

# Is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) a New Way of Colonialism or a Win-Win Global Solution?

Itayi Artwell Mareya<sup>1,\*</sup>, Eden Adelaine Mareya<sup>2</sup>, Liberty Artwell Mareya<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Foreign Languages, Hanjiang Normal University, Shiyan, China

<sup>2</sup>Department of Modern Post, Chongqing University of Post and Telecommunication, China

<sup>3</sup>Department of Science and Technology, China Jiliang University, Zhejiang, Hangzhou, China

**Abstract** Many have been taken aback by China's unexpected and miraculous growth during the last 20 years, which has also taken the major western industrialized nations off guard. Many western leaders are questioning whether China's adoption of the Belt and Road Initiative is a real threat to the status quo in the world or if it should just be seen as a political and economic rivalry between China and the most developed western nations, who have dominated international affairs and the global economy since the end of World War II. The west has given the globe its names and definitions, and everything that originates elsewhere has not been able to gain acceptance in the west. Many nations in the Global South (GS) and a few in Europe have embraced the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has led some Western countries to refer to China's initiative as new colonialism. The BRI is seen by the GS nations—including those in Africa—as a win-win solution that benefits China and the rest of the globe. Using a critical methodology, this study attempts to explore how the world perceives the Chinese (BRI) in a negative light.

**Keywords** Belt and Road, Colonialism, Win-win, Global Solution

## 1. Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as One Belt One Road, was started by the Chinese because they have long wanted to revive the Silk Road. The Silk Road was an important transcontinental trade route that linked Eurasia and the West between 206 BC and 220 AD, according to Chan M.H.T. (2019) [1]. However, according to Andrea A.J. (2014), the Silk Road's historical period spanned from 100 BCE to 1450 AD and linked northern Europe with East, Southeast, and Central Asia via the Mediterranean. Sī chóu zhī lù, or 丝绸之路, is the Chinese name for this ancient Silk Road.

When Xī jìn píng, the leader of the People's Republic of China, revived the Silk Road in 2013 as the Belt and Road Initiative, the world responded differently. The West has seen it with skepticism, but the Global South (GS) has embraced it as a win-win worldwide answer to economic advancement and the eradication of world poverty. The Global South's African nations are situated between China, the region's ally since its independence fights, and their erstwhile colonial oppressors.

African nationalist political groups received military training and weapons from China, Russia, and Cuba. Following their liberation and independence from the West, African countries have taken a while to achieve economic independence from their former colonial oppressors. Over the past 20 years, China has made enormous investments in Africa, making it the greatest individual investor in the world. China's participation in Africa is therefore seen by the US-led West as an attempt to control the continent by creating financial debt traps.

### 1.1. Background of Research Problem

Since the end of World War II, the West has dominated international politics. Due to a number of factors, including the unequal distribution of the global economy and unjust practices by international organizations that prioritized dealing with the West over other areas of the world, the west continued to flourish while others became poorer. Western predominance in global economic and international affairs has been challenged by China's ascent, which it saw as an economic danger. China's emergence has been viewed by Africa and the rest of the GS as a solution to the global issues that the West has been unable to resolve. In practice, the west sees China as a danger to its position in the world, but internationally, it sees it as a rival. Despite being

\* Corresponding author:

artwell2022@126.com (Itayi Artwell Mareya)

Received: Nov. 21, 2024; Accepted: Dec. 9, 2024; Published: Dec. 11, 2024

Published online at <http://journal.sapub.org/sociology>

perceived as a new form of colonialism in the west, China's quiet diplomacy has won a spot in the GS. According to Christian D. (2000) [2], the emergence of powerful agrarian civilizations that engaged in trade during that era dominated the Silk Road in the past. However, the West is now lagging behind in terms of global commerce due to China's development as a major manufacturing force.

Western-dominated global marketplaces have been overtaken by Chinese goods. The BRI's primary objective has been criticized because to the west's unwillingness to allow Chinese commodities to reach every country in the world; as a result, it has been described in numerous ways. The world now questions whether the Belt and Road Initiative is a true win-win solution or a new form of colonialism as a result of Western tariffs on Chinese commodities. I firmly contend that the west's actions against the BRI demonstrate that the peaceful coexistence of people from all over the world has been put at risk, in contrast to Chin T. (2013) [3]'s claim that the Silk Road led world communities into friendly interactions.

## 1.2. Research Objectives

The research aimed at establishing critical perspectives over the world's view of the BRI.

## 1.3. Research Questions

- a. Is the BRI a new way of colonialism?
- b. Is the BRI a win-win global solution?
- c. Is the rise of China a threat to the world or a chance towards global development?

# 2. Literature Review

## 2.1. China's Relationship with the West

Since the end of World War II, America has taken the lead in the West and all of her allies in refusing to support other superpowers that do not share Western values. Along with Russia, India, Brazil, Iran, Turkey, and Africa, China is one of the world's superpowers that does not follow western values. China believes in democracy with Chinese characteristics, whereas the West views China and other non-Western nations as non-democracies.

The IMF, UNSC, WHO, and World Bank are especially biased against non-Western nations, according to the BRICS nations—China, Russia, India, Brazil, and South Africa—which hold that the United States and the West have the most sway over international organizations. According to Sutter R (2023) [4], the BRI is just one instance of how China and the United States have created a rivalry in almost everything China does worldwide. The United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom (AUKUS) established a trilateral security partnership with the goal of promoting an open and unfettered Indo-Pacific area after China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was adopted globally.

The creation of the Quad, an alliance that united the US, India, Japan, and Australia to resist China's expansion, is an example of the current state of affairs between China and the west. China sees everyone else as a friend, much like Zimbabwe does. The creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which opposes the conventional western establishment in the financial circles, is one of China's tactics to undermine the global order and western hegemony, claim Duarte P.A.B et al. (2022) [5]. Western countries that perceive China's Belt and Road Initiative as a win-win situation, such as Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands, disagree with this perspective. In 2024 alone, China encountered fierce resistance from Western countries, as evidenced by the substantial trade restrictions imposed on Chinese-made electric cars in Europe. Nevertheless, the EU's "China policy" has not been followed by Norway, Sweden, Germany, or Hungary. When referring to China, the term "de-risking" has gained more traction in the West and America than "decoupling." Regarding the trade conflict between the West and China, the West views the BRI as a thorn in the side of the globe that needs to be resolved at any costs, while China sees it as a gift.

## 2.2. China's BRI Relationship with Africa

Many in Africa and the West consider many Chinese collaboration programs to be an act of neocolonialism, even though China is now Africa's largest single investor in the continent. Using former Ghanaian president Nkrumah's book "Neocolonialism," Li S (2023) [6.1] makes the case that neocolonialism is the last phase of imperialism. At a meeting in Berlin in 1885, the West colonized Africa and divided it into the modern African nations. Africa, which is now completely politically independent, faces economic difficulties that are thought to be brought on by the past colonial rulers who continued to impede the majority, if not all, of the African people's economic progress. The concern that other strong nations like China and Russia will dominate them again is Africa's greatest suspicion and worry. Many Africans wonder if China's non-interference in the domestic affairs of other nations is genuine. Although many African countries have adopted the Chinese win-win slogan, opinions on whether it is actually useful are divided. The British journal claims that China's assistance to African nations is a form of neocolonialism (Agri, B., 2009) [7]. The fact that certain African nations have already defaulted on loans from the Chinese government lends credence to this claim. Many Western nations referred to the difficulties Zambia and many other African nations faced as a "debt trap." Africa is a virgin market for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which encompasses not just road and rail infrastructure but also maritime and aviation. According to Li S (2023) [6.2] (ibid), the BRI presented a number of difficulties for the Nairobi-Mombasa railway project, including conflicts of interest resulting from China and Kenya's divergent policy making, clashes of civilizations,

and numerous other issues. Many African politicians were not pleased with the Chinese government's and Chinese grants' construction of the African Union's (AU) headquarters building in Ethiopia and the new parliament building in Zimbabwe.

Many young African politicians believe that such funds and aid should have been directed more toward African economic challenges rather than political ones. Glysing M (2022) [8.1] claims that in 2019, China signed BRI cooperation agreements with 39 of the 53 African nations, Kenya being one of the recipients. Kenya's longstanding maritime agreements with China dating back to the 15th century made it one of the BRI's beneficiaries.

With the aid of Chinese BRI loans and grants, numerous projects were constructed, including seaports, airports, and railroad and road infrastructure. The difficulties in repaying these debts became so severe that other African nations believed this to be a form of neocolonialism.

Many young African politicians believe that such funds and aid should have been directed more toward African economic challenges rather than political ones. Glysing M (2022) [8.2] claims that in 2019, China signed BRI cooperation agreements with 39 of the 53 African nations, Kenya being one of the recipients. Kenya's longstanding maritime agreements with China dating back to the 15th century made it one of the BRI's beneficiaries. According to a number of young African politicians, the money and assistance ought to have gone more toward addressing the continent's economic problems than its political ones. According to Glysing M (2022) [8.3], China inked BRI cooperation agreements with 39 of the 53 African countries in 2019, including Kenya. Kenya benefited from the BRI because of its longstanding maritime relations with China, which date back to the 15th century.

Many projects, such as seaports, airports, and railroad and road infrastructure, were built with the help of Chinese BRI loans and subsidies. Other African countries thought this was a sort of neocolonialism because of the extreme difficulty in repaying these debts.

### **2.3. China's BRI Relationship with Asia and the Pacific**

China's rising is both a threat and a blessing in Asia and the Pacific. The threat comes from some Asian and Pacific countries that are aligned to the US and the West in ideology and values. China is the top investor in most of the Asian and Pacific countries. Some example countries where China is the top investor in Asia and the Pacific includes Sri Lanka and Pakistan to name but a few. The BRI in Sri Lanka was just but a revival of the ancient Silk Road. Sri Lanka was also a beneficiary many centuries ago. Janaka W and Nuwanti S (2018) [9]. China's infrastructural projects from airports, seaports, roads, dams and railways came at the right moment in Sri Lanka but not without a cost which most of them seems to be regretting. The regrets came in the form of other infrastructures failing to retain expected capacities in profits hence rendering the country and

government to be heavily indebted to China. Some of the infrastructures ended up in the hands of the Chinese government after Sri Lanka failed to pay back the loans as stipulated in their contracts of agreements. Yu, J and Wallace Jon (2021) [10] asserts that the events that occurred in Sri Lanka influenced the Kenyan scenario. Clarke M (2017) [11] is of the view that the purpose of China's BRI was for plan to solve Chinese's domestic economic problems through creating foreign jobs for Chinese nationals and the spreading of Chinese global influence. This view has been assumed to have emanated from some rivalry Asian and Pacific countries such as Japan, South Korea, India and Australia who mostly do not support any Chinese policies due to their alignment with the US and the West. This brought to the issue of countering the BRI by some Asian and Pacific nations as it shall be discussed in this research.

#### **2.3.1. The View of the BRI in Other Parts of the World**

China has one of the largest populations in the world and, after the US, has the second-largest economy. China is third after the United States and Russia in terms of military power. Under such circumstances, China's role in world affairs is very important and fundamental; therefore, its relationships with other nations are undoubtedly characterized by both friends and adversaries. China is bordered by both friendly and hostile countries in Asia. China's relations with South Korea, Japan, India, and the Philippines have not always been stable. However, China has had relatively trouble-free relations with other Asian nations over the past 20 years, including North Korea, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, and many more. Myanmar's relationship with China has been erratic since the 1950s, according to Tritto and Park (2020) [12]. The people of Myanmar believe China is bringing a new era of neocolonialism to the nation of over 50 million people as a result of the commercial agreements between the two nations. Because of Myanmar's government's heavy reliance on Chinese loans and grants, the benefits of the BRI have been perceived as a new form of colonization. China has made billions of dollars in investments with developing countries in the US's backyard in other parts of the world, such as South America. Since then, some nations, including Argentina, have requested to withdraw from the BRI investment projects because of their outstanding debts to China. The relationship between Argentina and China has evolved ever since the new government took office. Nonetheless, a number of South American nations, led by Brazil, a member of the BRICS group, have welcomed the BRI, and others are looking to join both the BRI and the BRICS. However, according to Bruning B (2021) [13], some academics have recently characterized the BRI and China's assistance as a debt trap and a form of neocolonialism.

#### **2.3.2. Countering the BRI**

Many industrialized countries, especially the West and its

allies, have not been very supportive of China's global aspirations. Under Shinzo Abe and Donald Trump, Japan was the first nation in Asia to oppose China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Grissler J.R. & Vargo, 2021) [14]. In response to the BRI's perceived lack of transparency, the Japanese prime minister created the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" plan, which aims to demonstrate the region's trade and movement of commodities and services. Australia and India shared the same idea as the Japanese government.

In response to the BRI, the US-led G20 also suggested countermeasures and decided to launch the "Build Back Better World" (B3W) program. However, these actions have led the majority of the Global South nations to support the BRI in protest of the West, which they believe has long ignored the suffering of the poor and impoverished world. According to Coca N (2023) [15], the majority of Southeast Asian nations, with the exception of Japan and its allies, have chosen economic expansion and trade over territorial issues and regional security, and they have joined the BRI.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Critical Methodology

In order to avoid problems and biases in data collecting, the survey utilized a critical approach. As a result, the research used a questionnaire that was intended for a wide range of individuals who had an open mind about China's Belt and Road Initiative.

### 4. Results and Discussions

#### 4.1. Results

The following results were brought about through the distribution of questionnaires online and managed to gather the support of 160 participants who answered the questionnaire.

##### 4.1.1. Participants' Nationality

The survey involved 151 Asians, 1 American and 8 African participants and brings the total participants to 160.

##### 4.1.2. Participants' Age Demographics

Among the 160 people who participated in the survey 141 were of the ages between 18-25 while 14 people were of the age between 26-35. Only 4 people were of the age between 36-45 and 1 person was above 46 years of age.

##### 4.1.3. Participants' Gender Demographics

Most of the participants in this survey were those identified as female and those identified as males were less. Female participants were 119 while male participants were 41.

##### 4.1.4. Participants' Educational Background

Sixty-two of the participants had a bachelor's degree,

twelve had a master's degree, and eight had a doctorate. The remaining 78 individuals were first-year university students.

**Q 1:** Regarding the question whether the (BRI) was a new way of colonialism 84% said "No" while 10% said "yes". Only 6% of the participants had mixed views and were not really certain.

**Q 2:** On the question whether the "BRI" was a win-win global solution 96% said "yes" while no one said "no" but 4% of the participants had mixed feelings.

**Q 3:** The question about the rise of China whether the world viewed it as a threat or a chance to global development 27% said "yes" and 22.5% said "no". However 50.5% were not certain about this threat by China's rising.

**Q 4:** The participants were asked about who were the most beneficiaries of the (BRI) to which 76% said the "Asians" followed by 22% who said the "Africans". 2% said the "Europeans".

**Q 5:** When asked about which part of the world was countering the (BRI) most 77% said the "Americans" followed by 19% who said the "Europeans". 2.5% said the "Asians" while 1.5% said the "Africans".

**Q 6:** China is known by what it calls 'quite diplomacy'. The participants were asked whether China's 'quite diplomacy' 'the best foreign policy to the world. 48% of the participants had mixed feelings about this policy while 39% said "yes". However 13% said "no".

**Q 7:** The participants were asked whether it was true that the west was the losing power while China was the present and Africa the future. 46% said this perception was not true. 41% were however not sure but 13% said "yes".

**Q 8:** The question about whether the (BRI) had brought more friendship between China and the world 94% said "yes" while 6% had partial feelings.

**Q 9:** The perception that China's (BRI) was a smart way of ushering a new world order was agreed by 88% of the participants while 9% were of a mixed feeling but 4% of the participants disagreed with this perception.

**Q 10:** Lastly the participants were asked whether those who were doing counter measures against China's (BRI) would win countering China's global ambitions 80% said "no" while 12% were of mixed feelings but 9% said "yes".

#### 4.2. Discussions

The research findings demonstrated that most people worldwide disagree with the claim that Chinese colonialism is a new form of colonialism, which is in line with the goal of the study. Over 75% of survey respondents think that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a win-win global development solution. Although most people have conflicting opinions about this, the west, which has controlled world politics since the end of World War II, has seen China's growth as a worldwide power as a danger. It has demonstrated the world's ambivalence about siding with the West or China.

The US-led west has been seen as the main force halting China's ascent, with a few other Asian nations like Japan and Australia following.

Regarding the question of whether Western countermeasures are sufficient to stop China's rise, the majority of people believe that they cannot, given the enormous support China enjoys from around the world, particularly from the GS nations that have joined China in the BRICS organization's vision. Many believe that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a clever strategy for bringing about a new global order. It is believed that China's foreign strategy of "quite diplomacy" is not the ideal one.

China has consistently found itself on the sidelines of numerous global crises that require confrontation in order to restore stability, despite the fact that action by global powers is crucial in these unpredictable times. These include the unstable Middle East, where Israel's overreaction to the October 2023 terror attack on Israel has resulted in numerous fatalities. The majority of people think that participation from superpowers like China is necessary for world peace and security. China is at a disadvantage because of its quiet on international issues that may require involvement. According to this study, a lot of people think that the west is not truly losing ground at this time. The experts have concluded that the globe is locked in an uncertain future between China and the West because of this understanding.

## 5. Conclusions

China has found itself in the corridors of conflict with the west, which has dominated international events for many decades, as a result of the world being split between the west and the growing east. Trade and cyber battles have given way to ideological conflicts, with the major western nations opposing and demonizing China's Belt and Road Initiative. Western rivalry has become more open as a result of China's ascent. As a result of the GS countries' support for China in the BRICS group and the BRI, powerful western nations have retaliated by devising their own countermeasures to halt China's ascent. Many people think this regardless of the countermeasures taken by the West and its allies. Researchers can confirm that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is not a new form of colonialism, but rather a means of advancing global development. They have also confirmed that China has made more friends than enemies through the BRI, with Asian and African nations benefiting the most from the construction of massive infrastructure, including roads, railroads, airports, bridges, and seaports. Most former colonies did not receive enough support from their former colonial masters to develop their countries after many gained independence from Western colonialists, so the BRI's involvement in world development has brought more friendly nations to align with China's global ambitions. This has caused the majority of Western nations to oppose China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which appears to be a driving force behind the dissolution of former Western colonies from their previous imperial overlords.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Chan M.H.T (2019), *The Belt and Road Initiative-the New Silk Road: a research agenda*, East Asia Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies. <https://doi.org/10.1080/247610282019.1580407> Routledge.
- [2] Christian D (2000), *Silk Roads or Steppe Roads? The Silk Roads in World History*: World History Association, University of Hawai, i Press, *Journal of World History*, Spring, 2000, Vol, 11, No 1. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/20078816>.
- [3] Chin T (2013), *The Invention of the Silk Road, 1877*: Chicago Journals University of Chicago Press.
- [4] Sutter B (2023), *Why America Opposes the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)*, *The Palgrave Handbook of Globalization with Chinese Characteristics: The Case of the Belt and Road Initiative*; 515-528.
- [5] Duarte P.A.B, Leandro F.J, Galan F.J.E.M (2022), *The Palgrave Handbook of Globalization with Chinese Characteristics: The case of the Belt and Road Initiative*, palgrave macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-6700-9\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-6700-9_1).
- [6] Li S (2023), *Is China-Africa Cooperation under China's "Belt and Road" Initiative a Neo-colonialism?* --- Case of the Mombasa -Nairobi Railway: *International Journal of Frontiers in Sociology* Vol. 5, Issue 3: 70-74, DOI:10.25236/IJFS.2023.050312.
- [7] Agri, B, (2009), *Outsourcing's third wave*, *The Economist*: <https://www.economist.com/node/13692889/all-comments>.
- [8] Glysing M (2022), *Belt and Road Initiative through Post-Colonial Theory: Does China's Belt and Road Initiative fit the post-colonial description of draining a developing state?* UPPSALA UNIVERSITET.
- [9] Yu J & Jon W (2021), *What is China's Belt & Road Initiative (BRI)?* chathamhouse. <https://chathamhouse.org/2021/09/what-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-bri>.
- [10] Clarke M (2017), *The Belt and Road Initiative: China's New Grand Strategy?*: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319100054>.
- [11] Janaka W & Nuwanti S (2018), *China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Sri Lanka*, Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico-Instituto deInvestigacionesjuridicas. <https://archivos.juridicas.unam.mx/www/bjv/libros/12/5550/19.pdf>.
- [12] Tritto & Park (2020), *The Belt and Road Initiative in ASEAN - Myanmar*, In, HKUSTIEMSReports No. 2021-04. <https://iems.ust.hk/publications/reports/uob-bri-myanmar>.
- [13] Bruning B (2021), *The BRI - China's way of modern colonialism in Myanmar: In what extent is China controlling Myanmar's economy and government?* GOETHE UNIVERSITAT FRANKFURT AM MAIN.
- [14] Grissler J.R & Vargo L (2021), *The BRI vs FOIP: Japan's Countering of China's Global Ambitions*, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349111236>.

- [15] Coca N (2023), Countering Chinese Economic Coercion and Corrosive Capital in South east Asia: The Transformation of the Liberal International Order: Evolution and Limitations, 8889. 2023, library.open.org.

Copyright © 2024 The Author(s). Published by Scientific & Academic Publishing

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY). <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>