

China's Belt and Road Initiative and its Implications for South Asian Region

Dr. Sawaira Rashid*
Dr. Gulshan Majeed**
Dr. Muhammad Ikram***

Abstract

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a significant infrastructure and economic development initiative that aims to connect Asia, Europe, and Africa through a network of infrastructure projects. The BRI has implications for the South Asian region, as several South Asian countries are participating in the initiative. This paper provides an overview of the BRI, its goals, and its potential implications for the South Asian region. The paper examines the BRI's impact on the South Asian region in several areas, including trade, investment, energy, and connectivity. The BRI has the potential to increase trade and investment flows between China and South Asia, which could benefit the region's economies. However, it also raises concerns about the potential for increased Chinese influence in the region, as well as the risk of debt traps for participating countries. The paper also explores the BRI's implications for regional connectivity and energy security. Additionally, the BRI's energy projects could help address the region's energy needs, but they could also increase reliance on China for energy resources. Overall, the BRI has significant implications for the South Asian region, and its impact will depend on how it is implemented and how participating countries manage the risks associated with the initiative.

Keywords: BRI, Debt-trap, Geo-Political Tensions, Gwadar Port, Human Trafficking, Indian Ocean, OBOR, Trade Deficit.

Introduction

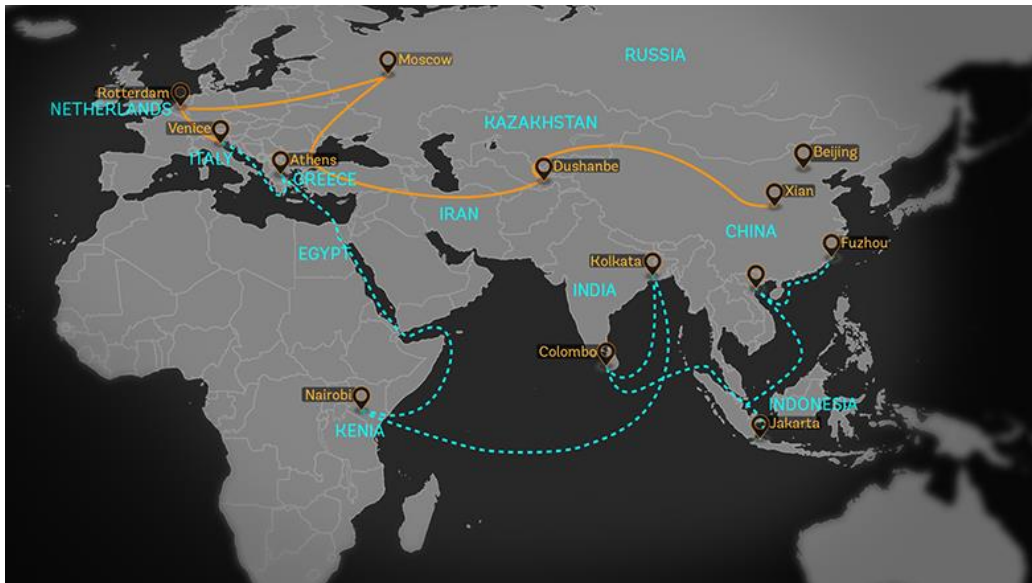
China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as the One Belt One Road (OBOR) project, is a massive infrastructure and economic development initiative that was launched in 2013. The goal of the initiative is to connect Asia, Europe, and Africa through a network of infrastructure projects, including railways, ports, highways, and pipelines, with the aim of promoting economic cooperation and

* Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science & International Relations, University of Central Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: dr.sawaira@ucp.edu.pk

** Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore. Email: gulshan_99@hotmail.com

*** Assistant Professor, Department of Politics & International Relations, Lahore Leads University, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: ikramisi@yahoo.com

development. The initiative comprises two main components: the "Belt" which refers to the land-based component, and the "Road" which refers to the maritime component. The Belt and Road Initiative spans over 70 countries and encompasses over 60% of the world's population, making it one of the largest infrastructure projects in history. The initiative has been met with both support and criticism. Supporters argue that it will promote economic growth and development in participating countries, while critics argue that it is a means for China to increase its geopolitical influence and control over other countries, and that it could lead to debt traps for participating countries. Despite these criticisms, China has continued to invest heavily in the initiative, and it is likely to play a significant role in shaping global trade and economic relations in the years to come.



Source: The World Bank, [Belt and Road Initiative \(worldbank.org\)](http://worldbank.org)

Figure 1: China's Proposed Belt and Road Initiative

It is a global infrastructure and development project launched in 2013, which aims to connect Asia, Europe, and Africa through a network of roads, railways, ports, and other infrastructure. The initiative has significant implications for the South Asian region, which comprises countries such as Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. The BRI has the potential to transform the economic landscape of the South Asian region by boosting connectivity, trade, and investment. (Butt, 2021) However, it also raises concerns related to geopolitical implications, debt

sustainability, environmental impact, and social stability. In this context, it is important to examine the potential implications of the BRI for the South Asian region and to understand the opportunities and challenges associated with the initiative. Keeping in view the descriptive-analytical research method, this paper discusses the key implications of China's BRI for the South Asian region and analyze the potential opportunities and challenges of the initiative.

Implications of China's Belt and Road Initiative for South Asian Region

As it already been discussed that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a massive infrastructure and economic development initiative that aims to connect Asia, Europe, and Africa through a network of infrastructure projects. The BRI has significant implications for the South Asian region, as several South Asian countries are participating in the initiative. In this article, we discuss the potential implications of the BRI for the South Asian region. The BRI has the potential to increase trade and investment flows between China and South Asia, which could benefit the region's economies. However, it also raises concerns about the potential for increased Chinese influence in the region. Chinese investments in the region could also lead to debt traps for participating countries, as some countries may struggle to repay the loans (Gong, 2019).

The BRI's infrastructure projects could improve connectivity in the region, but they could also exacerbate existing geopolitical tensions. For example, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has raised concerns in India, as it passes through the disputed territory of Gilgit-Baltistan. The BRI's energy projects could help address the region's energy needs, but they could also increase reliance on China for energy resources. For example, the construction of the Gwadar Port in Pakistan could give China access to the Indian Ocean and help address its energy security concerns. However, it also raises concerns about China's influence in the region. It could promote regional cooperation and integration in the South Asian region, as participating countries work together on infrastructure and economic projects. However, it could also exacerbate existing tensions and rivalries in the region. Moreover, the BRI has significant implications for the South Asian region, and its impact will depend on how it is implemented and how participating countries manage the risks associated with the initiative. South Asian countries need to carefully consider the potential benefits and risks of participating in the BRI and work together to ensure that the initiative benefits the region as a whole (Linhui Yu, 2020).

So, it is clear from the above discussion that China's BRI strategy has both positive and negative aspects. As South Asia consisted of eight countries e.g. Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and

Bangladesh; all these countries cannot equally benefit or suffer from Chinese policies in the region. If a country is benefited economically and politically because of CPEC, another country can have negative attitudes towards the successful completion of this mega project.

Ecological Impacts of the Belt and Road Scheme and its Implications for Climate Security

The BRI has the potential to have significant ecological impacts, both positive and negative.

Positive Impacts:

- **Clean Energy Development:** The BRI aims to promote clean energy development by investing in renewable energy projects such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power plants, which can reduce carbon emissions and help combat climate change. Energy is major issue in developing and under developed counties now-a-days. Pakistan is also an energy deficient country, so this project will help to boost energy development in country.
- **Biodiversity Conservation:** Some BRI projects aim to protect and conserve natural areas, including the protection of endangered species and their habitats. So, biodiversity conservation is also an important aspect of BRI scheme and it is helpful for the endangered species of the region.
- **Water Resource Stress:** Large-scale BRI projects often include the construction of dams and hydropower plants. While these can provide energy and water resources, they can also alter natural river systems, leading to downstream environmental impacts, water scarcity, and affecting ecosystems.
- **Improved Transportation Infrastructure:** By improving transportation infrastructure, the BRI can help reduce the environmental impact of transportation by promoting the use of more efficient modes of transportation, such as high-speed rail, which can reduce carbon emissions ((Cuiyun, 2020).

Negative Impacts:

- **Habitat Destruction:** The construction of roads, railways, and other infrastructure can result in habitat destruction and fragmentation, which can have significant impacts on wildlife populations and their ecosystems.
- **Pollution:** The increased transportation and industrial activity associated with the BRI can result in increased pollution, including air and water pollution, which can have negative impacts on human health and the environment.

- **Water Resource Depletion:** The BRI projects involve building dams, reservoirs, and other water infrastructure, which can have negative impacts on freshwater ecosystems and lead to water resource depletion.
- **Climate Change:** While the BRI aims to promote clean energy development, some projects involve the construction of coal-fired power plants and other high-carbon-emitting projects, which can contribute to climate change (Wen, 2019).

Overall, the ecological impacts of the BRI will depend on how the project is implemented and whether environmental considerations are taken into account in the planning and implementation of individual projects. It is essential to ensure that the BRI is implemented in an environmentally sustainable manner to minimize negative impacts on the environment and maximize the positive impacts. While the BRI aims to promote economic growth and connectivity between countries, it can also result in environmental degradation and pollution (Baloch, 2019).

To mitigate the negative environmental impacts of the BRI, it is crucial to ensure that environmental considerations are taken into account in the planning and implementation of individual projects. It is also essential to work closely with local communities and stakeholders to ensure that their voices and concerns are heard, and to develop strategies to protect biodiversity and ecosystems. Finally, it is critical to promote the use of clean energy and sustainable development practices, such as renewable energy projects and green transportation.

Table 1: Impacts of Transport Related Projects on Earth Systems

Transport Type	Atmosphere	Hydrosphere	Geosphere	Biosphere
Road	Air Pollution; Dust; Noise; Microclimatic effects from warming	Impede drainage; Littering; Pollution and sediments in runoff	Soil erosion; Landslides especially in rocky terrain	Habitat loss; Road kills; Fragmentation; Wider clearings; Human and exotic species invasions
Rail	-	-	-	Limited stops reduce human footprint; Similar to roads but less severe

Airport	Air pollution; Acid rain; Noise	Chemical contaminants in runoff; Impede drainage; Solid and hazardous waste	Soil pollution	Often affects floodplains, noise and light disturbance wetlands and coasts
---------	---------------------------------------	--	-------------------	---

Source: Developed by Author himself by collecting data from <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-3298/6/6/72>

It can be analysed from the above table that all types of transports under Belt and Road Initiative have negative impacts on earth. Transport types such as road, rail, airport and seaport create dust, noise and pollution in the atmosphere. Similarly, hydrosphere is also getting affected through roads, railway, airports and seaports. These are responsible for impede drainage, hazardous waste, littering and pollution etc. Likewise, it also would affect geosphere in different manners such as through landslides, soil pollution, dredging, reclamation and soil erosion etc. In the same manner, it has also negative impacts on biosphere through habitat loss, entanglement in waste, wider clearings and fragmentation etc.

Table 2: Impacts of Energy Related Projects on Earth Systems

Energy Type	Atmosphere	Hydrosphere	Geosphere	Biosphere
Pipelines	Air pollution; Noise	Risk of accidents; Contaminants in runoff	Soil pollution	Fragmentation; Habitat loss; Human and exotic species invasions
Power Lines	Redistribution of pollution to power source; Electromagnetic disturbance	Contaminants in runoff	Soil pollution; Compaction	Habitat loss; Fragmentation; Edge and barrier effects; Human and exotic species invasions
Hydropower	-	-	-	-
Coal plants	Toxic air pollution; Greenhouse gases; Acid rain	Heavy metal contamination; Thermal	Subsidence from lowering of water table	Air and water pollutants; Physical habitat destruction

		pollution; High water usage		
Wind farms	Significantly lower impact than fossil fuel power plants, but will still have life-cycle impacts	-	-	Avian/bat mortality
Solar farms	Thermal pollution; Glare effect	Reduced infiltration capacity due to shading of soil	Soil sealing, degradation and shading	Landscape alteration and habitat fragmentation

Source: Developed by Author himself by collecting data from <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-3298/6/6/72>

It can be analysed from the above table that energy related projects under BRI also have negative impacts on the earth system. Pipelines which are going to construct under this project may cause noise and air pollution, soil pollution, risk of accidents, habitat loss and fragmentation. Power Lines constructed under BRI may cause electromagnetic disturbance, contaminants in runoff and soil pollution. Likewise, coal plants are very dangerous for the environment because these will create air and water pollution, acid rains and physical habitat destruction etc. In the same manner, solar farms create glare effect, thermal pollution, soil sealing and landscape alteration etc.

Table 3: Impacts of Economic Projects on Earth Systems

Economic Type	Atmosphere	Hydrosphere	Geosphere	Biosphere
Special Economic Zone	Air pollution; Noise	Impede drainage; Pollution and sediments in runoff Flooding risks	Soil erosion and pollution	Habitat loss and fragmentation

Source: Developed by Author himself by collecting data from <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-3298/6/6/72>

It can be analysed from the above table that economic projects such special economic zones also may cause negative impacts such as noise and air pollution, soil erosion, impede drainage and habitat loss etc. are under risk due to these special economic zones.

Trade Deficit and Chinese Pressure on South Asian Industries

Chinese pressure on South Asian industries can contribute to a trade deficit in the region, as it can make it difficult for local industries to compete with cheap Chinese goods. China's large-scale production and low labor costs allow it to offer products at lower prices than many other countries, including those in South Asia. This has led to a situation where local industries in South Asian countries find it challenging to compete with Chinese products. As a result, many industries in the region, such as textiles and electronics, have struggled to grow and expand. Chinese pressure on South Asian industries can also take the form of dumping. Dumping occurs when a country exports goods at prices lower than their domestic prices. This can be an unfair trade practice, as it allows Chinese products to flood the market and push out local industries. This can contribute to a trade deficit, as countries may be importing more products than they are exporting, leading to a negative balance of trade. To address these issues, South Asian countries can implement policies to protect local industries, such as imposing tariffs on Chinese goods or providing subsidies to domestic industries. This can help create a level playing field and allow local industries to compete with Chinese products. Additionally, South Asian countries can work together to negotiate better trade deals with China that are mutually beneficial and do not lead to a trade deficit (YEUNG, 2016).

Unsustainable Financial Burdens and Debt Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative

Many scholars are of the view that China's Belt and Road Initiative is a debt trap to create its hegemony over the underdeveloped and developing countries of the world. Most of the BRI projects are being financed by the Chinese banks such as Export-Import Bank of China and the China Development Bank. China is offering loans to the host countries for the development of roads, railways and motorways etc. This is not the Chinese aid to poor economies, but it is the loan which host countries have to pay sooner or later. This debt financing can become debt burden if the countries with weaker fiscal positions would not be able to repay these loans because it is not necessary that infrastructure developments will generate economic returns. So, this situation definitely will enhance the debt burden on fragile economies of the world. Moreover, there are many allegations about the hidden debts associated with BRI project. According to a report of 'The Guardian', some analysts are of the view that there are approximately the hidden loans of \$385 billion which China is providing to host countries and are implicit from the eyes of international financial institutions (Hurley, 2019).

There are also many concerns with the loan terms associated with the BRI projects. There are different categories of loans; long- and short-term loans. As a result of non-payment of timely loans, China will have the power to seize the infrastructure assets of default countries. Material proof of this is that China has taken the control of Hambantota Port of Sri Lanka and the same may be with the ports of Pakistan, Bangladesh and some regional and extra-regional countries. Some critics have accused China of using debt as tool of its promising diplomacy. Due to these long- and short-term loans, China may gain strategic advantages as well as the political leverage. In order to refrain from Chinese debt diplomacy, there is a dire need debt sustainability assessment by international financial institutions such as International Monetary Fund, Asian Development Bank and World Bank etc. These international institutions must ensure whether this borrowing of host countries for developmental projects is manageable or not. Moreover, host countries should carefully assess the viability of the projects of BRI. Favourable terms should be adopted to return the debts. On the other side, there are also some optimists who debunk the myth of China's debt-trap diplomacy. They consider Chinese strategies just to achieve geopolitical goals.

Furthermore, promoting sustainable financing and investment practices in BRI projects can help ensure that projects are economically viable and environmentally responsible. This includes promoting green and sustainable infrastructure investments, which can generate long-term economic benefits while also contributing to global climate goals. Finally, engaging with civil society and promoting public participation and accountability in BRI projects can help ensure that financing decisions are made in the best interests of local communities and that environmental and social risks are adequately addressed. This includes providing opportunities for meaningful public participation in decision-making processes, as well as ensuring that environmental and social impact assessments are conducted and that adequate safeguards are put in place to protect human rights and the environment (Russel, 2019).

There are few examples which indicate that South Asian countries under BRI may fall victim to Chinese debts. Under the shadow of BRI, China may be able to control infrastructure assets of South Asia such as Gwadar Port of Pakistan, Chittagong Port of Bangladesh and Hambantota Port of Sri Lanka. Due to China's BRI strategy, China may get control of these ports. That is the reason, many scholars call CPEC another East India Company.

Security and Sovereignty concerns associated with BRI

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has raised several security concerns among countries and international observers. These concerns encompass a range of

issues, including geopolitical, military, cyber, and environmental security. Geopolitical Competition: The BRI is viewed by some as a manifestation of China's ambition to expand its geopolitical influence. This has led to concerns about great power competition and rivalry, particularly with the United States and other major powers. It raises questions about how the BRI could impact global and regional geopolitics. Some BRI infrastructure projects, such as ports and transportation networks, have dual-use potential for military purposes. There are concerns that Chinese-controlled infrastructure could be used for military access and power projection in host countries, potentially altering regional security dynamics. BRI projects often involve the construction of digital infrastructure, such as telecommunications networks and data centers, using Chinese technology. This raises concerns about the security of these digital networks, including potential vulnerabilities to cyberattacks and data breaches. There are accusations that China is using BRI loans to gain political leverage and strategic advantages. When host countries struggle to repay BRI-related debt, China may negotiate debt-for-equity swaps or take control of key assets, raising concerns about sovereignty and economic coercion (Narins, 2019).

As host countries accept loans and investments from China to fund BRI projects, there can be concerns about losing control over critical infrastructure and national assets. Chinese involvement in the ownership and operation of key infrastructure can raise questions about sovereignty and decision-making autonomy. China's economic engagement through the BRI can lead to increased political influence in host countries. This influence can manifest in various ways, including shaping domestic policies, decision-making processes, and international alignment, potentially compromising the sovereignty of these nations. BRI projects, especially large-scale infrastructure development, can have significant environmental and social consequences. Host countries may feel pressured to accept such projects even if they have adverse effects on their environment or communities, potentially infringing on their sovereignty to protect their citizens and natural resources. Cross-border BRI projects may lead to disputes between neighbouring countries over project ownership, control, and benefits. The mechanisms for resolving these disputes and ensuring a fair distribution of benefits can raise sovereignty concerns if they favor one party over another. Addressing these security and sovereignty concerns requires careful negotiation, transparency, and risk assessment on the part of both China and the participating countries. International organizations and regional forums can also play a role in facilitating discussions and promoting responsible and mutually beneficial cooperation within the framework of the BRI (Ameyaw, 2018).

Labour Killings in attacks on BRI worksites

There have been concerns about labour conditions and worker safety on Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) worksites, which have led to incidents of labour killings in some cases. The BRI involves the construction of large-scale infrastructure projects, which often involve long working hours, hazardous working conditions, and limited labour protections. Reports of labour abuses on BRI worksites have included instances of workers being subjected to forced labour, inadequate pay and benefits, and unsafe working conditions. In some cases, workers have been killed or injured on the job due to accidents or inadequate safety measures. To address these issues, it is essential to strengthen labor protections and improve working conditions on BRI worksites. This includes implementing and enforcing labor laws and regulations, providing adequate safety measures and training for workers, and ensuring that workers receive fair wages and benefits. It is also important to provide workers with access to legal and social services, including channels for reporting labour abuses and seeking redress. Additionally, promoting transparency and accountability in BRI investments can help ensure that contractors and employers adhere to labour standards and that labour abuses are identified and addressed (Ahmed, 2018) (Shafqat, 2020) (Sahai, 2018).

It is also important to provide training and capacity-building for contractors and employers to help them comply with labour standards and improve working conditions on BRI worksites.

Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation Associated with CPEC

There have been concerns about human trafficking and sexual exploitation associated with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a major component of BRI. The CPEC involves the construction of large-scale infrastructure projects in Pakistan, which have led to an influx of migrant workers and an increase in demand for commercial sex services, creating a risk for human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Reports of human trafficking and sexual exploitation in relation to CPEC have included instances of women and girls being lured into prostitution or forced into sexual exploitation, as well as reports of labour trafficking and forced labour. In Pakistan's Balochistan province, which is a crucial part of the CPEC, there have been allegations of human rights violations, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and the displacement of local communities. These allegations are often linked to opposition to the CPEC and have raised concerns about the treatment of the local labour force. To address these issues, it is essential to strengthen efforts to prevent and combat human trafficking and sexual exploitation in the context of CPEC. This includes implementing and enforcing laws and regulations related to human trafficking, providing adequate training and resources for law enforcement and social service

providers, and increasing public awareness of the risks and consequences of human trafficking and sexual exploitation (Ahmad, 2020).

It is also important to provide support and services to victims of trafficking and exploitation, including access to medical care, legal assistance, and safe housing. Additionally, engaging with communities and stakeholders to promote ethical and responsible investment in CPEC projects can help prevent the exploitation of vulnerable populations. Finally, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment can help address the root causes of human trafficking and sexual exploitation, by providing women and girls with access to education, economic opportunities, and social services (Latif, 2022). Sexual exploitation associated with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a distressing and multifaceted issue that demands serious attention. CPEC is a massive infrastructure project connecting Gwadar Port in Pakistan to China's Xinjiang region, designed to stimulate economic growth and development. However, the project's rapid expansion and the influx of workers, along with various other factors, have given rise to concerns regarding sexual exploitation.

This form of exploitation can manifest in different ways within the context of CPEC. As CPEC requires a substantial workforce, laborers from different regions are often employed in the construction and development of the project. These workers can be vulnerable to labour exploitation, including sexual exploitation, due to inadequate working conditions, limited legal protection, and a lack of oversight. The increased movement of people and labour migration associated with CPEC creates opportunities for human traffickers. Vulnerable individuals, including women and children, may be deceived or coerced into trafficking networks, leading to sexual exploitation and abuse. Within the project's labour force, women may face heightened risks of sexual harassment, assault, and discrimination. The absence of effective mechanisms for reporting and addressing such abuses can perpetuate a culture of impunity. The transformation of local communities due to CPEC's development can result in social disruptions that may contribute to increased gender-based violence and sexual exploitation within these communities.

Addressing sexual exploitation linked to CPEC requires required quick efforts from the part of civil society, governments, international organizations, and the private sector. This entails implementing stringent labour regulations, raising awareness, strengthening law enforcement and accountability mechanisms, providing support services for victims, and fostering international cooperation. Ensuring that the economic benefits of CPEC do not come at the expense of the dignity and well-being of vulnerable individuals is a crucial moral imperative and

a fundamental human rights concern. Consequently, it is essential to acknowledge and address the issue of sexual exploitation within the broader context of the CPEC project.

The New Coronavirus Outbreak: Global Spread via BRI Projects

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been criticized for potentially contributing to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The BRI involves the construction of large-scale infrastructure projects in multiple countries, which has led to an increase in travel and trade, potentially facilitating the spread of the virus. Several BRI projects have been identified as potential contributors to the spread of the virus. For example, the construction of the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in Wuhan, China, which has been identified as a possible origin of the virus, was supported by BRI funds. Additionally, the movement of workers and materials across borders for BRI projects has created a risk for the spread of the virus, particularly in areas with limited healthcare infrastructure and resources. To address these concerns, it is essential to implement effective measures to prevent and control the spread of the virus in the context of BRI projects. This includes implementing and enforcing travel restrictions, quarantine measures, and other public health measures to prevent the spread of the virus. It is also important to ensure that workers on BRI projects have access to adequate healthcare and sanitation facilities, as well as personal protective equipment (Tonchev, 2020).

Furthermore, promoting transparency and collaboration among countries involved in BRI projects can help identify and address potential risks for the spread of the virus. This includes sharing information and best practices for preventing and controlling the spread of the virus, as well as cooperating on efforts to develop and distribute vaccines and treatments. Finally, it is important to recognize the interconnected nature of global health and to prioritize investments in healthcare infrastructure and resources, particularly in areas with limited healthcare capacity. This includes investing in healthcare systems and facilities in countries along the BRI routes, to help prevent and control the spread of not only COVID-19 but also other infectious diseases (Glantz, 2020).

Conclusion and Findings

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has the potential to bring significant economic and social benefits to the South Asian region, by improving connectivity, promoting trade and investment, and enhancing infrastructure development. However, there are also potential risks and challenges associated with the BRI, including concerns about debt sustainability, environmental impacts, and social and human rights issues. To ensure that the BRI has a positive impact on the South

Asian region, it is essential to promote transparency, accountability, and sustainability in all BRI projects. This includes ensuring that financing terms are clear and transparent, that environmental and social risks are adequately assessed and addressed, and that local communities have meaningful opportunities for participation and engagement in decision-making processes.

To address these issues, it is essential to strengthen labour protections and improve working conditions on CPEC worksites. This includes implementing and enforcing labour laws and regulations, providing adequate safety measures and training for workers, and ensuring that workers receive fair wages and benefits. It is also important to provide workers with access to legal and social services, including channels for reporting labour abuses and seeking redress. Additionally, promoting transparency and accountability in CPEC investments can help ensure that contractors and employers adhere to labour standards and that labour abuses are identified and addressed. Finally, it is essential to ensure that labour protections and working conditions are a priority in CPEC project planning and implementation. This includes engaging with local communities and workers to understand their needs and concerns and involving them in the decision-making process. It is also important to provide training and capacity-building for contractors and employers to help them comply with labour standards and improve working conditions on CPEC worksites (Sahai, 2018).

Additionally, it is important to promote equitable and inclusive development, ensuring that the benefits of BRI projects are shared fairly among all members of society, including marginalized and vulnerable groups. This can be achieved through the development of policies and programs that support inclusive growth, promote job creation, and prioritize investments in social infrastructure, such as education, healthcare, and social protection. Finally, it is essential to promote regional cooperation and collaboration, to maximize the benefits of the BRI and to address potential challenges and risks. This includes promoting cross-border cooperation on issues such as infrastructure development, trade and investment, and environmental and social protection, as well as fostering dialogue and cooperation among all stakeholders, including governments, civil society, and the private sector. In conclusion, while the BRI has the potential to bring significant benefits to the South Asian region, it is essential to ensure that these benefits are achieved in a transparent, accountable, and sustainable manner, while promoting equitable and inclusive development and regional cooperation.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has several implications for the South Asian region, including both opportunities and challenges. Here are some of the key findings:

Opportunities

- **Improved connectivity:** The BRI could improve connectivity within the South Asian region and between South Asia and China, leading to increased trade, investment, and tourism.
- **Infrastructure development:** BRI investments could help address infrastructure gaps in the region, such as in transportation, energy, and telecommunications.
- **Economic growth:** Increased trade and investment could lead to economic growth in the region, potentially generating employment and income opportunities for local communities.
- **Regional cooperation:** The BRI could promote regional cooperation and collaboration, leading to greater integration and stability in the region.

Challenges

- **Debt sustainability:** There are concerns that some BRI projects could lead to unsustainable levels of debt for recipient countries, potentially leading to economic instability and political influence by the financing countries.
- **Environmental impacts:** Large-scale infrastructure projects associated with the BRI could have negative environmental impacts, including deforestation, habitat destruction, and pollution.
- **Social and human rights issues:** BRI projects could have negative social impacts, such as displacement of local communities, violation of land and property rights, and labor rights violations.
- **Geopolitical tensions:** The BRI could exacerbate geopolitical tensions in the region, particularly between India and China, as well as potentially leading to increased competition and rivalry with other major powers.

Overall, the BRI has the potential to bring significant benefits to the South Asian region, but it is important to address the potential risks and challenges to ensure that these benefits are achieved in a sustainable and equitable manner. Based on the findings related to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its implications for the South Asian region, here are some recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders:

- **Enhance transparency and accountability:** Encourage greater transparency in all BRI projects, including clear and transparent financing terms and conditions, and ensure that local communities have meaningful opportunities for participation and engagement in decision-making processes.

- Strengthen environmental and social safeguards: Promote the integration of robust environmental and social impact assessments in all BRI projects to mitigate negative environmental impacts, ensure the protection of human rights and labor rights, and safeguard the rights and interests of local communities.
- Foster regional cooperation and collaboration: Encourage regional cooperation and collaboration among all stakeholders, including governments, civil society, and the private sector, to maximize the benefits of the BRI and address potential challenges and risks.
- Promote inclusive and equitable development: Develop policies and programs that support inclusive growth, promote job creation, and prioritize investments in social infrastructure, such as education, healthcare, and social protection, to ensure that the benefits of BRI projects are shared fairly among all members of society, including marginalized and vulnerable groups.
- Strengthen debt sustainability: Ensure that recipient countries have the capacity to manage and service debt associated with BRI projects, and promote greater debt transparency and debt sustainability in all BRI financing.
- Address geopolitical tensions: Encourage dialogue and cooperation among all stakeholders to address potential geopolitical tensions, and promote greater regional integration and stability.

Overall, it is essential to promote transparency, accountability, sustainability, and inclusive development in all BRI projects to ensure that the initiative has a positive impact on the South Asian region.

References

- Ahmad, R. (2020). Revisiting the potential security threats linked with the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). 64-80.
- Ahmed, Z. S. (2018). Impact of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor on Nation-Building in Pakistan. 1-15.
- Ameyaw, T. (2018). The Belt and Road Initiative: Debt Trap and its Implication on International Security.

- Baloch, M. A. (2019). The effect of financial development on ecological footprint in BRI countries: evidence from panel data estimation. 6199.
- Butt, P. D. (2021). String of pearls: Politics of ports in Indian Ocean. *South Asian Studies, 1*(35).
- Cheng Cuiyun, G. C. (2020). Green development assessment for countries along the belt and road. 263.
- Cuiyun, C. (2020). Green development assessment for countries along the belt and road. 263.
- Ferchen, M. (2019). Why Unsustainable Chinese Infrastructure Deals Are a Two-Way Street.
- Fravel, T. (2003). 22-35.
- Fravel, T. (2003). China's New Diplomacy. 22-35.
- Glantz, M. H. (2020). China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative and the Coronavirus Pandemic. 120-129.
- Gong, X. (2019). The Belt & Road Initiative and China's influence in Southeast Asia. *The Pacific review, 635*.
- Hurley, J. (2019). Examining the debt implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a policy perspective.
- Latif, Y. (2022). The Determinants of Trade Openness in Two Emerging Economies; China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Perspective. 13-15.
- Linhui Yu, D. Z. (2020). Does the belt and road initiative expand China's export potential to countries along the belt and road?
- Luong, T. (2020). Mapping on Transnational Crime Routes in the . 20-35.
- Mandic, D. (2017). Trafficking and Syrian Refugee Smuggling: Evidence from the Balkan Route.

- Narins, T. (2019). Missing from the Map: Chinese Exceptionalism, Sovereignty Regimes and the Belt Road Initiative.
- Russel, D. R. (2019). *Navigating the Belt and Road Initiative*. ASIA SOCIETY POLICY INSTITUTE.
- Sahai, D. (2018). *China's Terror Dilemma in CPEC*: .
- Shafqat, S. (2020). *The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor*. 96-122.
- Smith, E. (2019). Transnational crime in Asia: causes, effects, challenges.
- Tonchev, P. (2020). The Belt and Road After COVID-19.
- Wen, X. (2019). Impacts of the Belt and Road Initiative on the China-Europe trading route selections. p. 581.
- YEUNG, H. W.-C. (2016). East Asian Industrial Transformation in the New Global Economy.
-