



## Original Research

# The Role of the Belt and Road Initiative in Increasing China's Influence in the World (2013-2023)

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**Abstract:** The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has become a primary priority for the Chinese government, and it is critical to comprehending Chinese President Xi Jinping's vision. This study will examine how the BRI has increased China's influence from 2013 to 2023, with a particular emphasis on Chinese growth into developing countries as an alternative to challenge US dominance through BRI projects. It will also look at how China has utilized the BRI to change global governance institutions and strengthen its influence inside them. The analysis leads to the conclusion that China plans to extend its influence in nations and in the Asia-Pacific region by developing and regulating infrastructure along the BRI. By outsourcing infrastructure projects to Chinese state-owned firms, China may solve the surplus capacity and unemployment in its sectors. Additionally, China seeks to establish structural power in a multipolar world, enabling it to confront US hegemony and the restrictions on its rise.

**Keywords:** *Belt and Road, Initiative, China's Influence, Development, Political Implications, Economic*

## Introduction

The Belt and Road initiative (BRI) is a policy that has a projected long-term completion time, of perhaps twenty-five to thirty years. This is an important consideration in assessments of its impact, in which a common mistake would be to expect a high and quick return. The infrastructure to support the new routes will be largely funded and constructed by China. This can be seen as a problem for some developing countries involved in the initiative, in which they would potentially become indebted to China. Thus, it can be stated that the objectives of the initiative are not evidently in mutual interest and can be perceived as China simply aiming to expand its influence across the world (Khor, Poonpatpibul, and Foo 2021; Yang et al. 2020).

The Chinese government announced the One Belt, One Road initiative in 2013 and 2014 to create a network of land and sea routes connecting the Eurasian continent, aiming to boost trade and economic growth. This initiative is a modern-day revival of the ancient Silk Road,

reflecting China's perspective on the current international order. China seeks to return to traditional values, improve living standards, and restore a sense of national pride and power (Song and Fabinyi 2022; Hu et al. 2022; Xie, Zhu, and Grydehøj 2020).

The background of BRI can be traced from various sources such as China's internal and external challenges. China had accumulated large foreign exchange reserves due to economic growth, leading to overcapacity, rising unemployment, and attempts to hinder its growth. BRI aims to address these issues by creating new markets, addressing domestic concerns, and increasing global cooperation (Dunford 2021; Chen 2020).

## Objectives of the Study

The defensive agenda is to ensure that China's export and import routes are not compromised by instability in key regions. Chinese firms and Chinese nationals working overseas have often been victims of political violence, and the BRI is designed to create a more secure environment for Chinese economic activities abroad. The offensive agenda is to diversify China's market access and sources of key resources (especially hydrocarbons and minerals) away from a situation in which a large proportion are acquired from a single area, the Western Pacific. Particularly in the case of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Central Asia, and the Middle East, China seeks to promote these regions as alternative loci of economic activity to their current dependence on Europe and North America. This would improve China's strategic depth and reduce US capacity to contain China by dominating the key choke points through which Chinese trade must pass.

This article examines the BRI within the context of China's strategic goals. Rooted in China's historical experiences with isolation and the tributary system, the BRI is a reflection of China's self-perception as a "world order" within its own right. Although it can be called "revisionist" in challenging certain aspects of the existing order, China does not see itself as seeking to overturn the system; rather, it seeks to "encourage" change by altering incentives facing other states. The BRI is China's attempt to put its own stamp on global economic governance and promote a network of relationships around the world built on Chinese leadership. The objective of the BRI is to increase China's centrality in global economic and geostrategic affairs. This involves both a defensive and an offensive agenda.

## Scope and Limitations

This study's scope is to understand China's BRI and its impact on the world from 2013 to 2023. It will analyze the reasons behind China's shift in strategy; assess the BRI's impact on economic, military, cultural, and political terms; and evaluate its potential to change the unipolar world dominated by the US. The study will also examine the BRI's effects on global governance and international institutions. Understanding the future impact of the BRI is crucial for proactive measures to mitigate any detrimental effects on the global system.

## Research Question

How will the BRI contribute to increasing Chinese influence in the world?

## Literature Review

Between 2013 and 2023, China's influence around the world grew significantly as a result of the BRI. Chinese progress through this endeavor in carrying out the initiative are highlighted in the following literature.

According to Ru (2023) and Ishaque (2022), the US has responded differently to China's BRI, depending on the government in office. The Obama Administration's initial emphasis on forging a strategic alliance with China resulted in a lack of enthusiasm for the BRI. As time went on, worries about how the BRI would affect the international governance and the US-backed economic system intensified, prompting further attempts to address Chinese difficulties inside the BRI. The Trump Administration adopted a more combative posture, adopting a hard China policy and having a pessimistic view of the BRI. This change persisted throughout the Biden Administration, leading to increased efforts to uphold liberal principles and mobilize democratic governments' backing against unfavorable Chinese-directed BRI advances. In the context of US-China competition, the US reaction to the BRI, seen as a whole, displays a complex interaction of geopolitical, economic, and ideological factors.

Examining the BRI as a China-led initiative, Upadhyay notes that it encompasses infrastructure and construction projects in over 140 countries, 65 of which represent 30 percent of global GDP, 35 percent of global trade, 39 percent of global land, 64 percent of global population, 54 percent of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and 50 percent of global energy consumption. Many people believe that Chinese Premier Xi Jinping's 2013 initiative is his dream. Its geographical and sectoral complexity swiftly expanded, encompassing the Arctic, deep waters, Latin American nations, Africa, and even joint ventures in space and marine exploration (Upadhyay 2023).

According to Ramzan, Ali, Khan, Mehar, Ashraf, and Kiran, the BRI encompasses 30 percent of the global GDP and 64 percent of the world's population. Using the gravity model technique, they examined the effects of BRI-driven modifications to maritime networks on bilateral trade flows. The influence of bilateral commerce between China and other nations was investigated in the study using a variety of quantitative methodologies. Twenty years of data were analyzed, and the results demonstrated that China has a favorable effect on global commerce and has a very high GDP per person. The findings show that trade partner nations' economies have expanded in tandem with their population growth (Ramzan et al. 2023).

According to Fan, China is making a major effort to support inter-regional economic growth through the BRI, which includes the development of commerce as a key component. On the basis of Chinese trade data from 190 global regions and countries for the period 1993 to 2021, the empirical findings demonstrate that China's commerce with nations

participating in the BRI as well as countries bordering the route is considerably increased by the BRI, as are imports and exports across all five product categories. In the meantime, the amount of commerce with China significantly advances the economies of the trading nations. These findings demonstrate that the BRI advances the trade development of the participating nations in addition to China's international commerce (Fan 2023).

Gong and Lewis (2023) investigate the little-known contribution of foreign involvement, as well as particular foreign players, to China's BRI's greening. In order to comprehend the part that foreign actors have played in greening China's BRI, we offer two distinct models of engagement: direct engagement, which affects the specific project outcomes, and indirect engagement, which shapes China's more general policies and investment practices. We also note the limitations on the function of foreign influence, such as the lack of a significant Chinese international development organization.

There has been extensive research on China's BRI from various perspectives such as geo-economics, foreign policy, trade, investment, and regional politics. In their analysis, Rana and Ji (2020) discuss the dual character of the BRI as both a grand strategy and an economic strategy for China. They emphasize that the BRI aims to reshape not only the economic but also the political landscape of the region; they delve into the intricacies of China's motivations behind the BRI and its potential economic and strategic benefits for China and its key partners.

The BRI is founded on economic ideas positing that greater trade and collaboration may benefit all participating nations, as Chen and Guo (2022) and Zakić (2022) elucidate. In the context of the BRI, economic connectivity—as determined by trade and investment data—is essential for strengthening ties between China and the Western Balkan nations. Furthermore, the Global Trade Analysis Project (GTAP) model has been used to estimate the potential macroeconomic impact of the BRI on participating countries. This estimate emphasizes the significance of trade liberalization policies and the advantages for landlocked countries like Mongolia, Kazakhstan, and Nepal as well as nations that are well integrated into global maritime networks like Malaysia and Singapore. According to Das and Das (2013), these economic theories also inform the creation and application of policies meant to promote win-win collaboration, the building of infrastructure, and sustainable growth within the framework of the BRI.

## Research Approach and Methodology

The theoretical analysis undertaken in this article is based on secondary sources of information, including official documents and reports obtained from the Global Development Studies Library, and from relevant articles, books, and internet sites. Regarding the key terms driving analytical distinction, it is not possible to exhaust a self-contained definition or representation of each of these concepts. In each instance, a small selection from

the array of potential meanings is drawn together to shape the benchmark for comparison. Given the relative newness of the Chinese economic role and, consequently, the embryonic nature of academic literature, no singular conceptual expression emerges in any of these themes (Aman et al. 2022; Jiang and Ashworth 2021).

The approach to interpreting these concepts is based on their articulation in contemporary policy. The article is intended as a tracking and evaluation exercise on the Chinese regional/global strategy across a ten-year span. It is thus an empirically driven analysis, constantly testing various theoretical propositions related to Chinese economic and trade policy against the actual state behavior. This involves an assessment of the constraints and opportunities encountered by Chinese decision makers. The objective of this exercise is to discern patterns within and between different phases of Chinese external economic behavior and to ascertain conclusions on the current trajectory and potential future outcomes. Temporal comparisons will be drawn where necessary to discern key operational shifts in Chinese policy (Quan et al. 2024; Yip et al. 2023).

## **Economic Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative**

There is widespread agreement that BRI's reach may be vastly improved through infrastructure development. A study conducted by McKinsey & Company in 2016 observed the infrastructure gap within the BRI region in terms of inadequacies in provision (lack of access), poor quality of existing infrastructure, and extensive maintenance requirements. Using the projections case that the BRI will be a success, the studies assessed that if the status quo were to continue, the infrastructure investment required to close the gap by 2025 would be approximately USD\$5.3 trillion, with most of this investment concentrated in power and transport (Haran et al. 2020).

The same study estimated that a more optimistic globalized scenario driven by the BRI with increased cross-border trade and connectivity would require increased infrastructure investment of around USD\$6.4 trillion, providing additional infrastructure revenue of approximately USD\$0.6 trillion per annum over the status quo. The potential economic and strategic significance for China is that major projects are highly likely to be China-led with a degree of funding provided by China-based institutions. This can pave the way for Chinese firms to work in a conducive policy environment potentially with greater support and diminished political risk to that in other regions. The jobs created through the various projects can reduce underemployment in sectors such as iron and steel production as well as in construction and other labor-intensive industries (Sutherland et al. 2020).

These trends are associated with the modernization of an economy and are consistent with the growth and development changes observed within classical economic development models. Coming down to it, there is evidence to suggest that infrastructure development can help to alleviate overcapacity in certain Chinese industries. This can be through improving

prospects for exporting capital and intermediate goods and through providing an investment outlet for Chinese firms with experience in construction and infrastructure development (Nugent and Lu 2021).

The Chinese government could potentially support these ventures through financing, especially while Chinese firms have excess liquidity and are seeking profitable foreign investment and investment in higher yielding assets. By successfully gaining on the BRI's infrastructure projects, China may have alleviated its firms' difficulties in finding consistent and reliable access to foreign investment opportunities, with many future contracts often being obstructed by competition or being lost to Western MNCs or developed country government development aid projects. By investing its own capabilities to increase world standards of infrastructure, China's firms may also stand to benefit from ad hoc learning and technology transfer possibilities. Finally, there is some signaling that with increased globalization and regional development, China, as a developing state, may consider further opening up its own infrastructure and public projects to more foreign competition. This may have potential long-term effects on industry efficiency and productivity, offering a way to escape from the middle-income trap (Weng et al. 2021).

### Infrastructure Development

The Chinese government and companies will be involved in establishing ports and industrial parks in foreign countries. They have been given generous loans by China, quite different from the loans provided by the World Bank or Asian Development Bank (ADB), which have very low interest and longer grace periods. These loans will be used to fund various projects, such as the 4,500-km railway in Nigeria and the Indonesian railway between Jakarta and Bandung. While improving their credentials for more sophisticated activities elsewhere, especially in Western Europe, the US and Japan, China's companies see this as an opportunity to gain valuable experience and establish themselves in international markets (Yu 2020; Zou et al. 2022).

Infrastructure is one of the primary targets of BRI. According to the 2015 ADB Report, investment of between USD\$750 billion and USD\$1 trillion per year is needed in Asia, based on 2010 prices, to maintain and improve the growth trajectory of South, Southeast, and Central Asia. The lack of infrastructure will be more pronounced in 2030, when the developing Asian countries will experience a total infrastructure investment gap of nearly USD\$26 trillion (from 2010 to 2030, in 2010 prices). BRI aims to fill these infrastructure gaps (Zhai, Nam, and Malang 2021; Haga 2021).

### Trade and Investment Opportunities

The main way countries will benefit economically from the BRI is through the increased trade and investment that takes place, which provides more opportunities to its trade

partners. As trade increases, the exposure to new markets and new consumer trends can result in more competition and services that are better tailored to consumers' needs. This can lead to an increase in productivity and consumer surplus in the long run. The increase in trade can also lead to comparative advantages being realized by some countries, particularly those in Central Asia. For instance, the Trans-Siberian railway is currently underused, but modernization and integration with the BRI could potentially provide more efficient trade links between Russia and East Asia. Trade can take place not just between regions but also within road networks in different regions—this may have a significant impact for landlocked developing countries that can often trade only with their immediate neighbors. A commonly cited example is Laos, which has aspirations to be a land-linked country rather than a landlocked one through the development of the Singapore–Kunming railway (An et al. 2021; Ashraf, Luo, and Khan 2022).

Foreign direct investment (FDI) often follows trade increases and can be seen as the longer-term investment involving building a lasting interest in a foreign country. One can argue that there are both positive and negative impacts to countries hosting the FDI. The positives are the inflow of capital, technology, and organizational/management skills that can generally be good learning experiences for domestic firms and workers. It can also act as a driver of enterprise development and modernization of the host country's infrastructure. For certain BRI projects, China will be the host country for investment due to plans to construct facilities to serve as regional hubs, i.e., port facilities in Southeast Asia. The negative view is related to concerns that FDI may result in loss of ownership and control over resources and significant loss of national sovereignty in extreme cases. This is probably the greatest concern for countries at a greater economic distance from China (Liu, Schindler, and Liu 2020; Li et al. 2022).

Since its entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001, China's trade openness has gradually improved. China's international trade showed a relatively rapid growth overall both in exports and imports from 2002 to 2017, and exports were more than imports, resulting in a steady trade surplus (Figure 1). In addition, China's imports and exports accounted for more than 10 percent of the world trade in 2017 and were also showing a rapid upward trend (Figure 2). China's policy of open trade is playing an increasingly important role in global trade growth.

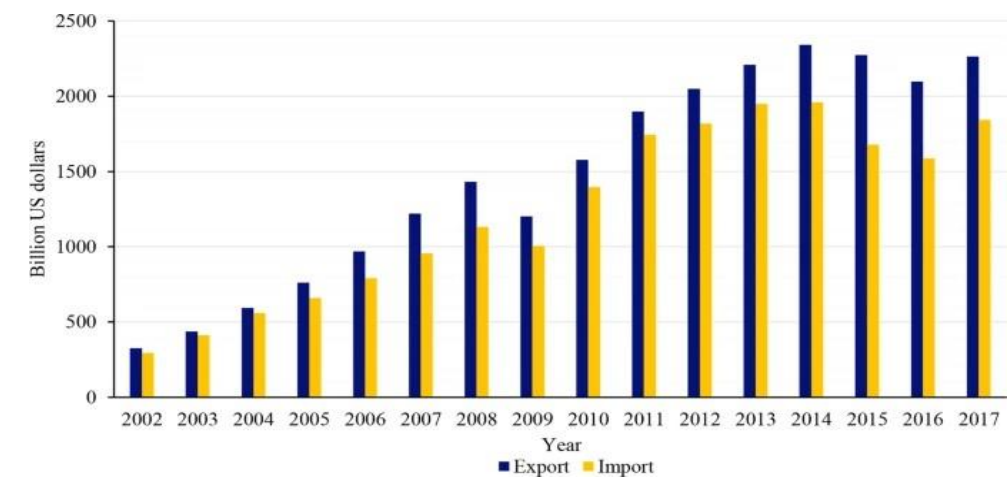


Figure 1: China's Exports and Imports from 2002 to 2017

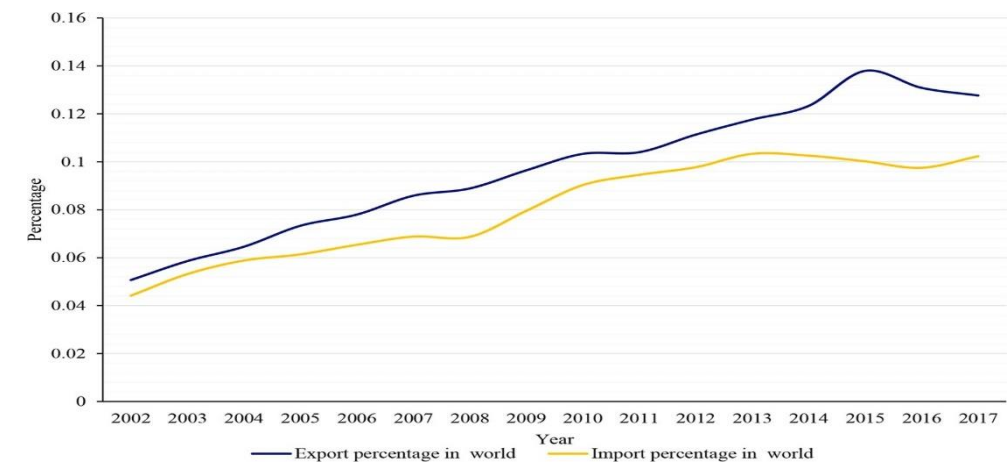


Figure 2: China's Export and Import Percentage in World from 2002 to 2017

Economic Cooperation and Integration

Greater economic cooperation and resultant integration within the existing and prospective partnership bloc is a somewhat nebulous expected outcome but one that forms a key aspect of China's desired end state for the BRI. While the contrary holds true in historical examples of European- and American-led infrastructure investment endeavors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it can be seen that the past half-century of increasingly globalized economic activity has rendered enhanced economic cooperation as a near-automatic side effect of infrastructure improvement in developing areas. Alternatively, in areas where infrastructure is already at an adequate level, cooperation can be brought about through



facilitation of investment and improved business environments in BRI target countries (Qian and Zhang 2024; Panagariya 2022).

The effortless facilitation of enhanced economic cooperation by private and public entities, both domestic and foreign, is a somewhat idealistic scenario, given that many BRI countries have cultural, bureaucratic, and legal barriers to entry that can render investment difficult or unattractive. However, the centralized momentum of the BRI-backed investment and construction operations represents a significant ability to bypass such barriers on a small scale, often limiting the scope of large-scale development projects being the government-to-government level agreements. An enhanced role for BRI internationalization as a funding facilitator holds potential for further benefiting this process, particularly in regions targeted by BRI investment with higher currency risks. BRI loans can empower domestic government and business borrowers with an ability to avoid forex risk on hard currency loans and bonds (Nurgozhayeva 2020; Sutherland et al. 2020).

### **Political Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative**

The BRI is expected to have a considerable impact on the distribution of power and influence across the globe. The initiative itself is the answer to the declining growth and profitability of Chinese investments in the early twenty-first century. BRI projects will develop economic ties between countries along the route, simultaneously transforming the physical infrastructure and the institutional systems within them. It is anticipated that the trade routes will increase the demand for stronger relationships with China, either economically or politically, across most, if not all, participating countries. Assessing the different pathways of the route, together with its key trading partners, one can assume that the initiative is strategic in differentiating which regions of the globe are subjected to US influence and which are not. In doing so, there is likely to be a shift in power from west to east. As of 2013, an era of US unipolarity was coming to an end with Iraq (2003–2012) and continued public dissent toward EU regional integration presented difficulties in the functionality of US trans-Atlantic mutual interests (Zou et al. 2022; Jin, Shen, and Jiang 2021). This situation is favored by China (and Russia), whereby both wish to see a multipolar world more balanced in terms of East–West influence and less unilateral decisions made by Western superpowers. An increase in Chinese influence in Central Asia and the Middle East will build regional support around the Chinese aim and reduce US and E3 foreign policy leverage in their respective regions.

It is probable that certain BRI projects could contradict recent or current foreign policies of US allies, sparking a competitive environment of investment lending credibility toward China's vision. An example of this would be Australian interests in Timor-Leste, where both countries have acknowledged the need for infrastructure investment but have varying opinions on whether it should be concessional or commercially based. Overall, one of the key political

implications of BRI is the reshaping of global governance to be more inclusive of China’s interests and less influenced by the norms and principles of the post-WW2 order (Yu 2020).

Geopolitical Considerations

BRI is Veblenian in nature, seeking to consolidate and secure China’s core and semi-periphery zones, while expanding its influence further into the periphery regions and the wider global economy. From a geopolitical standpoint, the BRI was necessary due to mounting international pressure on the yuan to float. The first aim of BRI is to increase the international use of the renminbi and secure China’s existing investments by preventing the spread of overseas renminbi into local currencies. This is to alleviate the risk of devaluation, which could cause high investment losses in countries with unstable currencies such as Venezuela and certain African nations. A depreciating local currency may also dissuade foreign investment in China’s very lucrative energy and raw materials sectors (Dunford 2021; Liu 2021).

In regard to China’s external environment, with the US pivot to Asia, China faces pressure from the US both in the South China Sea and in the East China Sea. The Trans Pacific Partnership, spearheaded by the US, further complicates China’s regional and global economic strategy. Increased attention has been paid to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) by the US and India. Both states have openly expressed their concerns that CPEC challenges the status quo of Indian- and Pakistani-administered territory as it is claimed by both states. In the Middle East, China’s influence and investment is second only to those of the US. It has assumed a more active diplomatic role in recent years and has a clear vested interest in stability with its dependence on the region’s energy resources. Collectively, China has a significant stake in the regions through which BRI traverses, and what happens in these regions will largely impact the future (Rahman 2022; Liu 2021; Yu 2020).



Figure 3: The Path of the Belt and Road Initiative

*Influence on International Institutions*

This particular aspect involves council areas in the region taking an active role. In the case of ASEAN, the leader, Suharto, has been personally promoting the intra-ASEAN rice trade and using “quiet diplomacy” to resolve underlying conflicts of interest in the rice trade. As evidence, Indonesia allowed its BULOG agency to import and resell rice under the National Food Security Programme. However, Indonesian dissatisfaction with slow domestic production growth contradicted the agreement reached under the ASEAN Integrated Food Security Agreement to phase out BULOG roles in 2007 (Dunford 2021; Zeng 2021; Costa 2020).

Other rice trading countries such as Thailand have an interest in maintaining substantial rice exports and were concerned about potential damage to their markets. Suharto had worked at the time to convince Thai Prime Minister Samak that simply accepting lower prices and sales to Indonesia would be the most effective way to avoid rice market distortions (Liu 2021; Yu 2020).

*Diplomatic Relations with Participating Countries*

China is actively increasing diplomatic relations with countries involved in the BRI. High-level conferences have been held to strengthen these relations. The goal is not only to establish satisfactory diplomatic ties but also to ensure their future strengthening through the BRI. Notably, between 2016 and 2017, China held 140 high-level bilateral meetings with participating countries’ leaders. The BRI aims to promote cultural exchanges and friendly interactions among the people of participating countries. China aims to strengthen diplomatic ties and cooperation with BRI countries. This involves efforts to promote understanding of Chinese culture and the provision of economic aid and zero-interest loans to foster economic cooperation and mutual understanding between participating countries (Lewin and Witt 2022; Mishra and Mishra 2021; Yu 2020).

**Environmental Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative**

China’s BRI aims to reconnect Asia to Europe and Africa through two main routes—overland and maritime. It has significant elements involving infrastructure development and is expected to activate a reallocation of global capital and resources in order to facilitate economic development. When dealing with infrastructure development, there are concerns about the promotion of unsustainable development. This is because infrastructure has a long-term impact on the environment, such as deforestation, mining, and construction. It also results in an increase in emissions and pollution and may open up previously untouched environments to development and exploitation. The key aspect to look at in terms of infrastructure development is a shift of technology, knowledge, and finance to Asia, which may alter the resource base for

development into a less sustainable one through the replication of the methods of more developed countries (Narins and Agnew 2020; Pröpper 2020).

This scenario would have the greatest impact on the lesser developed countries within Asia and Africa and would lock them into unsustainable development pathways due to an oversupply of capital and technology from China. This is a reinforcement of the current situation in developing countries, which are net importers of capital from richer countries, which just enforces the dependency pattern. Unsustainable development also causes various other types of impacts on the environment, such as an increase in the rate of resource depletion and energy use due to the increase in the production of goods and services. Finally, the construction of transport infrastructure has been shown to be a direct driver of land use change and associated impacts, which has the potential to pollute and impair both marine and terrestrial ecosystems. This has a significant impact as it disrupts or blocks waterways and changes the sediment and flow regimes of rivers, potentially impacting previous ecosystems over many decades (Pröpper 2020; Parepa 2020).

### Infrastructure Development and Environmental Concerns

Another issue is an increase in the spread of invasive species. Invasive species are often spread through ballast water exchange on ships or through hitching a ride on construction vehicles. The creation of artificial waterways will also aid the spread of invasive species. China itself has already been plagued by invasive species such as the American mink and muskrat, introduced for fur farming. Temporary construction settlements can also lead to uncontrolled pets and farm animals becoming feral, a root cause of many modern invasive species (Duarte and Ferreira-Pereira 2022; Freymann 2022).

Development of roads and rail will cut up natural habitats and will make them more accessible to loggers, hunters, and poachers. There is also likely to be severe water pollution and loss of fish spawning habitats through dam construction. China is currently planning to build around 700 hydroelectric dams. Gibbons et al. report that 47 percent of these existing dams are large to very large and are estimated to have a high impact on river systems. Dams also have indirect effects due to flooding, one example being the Serengeti Highway in Tanzania. During the wet season, flooding often renders sections of this road impassable for vehicles. It is likely that China will look for methods of flood prevention on transportation routes in order to maintain accessibility. This may involve an increase in the scale of current dam building projects.

With the BRI funding being focused on infrastructure, it is highly likely that concrete production will increase dramatically, with much of it being produced in regions that are currently experiencing development and have less stringent environmental regulations. The same can be said for the production of steel, another highly polluting industry. Perhaps the most obvious environmental concern is the impact of infrastructure development.

Infrastructure and the production of concrete are very damaging to the environment. Concrete production is incredibly carbon-intensive and is expected to release 3,760 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually by 2050, or around 4 percent of the total amount of CO<sub>2</sub> produced by humans (Narins and Agnew 2020).

China and Russia are strengthening their cooperation in building and modernizing transportation infrastructure, including ports, railroads, highways, and border crossings, as show. With an emphasis on integrating new green technology, this will boost traffic capacity and promote efficiency (Boyu et al. 2022).

### Energy and Resource Management

According to China's National Energy Administration reports, the BRI has helped attract foreign energy companies to invest in China in various forms, such as joint ventures, giving them an overseas platform and employment opportunities. Despite the overall mixed response on the level of success, it is highlighted that China has been able to gain political relations for economic gain using BRI and energy (Li 2023).

The previous argument about China's increasing political influence among BRI nations is further supported by the use of the energy sector as a diplomatic tool for developing relations with other countries (Kallio 2023; Salim and Shah 2023). Additionally, the global environment is greatly impacted by energy use, and BRI policy banks have claimed to promote a "green" energy policy by investing in renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies. These investments are aimed at reducing harmful emissions and mitigating global climate change. It is noteworthy that China's policy banks are required to invest a minimum of 50 percent equity into energy and resource sector projects to ensure their profitability. This strategic move is seen as a shift from traditional energy sectors to higher value-adding industries in energy-efficient technologies and renewable energy, thereby reducing the "lock-in" effect on Chinese influence (Rahman 2022; Van Noort and Colley 2021).

### Comparison with Other Global Powers

Compared to US initiatives, China's influence mostly benefits the country's development. This can be seen in the funds that have been allocated for aid. While in the same period of time, US aid was mostly spent on military spending, the amount of military spending by China is still minute compared to the US (USD\$146 billion versus USD\$608 billion defense budget). This means that with the smaller amount of military spending, the projects that benefit the country can still be maintained. The vivid comparison can be seen in Sri Lanka, where a mere USD\$250 million loan gave China an 85 percent share in the port of Hambantota, which port has been developed by a Chinese-owned company with a construction contract worth USD\$360 million (Yu 2020).

China's global influence is hard to make a comparison due to its unique nature of non-interference in many aspects of other countries. In terms of direct influence, from 2000 to 2016, the amount of aid given by China is only USD\$354 billion, nowhere close to the US's USD\$3,946 billion in the same period. However, the influence from the aid that has been given is visible in the projects. In contrast to US aid in the form of cash, China's aid is coming from the building of infrastructure. This includes roads, railways, and seaports, all of which are still actively contributing to the development of the country. This has been shown in Southeast Asia, where during the period 2009 to 2013, it has been recorded that nearly 60 percent of construction contracts worth USD\$85.6 billion have been won by Chinese companies.

#### Implications for the International Order

This aspect has generated the most attention and debate in the scholarly and policy communities, reflecting the significance of the BRI in international relations and the study of Chinese foreign policy. Analysts and officials from the US, India, and Japan have all made public statements expressing concern that the BRI is a veiled attempt to establish Chinese hegemony through a China-centric regional order and multiple regional forums, which will increase its influence at the expense of the US and other established great powers. While this perspective may overstate the degree of centralization and coherence of the BRI as well as misconstrue a central motive behind the initiative (sales of excess capacity in construction and industrial sectors), there is no doubt that BRI projects will help to increase China's influence in very many countries. The US National Security Strategy identified the BRI as a primary means by which China seeks to "shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests" and to "move the center of global power and influence" away from the US. This is perhaps the biggest concern of great powers and small states alike (Ciborowski, Oziewicz, and Pangsy-Kania 2021).

The former are worried about getting locked into dependent economic relationships with China and thereby reducing their economic and geopolitical autonomy vis-a-vis China, while the latter are concerned about their ability to maintain autonomy and not have their domestic politics and policies influenced by undue foreign interference. Particular concerns include (a) "debt trap diplomacy," in which leveraged assets are ceded to Chinese control or ownership, (b) an increase in support for incumbent leaders and ruling parties that are friendly to China and a corresponding decrease in support for opposition groups or criticism of extant regimes, and (c) a shift in international norms and institutions toward those that are more favorable to China's autocratic political system. This is a complex and multifaceted issue, and it is likely that BRI impact will vary widely across various countries and regarding different issues. As such, it merits continued and nuanced investigation in the future. At the same time, it should be noted that a large part of China's increased influence will be welcomed by countries that are frustrated with the economic conditionalities and presumed interference in domestic politics of Western-led international financial institutions (Duarte and Ferreira-Pereira 2022).

## Conclusion

This article has sought to highlight the profound influence that the BRI has had on China's rapidly increasing influence in the world. The adoption of the BRI as an explicit foreign policy strategy has facilitated the expansion of Chinese activities and investment in a broader range of countries and regions, with the strategic goal of improving China's economic and security situation. Although the effect of the BRI in achieving these goals remains to be seen, it has already served to greatly increase global perceptions that China has influence or interests in a wide array of countries and regions. Additionally, the implementation of the BRI has caused a shift in Chinese leadership from a reactive to a proactive approach in regard to participating in regional and global affairs. This marks an important departure from China being satisfied with its influence being limited to a few critical regions. With the implementation of the BRI, China has taken proactive steps to improve its influence, as signaled by the growing number of Chinese bilateral and multilateral initiatives, proposals, and agreements with other nations in areas that are related to the BRI.

## Summary of Findings

First, China will be able to increase its influence in the case of countries and the Asia-Pacific region through the building and control of infrastructure along the BRI. This will be able to facilitate an increase in Chinese economic-military (econ-mil) power in these areas, with the relative cost being much lower than trying to attain the same amount of influence through stepping up US-style econ-mil operations. The reason for this infrastructure as a power conversion tool is that China is in need of a change in the distributive share of econ-mil capabilities in its favor. The ability to outsource infrastructure building to Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) with BRI projects will also offset China's problem in overcapacity in industries and unemployment. This leads to the first quantitative findings by showing that the BRI will be able to change the balance of econ-mil power in China's favor and provide Chinese SOEs with a higher level of activity. An increase in China's econ-mil power will be the instrumental power required to push for more China-friendly general global policy and formation of international institutions favorable to China—intentions that were reported by the Chinese ambassador to Indonesia. These intentions are the structural power requirements for a multipolar world in which China can escape US hegemonic behavior that has sought to block China's rise. The BRI will also have an influence on changing the global political economy order.

This project has sought to explain the BRI, which was proposed by China in 2013 as an avenue through which it can increase its influence on the Asia-Pacific region and globally for the next decade. This study has approached the BRI using a “chessboard” perspective, with China as the main actor attempting to achieve its grand strategy.

## Recommendations for Policymakers

In conclusion, in order to take the maximum advantage of BRI and to be aware of the consequences of closer trade relations and cooperation with China, policymakers in BRI recipient countries need to be conscious of pitfalls and potential traps. This is particularly the case with regard to countries in the Asia-Pacific region. States should seek to mitigate potential economic and security risks of participation in BRI by focusing on strengthening their partnerships with other major powers and cooperating on policy coordination to better manage their economic interdependence with China.

For many countries in the Asia Pacific, the closer economic ties facilitated by BRI do not require significant interventions in trade policy; many are already China's major trading partners. Instead, these countries should focus on diversifying their economic links with China to reduce long-term vulnerability. Also, policymakers should strive to maintain a balanced and constructive relationship with China to ensure that closer cooperation through BRI does not eventuate in economic dependence, which may restrict their policy autonomy. Economic cooperation with China can potentially deliver positive-sum gains, but there remains a risk that it will be diverted into unfair economic exchanges that will exploit asymmetries in China's partner countries for China's benefit. In the worst case, this might work against the interests of the partner country. In efforts to avoid this, states could seek to engage China through regional or multilateral frameworks. A platform whereby BRI countries collectively engage China on BRI matters would also be beneficial for these aims. Moving on, developed countries mentioned in the case of European states need to be conscious of their long-term strategic interests and the potential technical and know-how transfers that might eventuate through closer economic cooperation with China. The modern Silk Road offers new opportunities for Chinese espionage and transferred IP. This will require a delicate balancing of the short-term financing and investment benefits of closer cooperation against the potential technology transfers and harm to indigenous industries in the long run. Failure to comprehend this may result in strategic drift, where countries find that it is too late to alter their position on BRI.

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## Informed Consent

The author has obtained informed consent from all participants.

## Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.



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