

Sowing seeds along the Silk Road

The Belt and Road Initiative presents a great opportunity for Hong Kong surveyors to export their skills and knowledge, but government support is essential for opening doors in overseas markets.

May Chan Rhodes



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The old Silk Road stretched all the way from the East of China to the banks of the Mediterranean Sea.



Sr Stephen Lai
Managing Director of
Rider Levett Bucknall



Sr PC Lau
Project Director
of SOCAM Asset
Management (HK) Ltd



Sr Ng Kin Siu
Chairman of FDB
Holdings

“We need to set up a mechanism for our skills and qualifications to be recognised as equivalent to something that other Belt and Road markets understand.”

In his latest policy address, Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying highlighted the importance of the Belt and Road Initiative for Hong Kong. He said that as a “super-connector” with a highly open economy and strong external connections, Hong Kong should proactively respond to the initiative – especially in terms of building infrastructure and pursuing free-trade agreements. He added that the Hong Kong government will play an active role in facilitating the implementation of the initiative.

For local surveying professionals, the Belt and Road Initiative – a development strategy and framework launched by President Xi Jinping that aims to strengthen China’s business and economic ties with countries along the historic Silk Road – offers the chance to get involved in projects in over 60 countries in Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe. Not only that, it also offers a window to influence the setting up of professional frameworks and regulations should the Hong Kong government provide the necessary support.

Sr Lau Ping Cheung, a project director at SOCAM Asset Management (HK) Ltd, part of the Shui On Group, says Hong Kong surveyors are already recognised for their international standards and their ability to adapt to different markets’ needs, thanks to their years of experience in working with international contractors at home and abroad.

This, he explains, provides a good foundation for the government to pursue high-level dialogue with its counterparts in Belt and Road countries. It also paves the way for Hong Kong surveyors to increase their influence on the industry by contributing to professional frameworks and relevant regulations, especially in developing countries like Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam and India.

Lau cites the example of Hong Kong’s long involvement in the development of real estate and property in the mainland. While China was opening up its economy in the late 1980s, Hong

Kong professionals – including lawyers, surveyors, bankers and engineers – helped lay the foundation for laws and regulations related to property, real estate, land development and administration.

“This gave Hong Kong professionals the first-mover advantage in the industry as we had unparalleled insight into business opportunities in the mainland,” says Lau, who is also the HKIS Past President and member of the Economic Development Commission as well as the Convener of its Working Group on Professional Services. “We understand the rules of the game better than our competitors because we helped write them.

“That is why Hong Kong still has a fair slice of the market share in the mainland’s construction and property industry despite the cut-throat competition. We can do the same with Belt and Road countries if we can have government-level support.”

Lau also emphasises the importance for the government to promote both student and professional exchanges with Belt and Road countries to “sow good seeds”. Singapore, for example, has a strong bond with its fellow ASEAN countries as it has invested in such exchange activities for many years. This has raised awareness of what Singapore can offer in terms of skills and knowledge.

Lau says the Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors (HKIS), which already has a footprint in Asia, Middle East, Africa and Europe, is in a strategic position to consult with the Hong Kong government on the immediate opportunities and challenges that exist in Belt and Road markets. The HKIS could also advise on how to raise awareness of Hong Kong’s professional services in those markets based on real experiences.

Sr Stephen Lai Yuk-fai, the HKIS Past President and managing director of Rider Levett Bucknall – a global construction and property company providing quantity surveying and cost

management, project management and advisory services – says an institutionalised mechanism that recognises the skills and qualifications of Hong Kong surveyors could open many doors in new markets.

“Some of these markets, for example, may not even have quantity surveying as a professional practice because they have a different process for construction management and cost control. We need to educate these markets on what we have to offer, convince them that it is important, and set up a mechanism for our skills and qualifications to be recognised as equivalent to something that the local market understands. That is exactly what the Hong Kong government and the HKIS did for the surveying industry back in the mainland in the '90s,” Lai says.

“The Singapore government has been really proactive in having their officials promote the country’s professional services on an inter-government level. It is time the Hong Kong government stepped up its efforts.”

Lai adds that general practice surveyors, quantity surveyors, buildings surveyors, and planning and lands surveyors would all benefit from better exposure to these markets. In particular, he sees great potential for quantity surveyors in contributing their skills in project management and cost control to assist in the construction of mega-infrastructure projects. Unlike the rest of the general construction industry, infrastructure projects rarely involve quantity surveyors. Rather, it is usually an experienced engineer who oversees cost and management.

Lai urges the government to push for change in this practice, saying that the invaluable experience of quantity surveyors in managing contractors and sub-contractors, setting priorities and timetables, and managing overall project costs could save mega-infrastructure projects billions of dollars by providing professional cost management.

He also says that the HKIS could share its experience and networks in overseas markets with local surveyors and the government. Having opened offices for his company around the world, Lai knows the importance of local knowledge when it comes to conducting business in a new market.

“Knowledge of the local legal and financial systems is very important. For example, in some Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian countries, you can’t operate without a local partner. It is very difficult to find a local partner who you can trust and who respects your professional standards.

“You will also need to find capable lawyers who you can trust in order to protect your company in international collaboration projects. Such ground work requires lots of market intelligence.”

Sr Ng Kin Siu, chairman of FDB Holdings, which offers design-and-build services, says the government can look at how to lift unnecessary market-entry barriers to help more local surveying firms bid for overseas projects.

Different countries have different requirements for international bidders in terms of capital, company size and skills, he says, which tend to screen out local firms – even if they are more suitable. He adds that the HKIS and the Hong Kong and China governments can work together with international governments to clarify concerns behind entry barriers, as well as streamline the application and screening process and build up a clear set of guidelines so more local firms can get involved.

Fruit Design and Build Limited, for example, has won a construction project as supervisory consultant in Nepal through bidding with the mainland’s Ministry of Commerce (MOC). This was possible because the company is on the list of consultants maintained by the Architectural and Associated Consultants Selection Board (AACSB), which provided reference information to the China Government as it worked with Nepal to put the project out for tender.

Ng also advises individual surveyors and firms to start planning now so that they can take advantage of the chance when it comes. “You have to ask yourself: are you interested in venturing outside of Hong Kong? If so, how is that reflected in the company structure, in how we build up a team, and in the business strategy? Don’t just sit there and wait for things to happen. Take action now.”

The article is published courtesy of Classified Post.

沿絲綢之路播種

「一帶一路」計劃固然為香港測量師帶來輸出技能及知識的良機，但要打入海外市場，不能少了政府的支持。

May Chan Rhodes

在最新的施政報告中，行政長官梁振英強調了「一帶一路」策略對香港的重要作用。梁振英指香港經濟高度開放、對外交往頻繁，擔當「超級聯繫人」之任，應當積極響應「一帶一路」，著力興建基礎設施，推動自由貿易協定。他補充說，港府將積極落實「一帶一路」策略。

「一帶一路」是國家主席習近平提出的發展策略和框架，旨在加強中國與古代絲綢之路沿線國家的商業及經濟聯繫。對於本港專業測量師來說，它帶來了在亞洲、中東、非洲、歐洲六十多國參與不同工程的機遇。港府若提供適當的支持，它更是促進建立專業架構及制訂專業守則的途徑。

劉炳章測量師是瑞安集團公司旗下瑞安建築資產管理（香港）有限公司的項目發展總監，他表示，香港測量師與本地及海外的國際承建商合作多年，其國際級水平及迎合不同市場需要的能力有口皆碑。

劉炳章解釋，這打下了良好的基礎，有助政府尋求與「一帶一路」國家政府高層對話，也替香港測量師鋪路，為建立專業架構和制訂專業守則出一分力，從而加強對業界的影響力，特別是在緬甸、柬埔寨、越南、印度等發展中國家。

劉炳章以香港長期參與內地房地產及物業發展為例。上世紀八十年代末，正值中國內地開放經濟之際，香港的專業人士（包括律師、測量師、銀行家、工程師）紛紛襄助，奠定了有關物業、房地產、土地開發及管理的法律和法規基礎。

劉炳章亦是香港測量師學會前會長以及經濟發展委員會委員兼專業服務業工作小組召集人。他表示：「這為香港專業人士在行內贏得先機之利，我們對內地商機瞭如指掌。這些規則是我們有份制定的，因此，我們比競爭對手更了解遊戲規則。」

「正因如此，香港在惡性競爭中，仍能在內地的建築及房地產行業佔一席位。如果有政府層面的支持，我們在「一帶一路」國家也可以做到這些。」

劉炳章亦強調，政府鼓勵學生和專業人士與「一帶一路」國家交流，有「播好種」的重要作用。例如，新加坡與其他東盟國家多年來交流不輟，聯繫密切，新加坡因而更加認清它能夠提供的技能及知識。

劉炳章說，香港測量師學會的足跡遍及亞洲、中東、非洲、歐洲，可把握其策略地位，與政府商討「一帶一路」市場當前帶來的機遇和挑戰。學會亦可根據實際經驗，建議如何在這些市場推廣香港的專業服務。

賴旭輝測量師是香港測量師學會前會長及國際房地產及建築業測量師事務所利比董事總經理，該公司提供的服務包括造價管理及工料

測量、項目管理和相關專業諮詢。他表示，一個認可香港測量師技能及資格的常規機制，能夠在新市場開拓不少機遇。

賴旭輝表示：「舉例來說，有些市場可能沒有工料測量這門專業，而採用其他流程來管理工程及控制成本。我們要讓這些市場認識我們提供的專業服務，他們理解這些服務的重要性，並設立一個機制，令我們的技能及資格得到認可，並得到當地市場認識。這正是香港政府及香港測量師學會於九十年代在內地為測量業做的事情。」

「新加坡政府一直主動讓官員向各國政府宣傳新加坡的專業服務。香港政府也是時候加把勁了。」

賴旭輝補充說，測量業若在這些市場打響名堂，產業測量師、工料測量師、建築測量師、規劃及土地測量師都能受惠。他特別提到，工料測量師潛力優厚，能夠在工程管理及成本控制方面發揮所長，協助建設大型基建項目。基建不同於一般建築工程，少有工料測量師參與，通常由一位資深的工程師負責成本及管理工作。

賴旭輝促請政府提倡改變這種做法。他指出，工料測量師在管理承建商和分包商、釐訂工程先後次序和時間表、管理整體項目成本方面擁有寶貴的經驗，往往能夠為大型基建項目節省因管理不善而造成的數十億元開支，減少工程超支風險。

賴旭輝亦表示，香港測量師學會不妨與本港測量師及香港政府分享它的海外市場經驗和網絡。賴旭輝的公司在全球各地設有辦事處，他深明要在新市場經營，掌握當地知識十分重要。

「了解當地的法律和金融體系非常重要。舉例來說，在一些中東和東南亞國家，你必須有當地合夥人才能經營。要在當地找到值得信賴又遵守專業守則的合作夥伴，並不容易。」

「你還要找到能幹又值得信賴的律師，在跨國合作項目中保護公司權益。這類基礎工作需要大量的市場資料。」

豐展控股有限公司從事設計及建築服務，公司主席吳建韶認為，政府可研究如何撤銷不必要的市場門檻，以幫助更多本地測量師行競投海外項目。

吳建韶表示，對於國際投標人的資本、企業規模及技術，各處鄉村各處例，因此有本港測量師行條件雖優於當地公司，卻被拒諸門外。他補充說，香港測量師學會可聯同與香港和中國內地政府，與各國政府攜手合作，釐清市場門檻背後的顧慮，簡化申請及篩選過程，並建立一套明確的指引，讓更多本港企業能夠參與。

豐展設計及營造有限公司與內地商務部聯名競標，順利擔任尼泊爾一個建築項目的監理單位。這有賴於該公司在建築及有關顧問公司遴選委員會的顧問公司名單中榜上有名，而中國政府與尼泊爾合作招標時，正參考了這份名單。

吳建韶建議個別測量師及測量師行著手規劃，及時把握機會。「你們要問自己：你有沒有興趣在海外創業？如有，你又如何在公司架構、建立團隊方式、經營策略當中體現創業之志？不要守株待兔，要坐言起行。」

本文由《Classified Post》撰文。

