



Is China's Belt And Road Action Plan A Form Of Nationalist Or Colonialist Expansion?

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Abstract

China's history of humiliation by foreign powers has shaped the country's nationalist agenda, which has been a dangerous undertaking. The colonial and imperialist nations of the nineteenth and twentieth century's, according to Chinese nationalists, are to blame for the loss of Chinese territory and national dignity. Until the British and Japanese wars of the 19th century brought them down, Chinese people were proud and believed in themselves as the hub of international diplomacy. With each change in the country's governmental hierarchy, Chinese citizens have experienced different nationalist emotions. Before the communist revolution, the governing Communist Party relied heavily on the concept of "national identity" to legitimize its control. President Xi Jinping's campaign slogan, "China Dream," calls for regaining abandoned territory and recapturing the glories of China's history. Because of other variables like economic advancement and prosperity, it is counterintuitive that the Nationalist card in support of the Communist Party of China succeeds. According to BRI's lofty China Dream, China's economic stagnation may be reversed by expanding its worldwide reach via the mammoth infrastructure project BRI. Chinese nationalism's renewed onslaught is reflected in the BRI's huge project, which wants to develop alongside the forces of globalization. The intended study is both informative and analytical. It intends to make use of both primary and secondary sources of knowledge. Accordingly, this study uses a historical method to examine a new nationalist feature of the China Belt & Road Initiatives to better comprehend its influence and ramifications on world politics. It also explains what BRI stands for, and the issues and fallacies surrounding the gigantic Chinese project as the critics perceive it as a new colonialism, a manifestation of ultra-nationalism.

Key Words: China-dream, Globalisation, Massive Project, Nationalism, New Colonialism.

Introduction

China's march toward nationalism has been fraught with risk because of the historical aspect of foreign powers humiliating great China. The Chinese version of nationalism is based on the idea that China was a victim of the imperial and colonial powers of the 19th and 20th centuries and that these forces were responsible for the loss of Chinese land and its hubris. In the nineteenth century, the China people were filled with self and thought of themselves as the centre of world diplomacy. With each change in the country's

governmental hierarchy, Chinese citizens have experienced different nationalist emotions. Some observers classify it as the “socialist-oriented state control nationalism” era, the “liberal nationalism” era, the “patriotic nationalism” era, or the more modern “cyber-nationalism” period [1].

A significant aspect in the legitimacy of China’s Communist Party since the communist revolution has been nationalism. Communists have long prioritized instilling a sense of national pride among the population. They’ve done so via patriotic education and other methods of investing a strong sense of patriotism in children. As soon as President Xi Jinping took office in 2012, he announced the “great regeneration of the Chinese nation” as the motto of the “China Dream” campaign. Regaining lost territory and redecorating its borders with neighbouring nations are two of China’s most ambitious goals in this grandiose China Dream [2]. However, the effectiveness of the nationalist movement in support of the Communist Party of China is ironically dependent on other variables, one of which is China’s continued growth and wealth. The BRI’s massive infrastructure initiative has been hailed as a critical weapon for achieving China’s lofty aspirations. The monetary slowdown in China is expected to be reversed by expanding China’s worldwide reach via the BRI. BRI’s massive project embodies the new aggressive Chinese nationalism, which seeks its growth with the forces of globalization, even if both processes are opposed.

For deeper insight, this study employs a historical analytical technique to examine the new nationalism underpinning China’s Belt and Road programs and their influence and consequences on world politics [3]. In addition, it explores the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), its global reach, and the controversy and misconceptions surrounding the underlying motivations of China’s megaproject, which some opponents perceive as an embodiment of hyper-nationalism and a new kind of colonialism.

The Belt and Road Initiative of the People’s Republic of China.

The BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) is a massive connectivity project of China to revive the silk root of the ancient age. Chinese officials formerly referred to the BRI’s projects collectively as the “One Belt, One Road” Initiative (OBOR) [4]. The project aims to connect the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe with a massive infrastructure of roads, ports, and rail. Chinese financing for the BRI has been estimated to be between \$1 trillion and \$8 trillion. More than 138 nations have signed up for this initiative, making it China’s most incredible connectivity and infrastructural project of the 21st century. The BRI initiative was launched in 2013 and has since spread throughout Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. For China’s international policies, financial and political strategies, and investment initiatives, it’s the new instrument. Throughout the globe, geopolitical talks, security worries, and scholarly discourses revolve around China’s flagship program, whether the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an altruistic effort by China to improve living standards in developing and poorly developed nations and change their course, or a

veiled instrument of the Chinese Communist Party to exploit member states in a colonial manner and destabilize democracies through its debt.

Besides economic and geopolitical aspects, China's hegemonic approach is particularly apparent in the institutional and informational aspects [5]. Its initiative to exploit the member countries by China uses opaque contract transactions with concealed terms, as shown by many examples. Various Chinese experts have argued that the BRI is an endeavour to modernize the member states and that the process of modernization will lead to democracy in the BRI countries. It is also said that the BRI reflects autocratic philosophy disguised as hyper-nationalism, civic obedience, and brutal capitalism, which has a secret objective to modify the liberal ideology and democratic system of open countries built on a free-market economy. President Xi Jinping is credited with inventing BRI in a speech in Kazakhstan in September 2013 during his first term in power, in which he first outlined his idea for a Silk Road Economic Belt. It is stated that his involvement in the project was what accelerated the transformation of this concept into a visually arresting plan.

Intending to enhance the lives of more than four billion individuals, China promotes this massive initiative as holistic creativity with great potential to improve human improvement conditions with an infrastructure stimulus across Asia, Africa, and Europe. Furthermore, it seeks to build bridges between other countries and their peoples economically and politically. In respect of infrastructure and commerce, the BRI plan will have a positive impact on the participating countries. Furthermore, China believes that the BRI is a simple option for tiny countries that cannot pay to acquire necessary infrastructure advances elsewhere [6].

Many essential elements are involved, including transportation infrastructures such as roads and ports, trains, and other modes of transportation. In addition to the BRI's surface transportation and infrastructural programs, including the development of new national highways and rail lines, through high-speed trains, the Maritime Silk Route, which includes the construction of trans-ocean infrastructure and ports, is also part of the BRI. It is a considerably more complicated undertaking that breaks with the old conceptions of country borders and includes collaboration across diverse political regimes, ethnicities and cultures, faiths, and economics. A massive initiative like this one, according to Chinese media, is more about promoting regional economic cooperation and stability for the sake of global wealth. Global commerce will benefit significantly from an increased connection between major cities in many nations, which will be made possible via the growth and enhancement of national infrastructure. A completion date of 2049 has been set for this project, which coincides with the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the "Republic of China."

Chinese overseas investment in CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) amounts to roughly \$ 60 billion, making it the most substantial piece of the BRI massive project. In addition to Pakistan, Beijing has made considerable contracts with Sri Lanka, Nepal,

Maldives, Bangladesh, and other countries in India's immediate vicinity. Bangladesh received \$38 billion in Chinese investment under the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Corridor, while the Maldives agreed to a free trade agreement with Beijing. Earlier this year, as shown in a World Bank research, one-third of global commerce, GDP, and almost two-thirds of the world's population would be a member of the BRI after its fulfilment [7].

The Belt and Road Initiative is the new Chinese nationalism:

Economic nationalism is taking root in the People's Republic of China now that the Xi administration has taken office. The BRI expresses China's new nationalism and is essential to its international and domestic policymaking. As a geopolitical strategy instead of an economic one, the BRI aspires to elevate the Communist Republic of China to the centre of the world stage. More than just an endeavour to improve China's global connectivity, the BRI plan aims to reverse the country's economic stagnation and address the problem of excess domestic production [8]. Using the nation's reserve money to fund BRI projects and creating a route for more and more markets for Chinese products and services is seen as a way to counteract the consequences of the downturn in the economy, both domestically and worldwide. To sum it up, China's leadership is pursuing a continual chance to enhance its global strategic, military, and economic hegemony to realize its Great China Dream under the grandiose massive project of the BRI.

When one examines the underlying reasons for China's support for the BRI initiative, it becomes clear that, even though nationalism and globalization are mutually incompatible factors, China is enthusiastically supporting globalization via the BRI. Infrastructure projects intended to link countries are in line with BRI's "go out" strategy, which aims to stimulate the home economy by exporting surplus output and investing extra resources abroad. The current trend of anti-globalization in various regions of the globe increases BRI's sensitivity to mega project success. However, it is still essential to balance economies via reliable investments [9].

Some commentators have referred to China's new nationalism, reflected in its aggressive foreign policy, as China's "insecure nationalism" to counter the domestic economic downturn, which might lead to dissatisfaction and suspicion of the leadership. The longevity of the communist period rests on China's economic well-being. Therefore, launching the ambitious international project known as BRI might be considered an effort to fight the economic downturn that could limit China's development potential in the previous decades.

With the aid of BRI, China is attempting to bring its underdeveloped, Uyghur Muslim-majority Xinjiang Autonomous Province under control, a problem that has plagued the communist leadership on several occasions [10]. To alleviate the cultural anxiety that comes with economic growth in the area. As a result of the territory's proximity to China and the central Asian nations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, the communist government hopes that the region will become a regional trading centre. China's policy

leaders hope that these gestures of benevolence will help the Uyghur's integrate into the majority Han population on the mainland and alleviate their problems.

To put it more simply, the BRI is the newest tactic route of nationalism in China, which is not only seeking to restore the famous "Silk Road" to make China great again but it has been considered a precious instrument by Chinese authorities to encourage growth in China's distant and backward regions and to maintain national unification.

Is BRI represents a new kind of Colonialism?

Doubt is growing throughout the globe about China's goals despite the country's noisy exhibition of its '2nd BRI forum meeting' in April 2019^[11]. The BRI is now suffering "push back" after early joy, notably in the South Asian area, finds a report by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). The study stated that "awful circumstances" are the major cause of the protests.

As a result of the BRI's debt trap, several of the BRI's CPEC partners, such as Pakistan, are struggling to repay their debts. Perhaps some nations have begun withdrawing from the BRI, which has sparked a wave of protests among the member nations. Due to Chinese pressure, the Nepalese government recently abandoned the "Seti" hydroelectric project, which would have required a 17 percent cost assurance and a sovereign assurance^[12]. The recent cancellation by Sierra Leone of a \$318 million¹² BRI project to build an airport with Chinese partners is another example of a lack of confidence among BRI partner states.

Pakistan is the latest nation to reject a \$4 billion loan from China for its 'Diamer-Bhasha Dam, citing exorbitant interest rates and other requirements imposed by Beijing regarding the project's ownership, maintenance, and safety exclusion from the CPEC. Pakistan seems to be rethinking the project's parameters because of the high interest in the Chinese loan. Pakistan has also slashed \$ 2 billion from its key BRI railway project. Gwader, Baluchistan's province, has enacted new legislation restricting land sales to Chinese enterprises. Chinese officials and employees are under continual danger from Baloch terrorists in the area where the CPEC is being built in Pakistan's most impoverished province, Baluchistan, according to Baloch leader Aslam Bhootani. In an assault on the CPEC route in the Balgatar district of Baluchistan, the 'Baloch Raji Ajoi Sanger' (BRAS) murdered four Pakistani military personnel, per a report in the Baluchistan post^[13].

"Beijing is intentionally patronizing Islamabad to transform it into a colony dependent on China for day-to-day survival," stated the 'European Foundation for South Asian Studies in a recently published report^[14]. This Amsterdam-based think tank not only indicted China for taking the edge of a worldwide alienated Pakistan because of its terror link, but it also warned against the disastrous impact of hegemonic Chinese culture upon the culture and society of Pakistan. According to this report, rising interest rates, tariffs, and

other fees would make it almost difficult for Pakistan to repay the loan, which will force the country to submit to secret Chinese demands that trample on its sovereignty.

An extreme example of China's use of monetary assistance and the debt trap to extend its massive empire and influence throughout the globe is the "Hambantota Port of Sri Lanka." After India first refused to provide finance for the port's development because it was deemed impractical given its proximity to the Colombo Port's 241 kilometres, China gladly provided the funds without hesitation [15]. China gave Sri Lanka no choice but to hand over the strategically located port in December 2017 for \$1.2 billion after the port failed to function as envisaged and the country could not pay back its debts.

In light of this scenario, the criticism of disguised colonialism on the Belt and Road Initiative that China is trapping the tiny and weak nations into its debt net and diminishing their sovereignty to their own country and territory is further justified. Hambantota Port was started in 2010 before BRI or OBOR were announced, but China quickly transformed it into a massive BRI project. Xinhua (China's state-run news agency) reported this next landmark on the road of the Belt and Road had been reported by Xinhua (China's state-run news agency) [16].

The Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mr. Mahathir Mohammad, said the Chinese collaboration projects should be renegotiated. Even in front of the Chinese premier, it was clear that he spoke out against a new kind of colonialism at the Beijing Great Hall of the People.

The Maldives, a small island country in the South Asian archipelago, is seeking to recover money due to China under the BRI. Economic Times claims that the "Maldives ministry of finance has established its task force to probe contracts signed with China by President Abdullah Yameen" and that numerous significant projects sponsored by China are under investigation, according to reports. Sri Lanka's new administration has realized the dangers of a Chinese debt trap and is attempting to find alternative sources of financing for its infrastructure projects. To improve Sri Lanka's railway infrastructure, it recently secured deals worth \$1.85 billion with Japan and \$1.3 billion with India, two long-term allies, to build a light rail system in the city.

According to BRI authorities, China's "China Harbour Engineering Company" has been banned by Bangladesh for seeking to bribe government officials, even though the anticipated cost of road-building indicated by China is 10-15 times more than the international rates. Consequently, Bangladesh has postponed its two-year-old plan to borrow \$25 billion through BRI due to growing concerns about China's objectives. Myanmar's people fiercely resist the Kyaukphyu-Kunming gas pipeline under the BRI because it restricts their movement and day-to-day activities recklessly and cynically. Along with these occurrences, the central Asian area, which is critical to the development of BRI, is experiencing a rising sense of unease and anxiety about China's economic and political influence. Chinese President Xi Jinping introduced the enormous OBOR project plan in 2013 at a ceremony in Kazakhstan. However, even though Kazakhstan appreciates China's BRI program and economic funding, its constant presence in the nation is a source

of concern. The BRI building effort in Kazakhstan relies heavily on Chinese workers who enter the country legally. The increasing number of these migrant Chinese workers is a cause for concern because it exacerbates local tensions and social anxiety and invites violent clashes. As anti-China sentiment grows and becomes more visible, the government is being pushed to modify Chinese assistance [17].

Regarding China, popular opinion in Kirgizstan is very “Sino phobic,” and many fear their nation has become a “dumping ground” because of low-priced Chinese items. There are additional reasons for anti-China sentiment in the area, such as a weak economy and corruption allegations against Chinese enterprises [18]. Chinese workers and migrants, unjust trade agreements, non-transparent contract terms, environmental infractions, a lack of interest in giving jobs to the local population, and a lack of social responsibility raise concerns.

Conclusion

President Xi Jinping emphasized that the BRI was not about creating colonies for China but rather a “community of common destiny” after the second summit of the BRI was concluded successfully. China is trying to persuade the global public that China’s Aspirational policy project, the BRI, “does not play little geopolitical games.”

Some tiny countries in Africa and other parts of Asia and Latin America have signed the BRI as a renewed type of colonialism where China’s Communist Republic is brutally increasing its power. Chinese companies have long had overproduction issues, and the recent economic recession has further exacerbated the problem. As a result, infrastructure projects like BRI are a viable alternative for maintaining both the over-capacities of industry and economic development. Natural resources, particularly mineral reserves, gasoline, and agro merchandise, have been extracted from every corner of the earth by China’s businesses with the support of large infrastructure projects abroad and evasive trading practices.

It’s incredibly difficult to deny that BRI is an effort to address China’s domestic economic miseries as well as its security and energy concerns, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, including the South China Sea, despite the Chinese demonstration that BRI is an attempt to provide funds to boost global trade through infrastructure development generously. The nation is prepared to use the same methods it has in the past to meet these issues. The fact is that China has launched a new strategy in the shape of BRI, and the danger of neo-colonialism has reached new dimensions, at least in terms of the heavy debt load China has on several BRI partners. The political unpredictability and underdeveloped economies of Asia and Africa make them prime targets for colonization of this kind. They have China in 39 African nations with the BRI centre place, and becoming the continent’s primary trading partner is not coincidental.

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