in the reviewed studies. Based on the type of data and the extent of mathematical and statistical analysis involved in a paper, the collected papers were classified into quantitative and qualitative categories (Narayanamurthy and Gurumurthy, 2016). Here, quantitative analysis is based on numerical data obtained using a quantifiable measurement process. In contrast, qualitative analysis uses subjective judgment based on nonquantifiable information that is descriptive and difficult to measure. As is shown in Table 3, it indicates that the methodology used to solve a problem is obviously different between topics, which might be due to the availability of data and the methods commonly used by researchers in different fields.

As is shown in Table 3, category 1 is the paper related to the literature review (LR); categories 2 to 5 are the papers related to PP, among which there is no existing paper studying the problems of geopolitics, cooperation or diplomacy using quantitative analysis. Only one paper relating to international relationships (category 3) was studied based on an empirical approach (Wang, 2017). Wang (2017) found the key driving forces for geoeconomic relationships between China and ASEAN countries was explored used structural equation modeling based on partial least squares. In addition, it was found that economic factors have the greatest impact on geoeconomic relationships and the total path effect is 0.778. Geolocation, geopolitics and geoculture act on geoeconomic relationships directly and indirectly. Moreover, political drivers improve geoeconomic relationships through cooperation, negotiation, coordination and institutional

mechanisms. This paper shows the possibility to study the international relationship in a quantitative way, which also establishes the foundation for studying the problems of transport and logistics for international relationships in the future.

Categories 6 to 8 are the papers related to ED. Only one paper used an experimental study/ modeling/ case study (He and Jiang, 2017). He and Jiang (2017) proposed the concepts of the probabilistic interval preference ordering set (PIPOS) and probabilistic interval preference ordering element (PIPOE) to solve the multicriteria group decision-making problem and made a detailed case study concerning the infrastructure investment decision-making problem on “the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road” (B&R) strategy to illustrate the approaches. However, most of the papers in the field of ED just discussed the current or potential situation of investment & financial services, economy and industry using qualitative analysis or empirical study based on the panel data before and after 2013, which is the year that the BRI was proposed.

Categories 9 to 13 are the papers studying TL directly. Because these topics are at an operational level, there are more scholars doing research on these topics using experimental study/ modeling. The optimal solutions of different problems for port, shipping, etc. are also commonly studied. However, in terms of trade (category 12), most of the papers simply monitored the change in trade before and after 2013. There no collected papers studying the trade using experimental study/ modeling/ case study.

Table 3 The methodology of reviewed studies

Topics	LR	PP				ED			TL					Total	
	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m		
Quantitative analysis	Empirical study	0	0	1	0	0	4	3	0	4	4	0	8	0	24
	Experimental study/ Modeling/ Case study	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	12	13	4	0	2	32
	Literature review	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Simulation	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	3
	Total	1	0	1	0	0	6	3	0	16	19	4	8	2	60
Qualitative analysis	4	9	27	2	4	1	10	4	2	2	1	1	0	67	
Total	5	9	28	2	4	7	13	4	18	21	5	9	2	127	

(Note: a-Literature review, b-Geopolitics, c-International relationship, d-Cooperation, e-Diplomacy, f-Investment & Financial services, g-Economy, h-Industry, i-Port/ Warehouse, j-Shipping, k-Road/Rail/Air, l-Trade, m-Value Chain)

In addition, we analyze the pattern of research methodology over the years. As is shown in Figure 11, the percentage of papers using qualitative analysis decreases and the percentage of papers using quantitative analysis increases over the years. This is most likely because there has been increasing amounts of data related to the BRI that has been released since 2013.

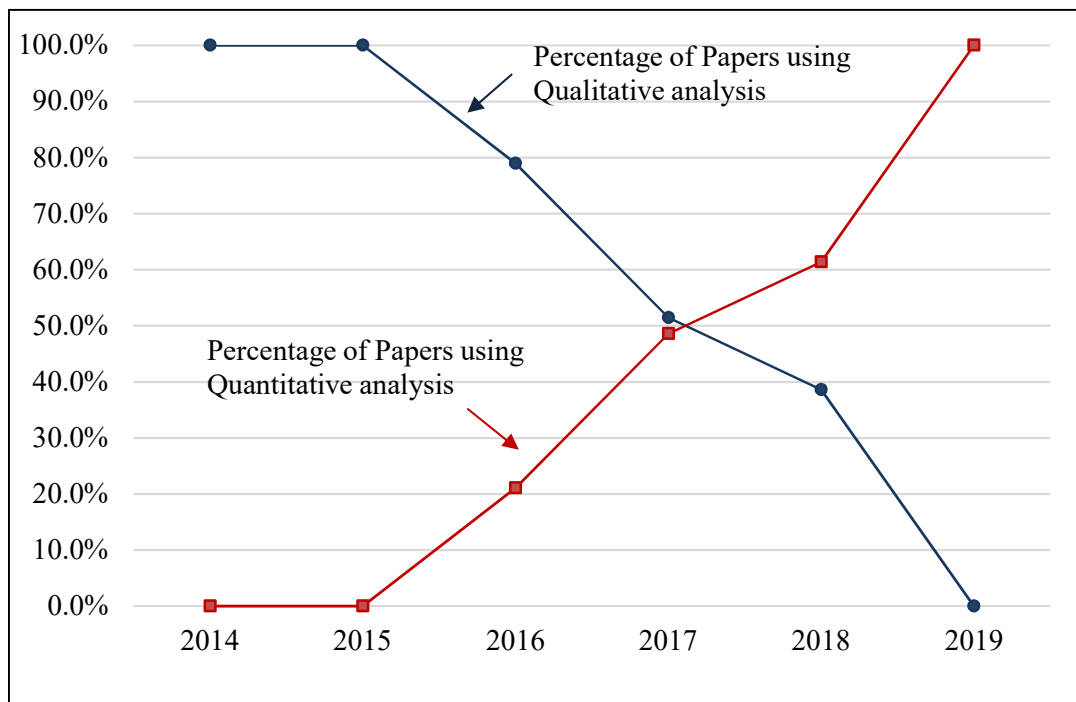


Figure 11. The pattern of research methodology over the years

5.3 Classification based on attitude on BRI and the effect on transport and logistics

There is a large amount of debate about the BRI; therefore, this section maps the attitude of reviewed studies from 2014 to 2019. Here, after reading all 127 papers, we separate them into 3 general categories (including positive attitude, negative attitude and neutral attitude) according to Figure 12. As is shown in Figure 12, first, when the author believes that the BRI can be achieved successfully due to the willing cooperation of countries along the BRI, the paper will be classified as a paper with a positive attitude; when the author argues that the BRI cannot be achieved due to the risks and challenges, the paper will be classified as a paper with a negative attitude; second, for the rest of the papers, we can further judge whether the paper discussed the benefits caused by the BRI or the harm caused by the BRI; then, the other papers without any positive or negative attitudes toward BRI will be classified as the ones with a neutral attitude.

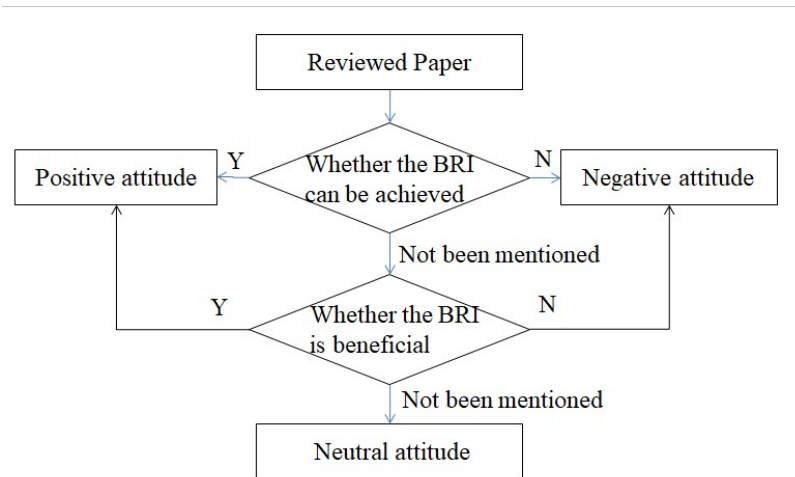


Figure 12. The flow of classifying the reviewed papers according to the attitude

As is shown in Table 4, there is only a small number of papers published in 2014 because the BRI was proposed in 2013 and it would take at least one to two years to propose a problem, address the problem, complete the paper, modify the paper and publish it in the international journal. Therefore, we draw a time series for negative/neutral/positive percentages from 2015 to 2018. It appears that the positive percentage is increasing, and the negative percentage is generally decreasing over these years. From 2015 to 2018, the percentage of papers with positive attitudes increased from 66.7% to 75.4%, which can partially prove that there are more scholars supporting the BRI by studying the active cooperation between China and other involved countries and the benefits caused by the BRI.

The increase in the percentage of papers with a positive attitude most likely indicates that the cooperation along the BRI and the benefits for countries along the BRI have been gradually recognized, and the risks and challenges for achieving cooperation along the BRI are steadily reducing. Thus, the risk for transport and logistics, e.g., the investment in transport infrastructure, can be reduced.

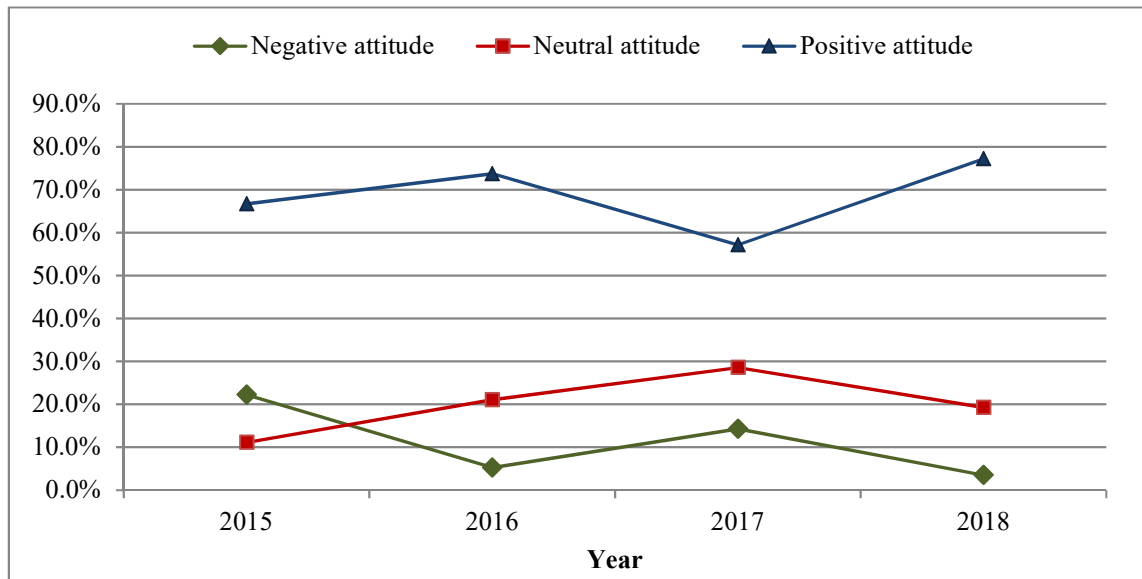


Figure 13. The percentage of papers with different attitudes toward the BRI

Table 4 The attitude of reviewed studies

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
Negative	0	2	1	5	2	0	10
Difficult to achieve	0	1	1	3	2	0	7
Harmful	0	1	0	2	0	0	3
Neutral	0	1	4	10	11	1	27
Case study along BRI	0	0	2	4	3	1	10
Literature review	0	1	0	2	3	0	6
Objective description	0	0	2	4	5	0	11
Positive	3	6	14	20	44	3	90
Active cooperation	0	1	4	4	6	0	15
Beneficial/ Win-win	3	5	10	16	38	3	75
Total	3	9	19	35	57	4	127

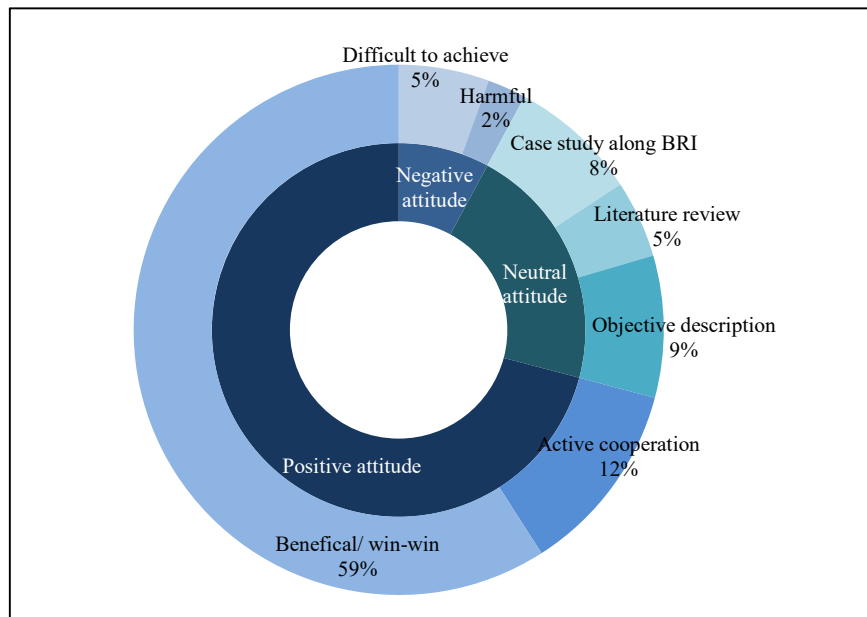


Figure 14. The attitudes of the reviewed studies

The percentage of papers of each category is shown in Figure 14. As is shown in Figure 14, first, 7.9% of papers have negative attitudes toward the BRI, among which, some papers argued that the BRI is too difficult to achieve by discussing the different risks and challenges that the Chinese government are facing. For example, Clarke (2018) doubted whether the BRI would achieve success because 1) the situation beyond the immediate confines of Central Asia, e.g., the dilemmas posed by CPEC as noted above, is not as obviously favorable to Beijing; 2) China also faces a major challenge in consolidating its hold on Xinjiang. A key issue here relates to the ‘openness’ and ‘connectivity’ narrative deployed by Beijing around the BRI in juxtaposition with the intensification of the state’s instruments of repression, surveillance and social control in Xinjiang; 3) the CPEC also has the potential to expose Chinese nationals and investments to attacks by Islamist militants, based along the Afghanistan-Pakistan frontier. This threat has actually come to pass in recent times when two Chinese nationals who had been taken hostage in Pakistan’s Baluchistan province on May 24, 2017 were executed by an ISIS-aligned Pakistani group, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi al-alamiin in ‘revenge’ for a Pakistani military operation against it; 4) The concerns of the apparent rise in the threat posed to Chinese security and interests by Uyghur and other Islamist inspired militants in Central Asia and the Middle East. Blanchard (2018) stated that China’s own situation and Southeast Asian international and domestic economic and political variables will hinder the complete implementation of the MSRI. Even if the MSRI is fully realized, various factors will limit the political impact of the MSRI’s economic attractions; others showed negative attitudes by analyzing the potential harmful impacts caused by the BRI, which only accounts for 2% of all the reviewed papers, including Mann (2017), Len (2015), and Panneerselvam (2017).

Second, the majority of papers mentioned the BRI in a positive way or draw a positive conclusion about BRI, which is approximately 70.8% of all the reviewed papers. Some of these papers supported BRI by discussing the willing cooperation of countries along the BRI or the existing cooperation which has been achieved between countries along the BRI and China, such as Šteinbuka et al. (2017), Chen (2017), etc.; simultaneously, other papers analyzed the benefits for countries along the BRI or some cities in China, such as Ruan et al. (2017), Fu et al. (2018), etc.

Third, some papers have not shown whether they support BRI or have a suspicious attitude toward the BRI. Consequently, a few researchers simply reviewed the existing papers and made up the ideas of other scholars, including Blanchard (2016), Wan et al. (2017), Sidaway and Woon (2017), Lee et al. (2017), Lin et al. (2018); some papers selected regions, ports, etc. along the BRI as the study case when they proposed methods to address different problems, such as Li et al. (2017), He et al. (2017), etc.; also, some papers describe the current situation along the BRI in different aspects such as population (Liu, 2018), the development of countries (Hu and Pan, 2017), etc.

5.4 Discussion on countries/regions studied in the reviewed papers

In this section, we focus on the countries and regions (except China, which proposed the BRI) that have been mentioned in these reviewed papers, especially the ones which appeared in the titles, abstracts, keywords, those which have been used as a study case, and the ones which have been discussed as a main example to prove the views of the authors (namely, the examples of the countries that have been discussed in detail). The countries that have been mentioned briefly, such as within one or two sentences, are not counted. This is not only because the brief examples cannot prove the importance of these countries (e.g., in some papers, tens of countries are mentioned together) but also because it is too hard to record the countries mentioned in one sentence in the middle of the long articles.

First, we scan each paper and record the countries mentioned. If the number of main countries referred to in one paper is x , we will count the paper $1/x$ times to equally show the significance of each country (shown in Figure 15).

As is shown in Figure 15, first, India is the country that has been most commonly discussed in these reviewed papers, which is followed by Russia and the US. This finding is in accordance with the data in Figure 7; second, most of the countries are discussed in the papers to represent the supportive attitude toward the BRI; third, only India and Pakistan are the countries that have been pointed out to show the risks or challenges that the BRI is facing.

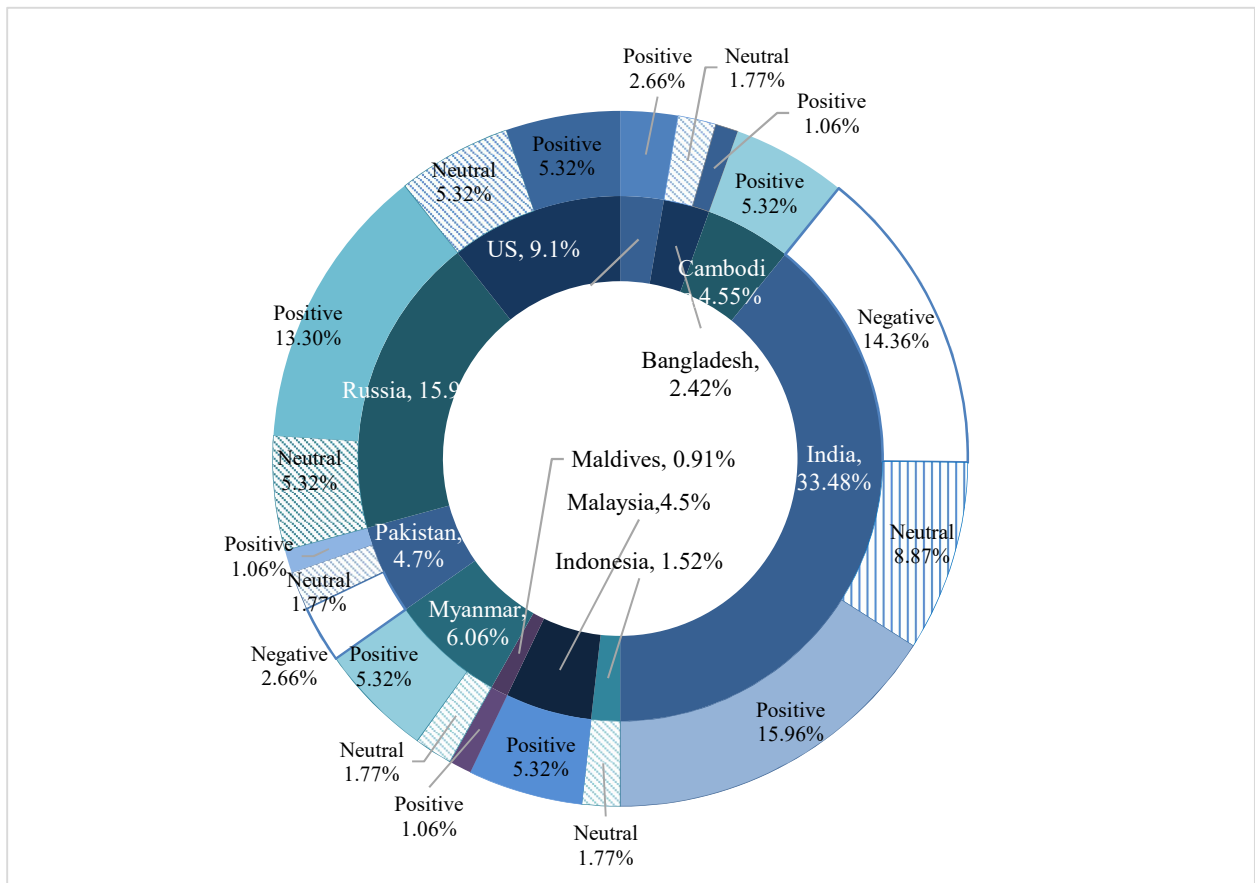


Figure 15. The percentage of papers for each country with different attitudes

5.5 Discussion on how the BRI was considered and how it will influence transport/logistics

To analyze how the BRI influences the transport and supply chain and determine how the scholars understand the BRI in-depth, we also analyze why it is important to involve the BRI in the paper and how the BRI was taken into consideration, especially according to the motivation and background of those papers. The collected papers are classified into 3 groups:

In the first group, papers studied the BRI directly based on the collected data by analyzing the difference along the BRI before and after 2013, when the BRI was proposed. The examples are shown in Table 5. These papers indicate that scholars have already realized the significance of the BRI and would like to monitor the change in trade, economics, transportation infrastructure, etc. caused by the BRI. Papers in this group indicate some research gap and future research directions. First, some existing papers studied the effects of BRI on transport and logistics directly. For example, Ge et al. (2018) monitor the construction progress and development trend of ports to interpret infrastructure elements. Inspired by these papers, scholars can draw a time series over these years for the transportation infrastructure (such as ports), shipping routes, and the surplus or lack of transportation supply including ports and container ships; second, scholars can not only monitor the process of progress and development trends of ports or other transportation infrastructure but also analyze the reasons that can influence the process of the developments. For

example, in July 2014, the Myanmar government suddenly announced that the Kunming Railway Project was on hold for various reasons (BBS, 2019) and Sri Lanka suspended the Colombo Port City project in March 2015 (IFENG, 2019); third, scholars can also study the investment risks based on the reasons that can influence the process of the developments and further study the transportation investment problem considering the risks; fourth, from the view of the supply chain, scholars can optimize the transportation supply and the warehouse, etc.; fifth, the manufacturing owners can even optimize the supply chain by relocating their factories according to the evolution of the population along the BRI.

In summary, these existing papers monitor the changes that have happened in the context of BRI and as for the future research directions, scholars can monitor the changes in different fields and do more research according to the trend which has been found.

Table 5 The Background of papers which analyzed the difference with and without BRI

Background of each paper	Authors
The main focus of the initiative is to improve hard and soft infrastructure in international trade → Therefore, this paper analyzes how will the Belt and Road initiative advance China's exports	Wang et al(2018)
The BRI will open up more trade opportunities for Malaysia. → Therefore, this paper analyzes how the BRI will open up more opportunities for Malaysia to generate trade	Woan, et al (2018)
The MSR is planned to improve the connection along BRI by maritime trade and shipment → The construction of Hambantota Port and Colombo Port plays a key role in supporting the shipping trade → Therefore, this article uses multi-temporal high spatial resolution remote sensing images to monitor the construction progress and development trend of ports to interpret infrastructure elements	Ge, et al (2018)
The aim of BRI is to promote highly efficient allocation of resources and deep integration of market → a better understanding of socioeconomics is the critical prerequisite for BRI to achieve economic policy coordination and carry our regional cooperation → electric power consumption (EPC) is an important component of socioeconomic indicators → Therefore, spatiotemporal patterns of electric power consumption in countries along the Belt and Road are studied	Shi et al.(2018)
The MSR is a sea channel for economic and cultural exchanges between China and other parts of the world → Due to BRI, regional cooperation and competitiveness will be significantly enhanced → Therefore, this paper empirically analyses the spatial pattern of China's international maritime linkages along the "twenty-first-century Maritime Silk Road" based on navigation data	Wang et al (2018)

In the second group, papers took the BRI into consideration in a logical way. Accordingly,

scholars have to understand the aims, the actions in the context of the BRI in-depth and then analyze which factor in Figure 1 will be influenced due to the BRI, how these factors will be influenced and how to obtain the optimal solution related to each factor to boost the BRI. However, there are only a limited number of papers that understand the aim, the policies, the actions of the BRI in-depth, such as Wu (2018), Chen and Yang (2018), and Kuzmicz, and Pesch (2018). For example, Chen and Yang (2018) have found that the main goal of BRI is to boost the economy along the MSR and improve policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds, and the main action taken by the Chinese government is in supporting the infrastructure construction financially. Therefore, they studied the problem of port investment along the MSR and considered the development of countries along the MSR by reviewing the increase in salary and the increase in scale of manufacturing along the MSR.

In the third group, papers proposed a new method for a certain problem and set the BRI as a study case because the problems also exist along the BRI. Thus, the methods and the solutions of some of these papers can also be treated as an upgrade strategy to support the implementation of the “the Belt and Road” Initiative in China (shown in Table 6). This shows that most papers only set BRI as a study case instead of studying the aim and actions of the BRI in-depth and analyzing what could happen due to the actions taken.

Table 6 The Background of papers which took BRI into consideration in a logical way

Background of each paper	Authors
Both maritime and railway container transportation have become an important part of global transportation and it may gain a new potential in the light of the BRI. →Due to the trade imbalance between Europe and China, the problem of empty container repositioning gains specific importance. →Therefore, this study analyzed solutions to empty container repositioning problems	Kuzmicz, and Pesch (2018).
The Maritime Silk Road is representative of China's global strategy of this century. →terrorism has quickly spread →research on the vulnerability and geopolitical risk of the Maritime Silk Road container shipping network is crucial in establishing and improving the security mechanism in the global economy operation	Wu (2018)
In the context of the BRI, financial support will be offered to promote investment and trade→The financial support of these financing platforms also improves the transport infrastructure→numerous large-scale port projects have emerged along the MSR→newly invested ports may promote industry transfer to MSR, and the industry transfer will boost port development→Therefore, this paper address the optimization of port cluster investment along MSR.	Chen and Yang (2018)
The proposition of MSR strategy promotes the process of regional port cooperation network layout. →And as an innovative network form, the stability of port strategic alliance has an	Zhao et al (2016)

important significance to regional cooperation and economic development.	
“The 21st century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) proposed by China strongly promotes the maritime industry” →The MSR also overlaps with other important routes in the busy shipping regions of the SCS and North Indian Ocean. →Hence, an analysis of the dynamic characteristics of the MSR can promote safe ship navigation and provide vital references for ocean engineering. →and “the results provides references for ship navigation as well as ocean engineering”	Zhang et al. (2018)
“As an important part of "the Belt and Road" Initiative in China, and with its cores being the maritime shipping network composed of ports and routes, the "Maritime Silk Road" has become an important passage” → taking "Maritime Silk Road" container shipping network as the object, →Therefore, this paper studies the topological property of the container shipping network and its upgrade strategy to support the implementation of the great “the Belt and Road” Initiative in China.	Jiang et al. (2018)
The government can determine, the number of independent ports, by splitting or merging the governance of extant ports, which is a problem that need to be solved →“Many new ports are being built in Asia. In particular, China has ambitiously adopted BRI that aims to develop infrastructure such as railways, seaports. →As China’s central government has applied centralized decision making regarding transportation-related infrastructure investments. →The ports along BRI can been set as an example	Lee and Cho (2017)

5.6 Research gaps and future directions

Implications and future directions for researchers inferred from the review results above are shown as follows:

(1) As discussed in Section 5.1, most of the existing papers only take into consideration one dimension or even just one factor in Figure 1. There is a gap of doing crossover studies in the context of BRI. For example, as mentioned by Blanchard and Flint (2017), geopolitics will play an important role in whether the practices of investment, trade, etc. in the context of the BRI are able to be completed. Hence, it could be a future research direction to take geopolitical practices and representations into consideration while doing research in the field of TL. In addition, there is a gap in doing research in the field of logistics related to the primary components of logistics, such as warehousing and inventory. Finally, studying the problem in the field of logistics from the viewpoint of the value chain could also be a future research opportunity.

(2) As is shown in Section 5.2, most papers related to geopolitics, international relationships, cooperation, diplomacy, economy, industry in the context of the BRI are studied based on the qualitative methods. It is necessary for the scholars to study the influence of the BRI on these factors in the context of the BRI using quantitative methods, which will be the basis for doing

crossover studies related to transport and logistics in the context of the BRI; also, there is a gap of studying the trade demand using an experimental study/ modeling/ case study, which can be a future research opportunity and can also boost studies related to the transport supply (such as port investment, shipping route design) considering the change of the trade demand in the context of the BRI.

(3) As discussed in Sections 5.3 and 5.4, it appears that the percentage of papers with a positive attitude is increasing, which means the cooperation among the BRI countries and the benefits to the countries along the BRI have been gradually recognized. It may also indicate that the risks and challenges for achieving the cooperation along the BRI are decreasing gradually. Consequently, it could be a future direction to study how the existing investment can influence the risks for further infrastructure investment or manufacturing investment along the BRI, and how the supply and demand of TL will be affected as the investment scales along BRI increase.

(4) Section 5.5 discussed how the BRI was considered and how it will influence transport/logistics, which shows a few different perspectives to propose innovative problems in the context of BRI. First, it can be a future research direction to monitor the changes in the field of trade, transport, etc. before and after 2013, when the BRI was proposed, such as monitoring the evolutions of supply for the transportation infrastructure; second, it is a potential research direction to analyze the reasons that can influence the process of infrastructure construction; third, scholars can do more research according to the changes which have been found based on the panel data; additionally, scholars can discover more future research directions in the field with which they are familiar by taking the BRI into consideration in a logical way. Thus, scholars have to understand the aims, the actions in the context of the BRI in-depth and then analyze which factors in Figure 1 will be influenced due to the BRI, how these factors will be influenced and how to obtain the optimal solution related to each factor to boost the BRI. Finally, for the scholars who have already proposed a problem in the field of transport and logistics, it is also a good idea to set regions, ports, etc. along the BRI as a study case, which is important for providing helpful suggestions for the implementation of the BRI.

6. Conclusion

With the implementations of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), there has been an increasing number of studies published in this field. This paper provides a comprehensive review of the literature about the BRI and its impact on transport and logistics from 2013 to 2019. Based on the content analysis methodology, we have thoroughly analyzed these collected studies to better understand the research of BRI in relation to transport and logistics. First, we performed the statistical analysis according to the basic information of these studies, such as the year of publication, publication outlet and the countries of the corresponding author's institution. Second, we performed a categorical analysis of these studies, especially journal papers, in detail from

various perspectives. The main findings of this paper are that: 1) The BRI has become a topic of interest since it was proposed in 2013, and there is an increasing number of studies related to the BRI; 2) politics has been one of the most commonly discussed topics, which can influence the implementation of the BRI. However, there is a gap in taking politics into consideration using quantitative analysis; 3) most papers showed a supportive attitude toward the BRI by discussing the active cooperation along the BRI and analyzing the benefits of the BRI for countries along the BRI; 4) India and Pakistan are the only countries that have been demonstrated to show risks or challenges; otherwise, most countries were set as the examples to discuss the win-win situation between China and the BRI countries; and 5) finally, we also analyze why it is important to involve the BRI in the paper and how the BRI was taken into consideration by studying the background and motivation of each paper in detail. The result shows that trade, investment in infrastructures, especially for transport, and cooperation are the main background for these reviewed papers. However, most of the existing papers just set the BRI as a study case. There are still a limited number of papers which have fundamentally analyzed the influences of the BRI.

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