

BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE: CHINA'S GEROPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS IN ASIA

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Keywords

Belt and Road Initiative
(BRI), Geopolitics, China.

Abstract. The Belt and Road Initiative/BRI as an ambitious infrastructure development initiative which is a continuation of the Silk Road program, has played a central role in restructuring the economic and political landscape in a number of countries in Asia. This research aims to investigate the geopolitical implications that the People's Republic of China's BRI has in the Asian region. The research methodology uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. The research results show that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has had a major impact on Asian geopolitics. This initiative increases China's economic and political influence in the region, strengthens connectivity between countries, and opens new trade routes. Although it brings economic opportunities, the BRI also poses a number of challenges, including financial risks, political risks and socio-environmental impacts. BRI's success is not only measured by economic growth, but also by its impact on regional stability and sustainability. Therefore, continuous attention is needed to ensure that the implementation of the BRI is in line with the principles of justice, transparency and sustainability, so that it can provide long-term benefits for the entire Asian region.

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1. INTRODUCTION

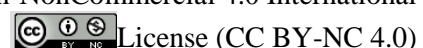
The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an ambitious global design introduced by China in 2013. Also known as "One Belt, One Road (OBOR)," this policy is considered a strategy for the expansion of China's influence by the international community (Anam & Ristiyani, 2018). In September 2013, during his visit to Kazakhstan which coincided with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit, President Xi Jinping began construction of the "Silk Road Economic Belt" connecting China to the western region across the Eurasian continent (Kurniawan & Gaol, 2021).

At the Summit of Asian Leaders in Southeast Asia, President Xi and Premier Li Keqiang promoted the construction of the "Twenty-First Century Maritime Silk Road." At the forum, President Xi stated that China must synergize with its neighbors to accelerate connectivity and build the Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road for the 21st century (Darmawan et al, 2022). This initiative reflects China's vision to enhance regional and global connectivity through extensive infrastructure development, establishing trade and investment networks involving countries along land and sea routes. The BRI is a symbol of China's ambitions in shaping the world's economic and political landscape in the 21st century" (Fabtian, 2018).

"One Belt" refers to the term "Silk Belt Economic Road", which is a revitalization of the ancient Silk Road that connected China to Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Hence, it is also known as the Modern Silk Road (Hosain & Hosain, 2019). "One Road" refers to the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" designed to connect Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. It is also known as the Maritime Silk Road. The goal of One Belt One Road (OBOR) is to unite Asia, Europe and Africa through strengthening partnerships between countries. Royal envoys under Emperor Zhang Qian opened the Silk Road 2000 years ago, turning it into a trade route to Arabia and Central Asia (Van Hout & Bingham, 2013). As silk became one of China's valuable export goods at that time, this route became known as the Silk Road (Tanggok, 2013).

In 2013, President Xi Jinping announced the re-establishment of the old Silk Road by establishing connections between China, the rest of Asia, Europe and Africa through the development of infrastructure such as railways and highways. This initiative is the largest economic platform in the

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world that will encourage global economic growth through strengthening economic cooperation (Ramasamy, Yeung & Laforet, 2012). BRI is a mega project involving two-thirds of the world's total population and three-quarters of energy resources (Wolff, 2016).

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has become an opportunity for China to strengthen its profile image regionally and internationally as a responsible global power, especially through providing public goods independently (Yudilla, 2019). Nevertheless, the enthusiasm and global infrastructure initiatives of the G20 group of countries need to be taken into account, given the large risks involved in individual projects, which may give rise to hesitation among other investors to get involved (Yuniarto, 2017).

Additionally, the BRI can be interpreted as a special economic assistance initiative for certain Asian countries that have close diplomatic relations with China and India, while addressing maritime conflicts, especially involving the Philippines and Vietnam. This approach is carried out through the introduction of the Chinese development model which is focused on growth through infrastructure development (Rabena, 2018). By adopting “win-win” calculations, China aims to create economic benefits for recipient countries in Asia in return for their support of territorial and water claims enforced by China. In this context, the BRI emerged as a strategic instrument to strengthen bilateral relations and secure political support while achieving broader regional and global economic development goals (Gong, 2019).

BRI is not only a driving force for infrastructure development, but also pioneers economic and political transformation along these lines (Pedrason, 2021). By investing billions of dollars in infrastructure projects such as roads, ports, and railways, China is seeking to expand its influence in Asia and beyond traditional geographic boundaries (Kuik, 2021). However, behind claims of development and connectivity, BRI has raised critical questions related to its geopolitical implications. How will the BRI affect power dynamics in the region? What impact will this have on interstate relations and regional stability? How are countries in Asia responding and evaluating China's role in directing these initiatives?

In this context, this research seeks to answer these questions and delve deeper into the geopolitical implications of the BRI in Asia. Through in-depth analysis of the influence of the BRI at regional and national levels, this research is expected to provide rich and nuanced insights into China's role in shaping geopolitical dynamics in the 21st century, as well as its long-term consequences for regional security and cooperation.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach, because it produces descriptive data in the form of writing about people or people's words and their visible and observed behavior. The use of this method is considered a "research procedure" which is expected to produce descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from a number of people and observed behavior. Qualitative research methods are often referred to as naturalistic research methods because research is carried out in natural conditions (natural settings); also known as the ethnographic method, because initially this method was more widely used for research in the field of cultural anthropology; It is called a qualitative method because the data collected and the analysis is more qualitative in nature (Yuliana, 2022).

Meanwhile, this research is a descriptive type of research where this research is a type of research that describes the research object based on its characteristics. Qualitative descriptive research aims to explain phenomena in depth through data collection. If the data collected is in-depth enough and can explain the phenomenon being studied, there is no need to look for other samples. Descriptive research seeks to convey responses regarding existing communication strategies based on data and observation results, then through data presentation, analysis and data interpretation. Researchers only create actor categories, observe symptoms, and record them in their observation books (Narbuko & Achmadi, 2007).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The geopolitical impact of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the Asian region includes a number of aspects that influence regional power dynamics and relations between countries. Some of these impacts involve:

Strengthening Chinese Influence

Strengthening China's influence through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the Asian region has become a key factor in shifting geopolitical dynamics. Through infrastructure projects and significant economic investments, China has succeeded in expanding the scope of its influence in the region. In particular, the presence of the BRI gives China a strategic position in setting the direction of economic and political development in a number of Asian countries. China has leveraged these projects as a means to forge stronger bilateral ties with its regional partners, gain political support, and create deep economic interdependence. By becoming a key actor in providing infrastructure and financial support, China is building a solid foundation to increase its influence at the regional level and direct power dynamics in Asia according to its national interests.

Furthermore, strengthening China's influence through the BRI has a significant impact on economic resilience and national security. Countries in the Asian region that receive investment and assistance from China within the BRI framework find themselves increasingly dependent on China in various aspects. This creates complex relationship dynamics, where recipient countries feel compelled to maintain good relations with China to ensure the continuity of the projects awarded. In this context, BRI has not only become a means for China's economic influence but has also become an effective foreign policy instrument, reshaping the map of power in the Asian region in accordance with the direction desired by China. Through infrastructure projects and investments carried out within the BRI framework, China has succeeded in increasing its influence in the Asian region. Strengthening the economy through active engagement in these projects provides strategic and sustainable advantages for China's political influence.

Improved Regional Connections

Increasing Regional Connections through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has had a positive impact on infrastructure development and connectivity in the Asian region. This initiative encourages the construction of more efficient transportation routes, including railways, ports and highways, connecting China with partner countries throughout the region. Through this increased connectivity, BRI creates a more unified network between countries, facilitates trade and economic exchange, and strengthens regional integration.

In addition, the increase in connectivity resulting from BRI provides significant benefits in accelerating economic growth and regional development in a number of Asian countries. Improvements in infrastructure accessibility enable more efficient mobility of goods and people, support trade activities, and encourage foreign investment. This not only benefits China as the country driving the initiative, but also provides an economic boost to partner countries along the BRI path. With better connectivity, economic sectors in Asia can develop more optimally, forming a more economically integrated and interconnected region, which in turn can increase prosperity and economic growth throughout the region.

Dynamics of Bilateral Relations

The geopolitical impact of BRI related to the dynamics of bilateral relations in the Asian region marks a shift in the balance of power and political influence. This initiative provides China a platform to strengthen its diplomatic relations with Asian countries involved in BRI projects. In this case, infrastructure development and economic investment carried out by China can be considered as an effective tool of economic diplomacy, creating closer relations with its regional partners. In addition, countries that receive BRI projects tend to have greater dependence on China, both from an economic and political perspective, which in turn can influence the policies and political decisions of these countries.

However, this impact can also trigger tensions and competition between countries in the region. China's rise in influence could raise concerns among neighboring countries that feel threatened by China's economic and political dominance. Geopolitical competition in Asia can emerge in the form

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of rivalry over national and territorial interests. Therefore, while the BRI can be a tool for strengthening bilateral relations, it also creates complex dynamics and shifts in the regional balance of power, which require careful diplomatic management and constructive dialogue between countries in the region.

Improved Resource Access

The BRI has opened the door for China to access crucial natural resources in various Asian countries, creating significant geopolitical impacts related to energy security and security. Through investments in the energy and natural resources sectors, China has ensured safer and more reliable access to the energy supplies that are so necessary to support economic growth and industrial development. Increasing control over natural resources in countries involved in the BRI allows China to exploit economic and security advantages, which in turn strengthens its strategic position in the Asian region.

Additionally, China's advantage in accessing natural resources under the BRI umbrella could create economic dependency for recipient countries. Countries that depend on Chinese investment and assistance for the development of their energy sectors may feel economically tied down, and this could give China greater influence in policies and decisions at the national level. Therefore, the geopolitical impacts of the BRI related to natural resource access create complex interdependence relationships between China and recipient countries, deepening economic interdependence and raising questions regarding sovereignty and energy security in the region.

Reengineering Trade Routes

The increase in connectivity resulting from the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has had a significant impact on the dynamics of global and regional trade in the Asian region. By strengthening transportation and logistics infrastructure, BRI facilitates the flow of goods and services between countries, creates new trade routes, and changes the traditional trade map. This allows China to play a more dominant role in global supply chains, reducing dependence on conventional trade routes, and opening up new access to regional markets.

The importance of these changes in trade dynamics also creates opportunities for countries involved in the BRI to expand their economic potential. By taking advantage of improved connectivity, countries in Asia can increase trade volumes, increase economic growth and create jobs. However, on the other hand, shifts in trade routes could raise concerns among countries that are not directly involved in this initiative. In this context, the BRI's geopolitical impact on trade could create regional economic imbalances and raise questions about economic independence and sustainability in the long term.

Regional Dispute Management

The strengthening of China's influence in regional and multilateral organizations is a significant geopolitical impact of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the Asian region. Through BRI, China is strengthening its role and participation in organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). China, as the initiator of this initiative, can influence regional policies and norms through its financial support in infrastructure projects as well as mobilizing support from its regional partners. China's membership and active involvement in these organizations strengthens its position as a major player in formulating regional agendas and policies in the Asian region.

However, along with strengthening influence, BRI has also sparked debate and challenges at the multilateral level. Some countries may be concerned that China's dominance in regional organizations could lead to policies that favor China's national interests over the region's collective interests. Additionally, the policies and approaches advocated by China in multilateral forums may give rise to debates on transparency, sustainability and human rights. Thus, the geopolitical impact of the BRI in regional organizations creates complex dynamics that require dialogue and cooperation between countries to ensure that the interests of all parties are accommodated and regional sustainability is maintained.

Influence in Regional Organizations

The geopolitical impact of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) related to managing regional disputes in the Asian region shows that this initiative can be used as a diplomacy and conflict mitigation tool. China, through the BRI, can offer economic solutions and infrastructure development as an effort to overcome regional tensions that may arise with its neighboring countries. Investment and assistance from China in BRI projects could create a better cooperative climate and defuse possible regional rivalries.

However, at the same time, BRI could also trigger disapproval and concern among neighboring countries who feel that China is using this initiative to strengthen its territorial claims. This could raise doubts and resistance to BRI projects in areas involved in regional conflicts. Therefore, the geopolitical impact of the BRI in managing regional disputes creates a duality, where this initiative can function as a catalyst for cooperation and conflict resolution, but also raises concerns and resistance at the regional level. In this perspective, it is important for there to be open dialogue between the parties involved to ensure that the BRI contributes not only to economic development, but also to regional stability and conflict resolution in a fair and sustainable manner.

Consideration of the challenges and risks associated with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) creates complex dynamics in the implementation of these projects in the Asian region. One of the main challenges is the financial aspect, where BRI projects often require large investments and are high risk. The involvement of a number of countries at different levels of economic and policy development can create difficulties in achieving consensus regarding project financing and risk management. In addition, political and legal risks also arise, especially related to changes in government policy at the national level and legal uncertainty in several countries.

Social and environmental impacts are also a serious concern. Infrastructure projects within the BRI often involve population relocation and major changes to the environment. Lack of local community involvement in project planning and implementation can lead to dissatisfaction and resistance at the local level. Apart from that, environmental impacts such as deforestation, land degradation and climate change also need to be managed carefully so that infrastructure development does not harm environmental sustainability. Therefore, the success of BRI implementation is not only measured from an economic perspective, but must also take into account social and environmental impacts in a balanced manner, ensuring that these projects provide sustainable benefits for local communities and protect environmental sustainability.

4. CONCLUSION

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has had a significant impact on Asian geopolitics, creating a transformation in power, economic and diplomatic relations in the region. Since its introduction in 2013 by China, BRI has become a grand design on a global scale that has expanded its influence at regional and international levels. The geopolitical implications involve a number of aspects including strengthening China's influence, increasing regional connectivity, dynamics of bilateral relations, access to natural resources, changes in trade routes, influence in regional organizations, and managing regional disputes. The strengthening of China's influence in the Asian region through the BRI can be seen in changes in the dynamics of power relations, which include increased economic diplomacy, strengthening regional connections, and an increasingly dominant role in regional organizations. Although this initiative brings great economic and infrastructure opportunities, it also faces a number of challenges and risks, such as complex financial aspects, political risks, and socio-environmental impacts that need to be managed carefully. In conclusion, the Belt and Road Initiative creates a new paradigm in Asian geopolitics, shaping a more economically integrated region, but also raises questions and challenges that need to be addressed. BRI's success is not only measured by economic growth, but also by its impact on regional stability, environmental sustainability and societal welfare. Therefore, it is important to continue to monitor and evaluate BRI developments and ensure that its implementation is in line with the principles of justice, transparency and sustainability to ensure long-term benefits for the entire region.

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