

Research Article

**China – Pakistan Economic Corridor:
*China's Strategic Ambition***

*Received: 26th March 2019; Revised: 13th November 2019;
Accepted: 23th November 2019; Available online: 27th November 2019*

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Abstract

China's Silk Road concept known as Belt and Road Initiative (B&R) by Xi Jinping aims at strengthening China's economic power. One part of the initiative is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Using a qualitative descriptive method, we attempt to explain how China and Pakistan integrate themselves in several aspects such as economic, military and politics. The CPEC establishment falls under the intention of both countries to gain more advantage in several aspects. The main objective of this journal is to explain non-economic and also economic interests behind China and Pakistan relations especially China's strategic and geopolitical interests. This journal also analyzes Chinese counter-measures against Indian influence in the Indian Ocean. The conclusion of this research shows that China gain more benefits from CPEC especially after the deployment of China's Navy into the Gwadar Sea Port.

Keywords: *China's Strategic Ambition; Geopolitical Interests; Economic and Military Cooperation; Economic Corridor*

How to Cite: Prakoso, S.G., Murtyantoro, A.P., Cahyani, M.P.I. (2019). China – Pakistan Economic Corridor: China's Strategic Ambition. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial*, 18 (1): 81-92 (doi: 10.14710/jis.18.1.2019.81-92), [Online]

Permalink/DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14710/jis.18.1.2019.81-92>

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INTRODUCTION

China is well known for its rich history back in the dynasty era. They –the Chinese- established a road which can connect China to the western world. Actually, it is not a physical road. It was, in fact, a trade route where merchants from China used to travel to the western world. This route is called The Silk Road. It is called “Silk Road” because back then a lot of Chinese merchants brought silk to Europe and traded them with something else. At first the name “Silk Road” was not an official name for this crucial trade route. Then in 1877, a German geographer coined the name “Silk Road” due to its main commodity that being transported through these networks of course (History, 2017). It did not only connect China to Europe, but it also connected China to the surrounding civilization such as Persia, India, Korea, Japan, Arabia, and Asia Minor. This road was also important to the development of culture and technology. Because as this road connected China with other civilization it also provided cultural exchange along the way.

This road was used as the main trade route to conduct trade among civilization. But when the Ottomans came to power, they closed the long-established road and imposed taxes to merchants who wanted to go through Asia Minor – present-day Turkey-. Due to the closure of Silk Road by the Ottomans Empire, the western world could not receive goods that come from the eastern world. In order to overcome this problem, the Europeans had to find another way to get the goods that they wanted. So, they searched for a new route and replace the over-land route with sea route (Mark, 2018). Since then, the Silk Road is slowly forgotten and most of all great Empires such as Spanish, Portuguese, Great Britain, and the Netherland used the newly founded Sea Route to conduct their trade.

But in this 21st century, there was a discourse to revive the existence of the prominent Silk Road. During a state visit to Kazakhstan in 2013, the President of the People’s Republic of China Xi Jinping announced a plan to bring the concept of the Silk Road back to life (Alice Ekman, 2017). The initiative once called One Belt One Road is currently known as Belt & Road Initiative (B&R). Xi Jinping’s vision is to revive the Silk Road’s strength under China’s influence. This initiative aims at strengthening China’s economic power through infrastructure projects in China’s neighboring country. B&R Initiative is based on two branch plans. The first one is the Silk Road Economic Belt which links China with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Iran, Turkey, and all the way to Europe through networks of roads, highways, and railroads. The other one is the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road which links China with Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, African East Coast, and all the way up

to Suez Canal and ends up in Europe through seaports. By building and financing infrastructure in neighboring countries, China hopes to boost trade with the neighboring countries using the new trade corridors. China will also gain more markets to sell their products. Aside from China's external goals, B&R also aims to make China's Hinterland and underdeveloped regions to flourish. By flourish is that their economic growth could be accelerated due to the newly built route so that they can gain connectivity to the other region in China, or to other countries.

One part of the Silk Road Economic Belt's plan is to establish the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This corridor aims to integrate the network of infrastructure between Kashgar in Xinjiang in China's far west with the port of Gwadar in Baluchistan province (Cai, 2017). With this integrated network being built between China and Pakistan, the flow of goods from China to Pakistan will run more smoothly. For China, this corridor can boost the economic development of China's outermost regions. Pakistan, on the other hand, could use this corridor to harness its unemployed citizens to build the infrastructure and to improve its economic performance. But with the ambitious goals that China aims, it is likely that CPEC is not only economic cooperation between the two countries. With Pakistan's strategic geographical position, it seems possible that China also seeks geopolitical interests.

Indeed, there are several studies that have been conducted regarding China's geopolitical interest in Belt & Road Initiative. The results of such research are to explain China's geopolitical interest globally. For example, a journal by Muhammad Sarqib Irshad explains how Belt and Road Initiative benefits Pakistan's Economy and also the improvements in China's significant relations with South Asian countries. (Irshad, Xin, & Arshad, 2015). In this case, there is a less focused study concerning China's geopolitical interest in Pakistan through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Due to Pakistan's proximity to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, it has high chances that China seeks advantages towards this geographical location. Therefore, the scope of this journal is to analyze China's geopolitical interest in establishing cooperation with Pakistan through CPEC.

Moreover, to analyze the topic several concepts and theories used as a guideline namely Balance of Power, Hegemonic Influence, Security Dilemma, and Stag Hunt Theory. The Balance of Power concept is well known in International Relations Studies. This concept belongs to the Realism theory in which states try either to maintain its current powerful position in the international stage or to overthrow the current powerful states in order to change their position. The main goal of implementing the Balance of Power policy is solely to seek power. When a state becomes even more powerful, it could influence other states and finally subdue them. The powerful states could utilize the weaker states in order to fulfill their national interest in international scope. But

if there were only one powerful state at the international level, the stability in international politics would be disrupted since they have ascendancy over the others (Yazid, 2015). Therefore, another nation should balance the powerful state in order to gain back the stability in international politics. The means to rebalance the stability could be done in various ways. For example, a nation could strengthen its power by building its military capacity. With strong military capacity, a nation could use these advantages either to defend itself from the foreign threats or to expand its influence to other weaker states. Another way to make a nation becomes more powerful is by developing its economic strength. With strong economic capacity, a nation could spread its economic influence to the less capable states through economic aid and international cooperation. Hegemony is a condition where there is a group or a single state who has more power to exerts its influence over other states. The hegemon does not have to conquer other's national territory in order to spread its influence. When the strength of political, economic, and military capacity of one's is powerful enough, other nations could be made as to their sphere of influence. It means that the weaker state is subdued by one's power and will do pretty much everything that the more powerful state told them to. The existence of a hegemon is crucial in international politics (Donnelly, 2005). A hegemon could control international stability with its power. Without a strong hegemon, the international condition could be chaotic since there is no one who takes charge of international order.

The next concept is the security dilemma. Security dilemma is basically a condition given the irreducible uncertainty about the intentions of others, security measures taken by one actor are perceived by others are threatening. While the others also take steps to protect themselves, these steps are then interpreted by the first actor as confirming its initial hypothesis that the others are dangerous and so on in a spiral of illusory fears and "unnecessary" defense (Donnelly, 2005). Security dilemma will affect how countries in the region maximize their power especially their military power to secure their country from any potential threat. This condition will create an indirect chance for each state to compete with one another for the sake of their national security. Other than those concepts, there is also one game theory that could put everything in one package, the Stag Hunt game theory. Rosseau's stag hunt theory explains how two hunters decide to hunt by giving four possibilities. The first one, both of the hunters cooperate to hunt a stag to get more 'meal'. Second and third, one of the hunters decide to hunt a hare by themselves and the other one doing nothing – this condition explained by Rosseau as the cooperation and deflect the situation. This second and third condition also leads to either one of the hunters gets a small amount of 'meal' or get tired of hunting alone because they still need to share the hare with another hunter. Fourth, both of the hunters decided to hunt a hare by themselves and there is no co-

operation between two of the hunters. This condition called deflect and deflect the situation. Both of the hunters get the same amount of meal –hares. But it only a hare, not as satisfying and fulfill the hunger as a stag does (Wagner, 1983). The stag hunt game theory will also create a *security dilemma* because when two of the hunters do cooperation the other hunters will realize that the chance and the power of these cooperate hunters will also increase. This condition leads to insecurities among the other hunters.

RESEARCH METHODS

To discover China's strategic ambition, a method implemented by Hanura in his work entitled "Assessing Indonesia-Russia Foreign Policy During Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono Administrations" can be used (Hanura, 2018). In his journal article he used descriptive-analytical method, through which focuses on description and interpretation. However, this research is not about comparison between two countries' policy but rather to analyze China's strategic ambition in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The relevant data and information about China's strategies along with the establishment of China Pakistan Economic Corridor in this journal collected by observing the current situation in China and Pakistan through media, literature research, and online data such as media text analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

China's Geopolitical Interests

China and Pakistan have a long history of bilateral relations since 1951 (Dumbaugh, 2010). Furthermore, it is worth noting that Pakistan became the first country in the South Asia Region that held the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with China back in 2006 (Dumbaugh, 2010). China's investments in Pakistan were allocated in several sectors such as energy, resources, and transportation infrastructure. These include Gwadar Sea Port, the Karakoram Highway, Chashma nuclear power plant, Saindak copper and gold project in Chaghm and Duddhar lead-zinc mining project in Lasbela district, Balochistan (Dumbaugh, 2010). Gwadar Sea Port is a strategic and important location for China. A transshipment point will make either China and Pakistan easier and safer in the mobilization and the distribution of their goods especially crude oil. Given that China is the second-largest crude oil consumer in the world (Duddu, 2013), the infrastructure is absolutely crucial to transport the resources from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Angola, Iraq, and Oman (Workman, 2018).

Besides the economic goals, CPEC also serves military and geostrategic purposes. With the vast network of roads and railways stretched from China to Pakistan, China has gained access to

the Indian Ocean. From the Chinese point of view, the port of Gwadar has a geostrategic position. This consideration is based on at least two reasons. First, the port of Gwadar is suitable for military purposes. It can house submarines, aircraft carriers, and other warships thanks to its deep-water characteristics.



Figure 1. Economic Corridors as Planned by China

Source: www.economist.com

The deployment of Chinese marines to Gwadar has a strategic goal. According to Jeff Smith, a researcher for South Asia at the Heritage Foundation, India and the U.S have an increasing relationship (The Economic Times, 2018). In that way the United States sees India as a net provider of security in the Indian Ocean for the U.S. To keep the Indian Ocean secured, the Indian government signed a 20 years pact with Seychelles to build a military base and an airstrip on Assumption Island (Osborne, 2018). This military base is used as an Indian military checkpoint, where they can refuel and resupply their vessels and other military systems. Therefore, China also wants to establish military force in the Indian Ocean, in Djibouti.

The Chinese policy is in accordance with the thesis proposed by Hans J. Morgenthau said in his book *Politics Among Nations*. Morgenthau introduced the *Balance of Power* theory. The theory claims that when a regional *Equilibrium of Power* is being disrupted, a state that has less power wants to balance the state that has more power (Morgenthau, 1990). The less powerful state seeks to restore the *Equilibrium* that has been disrupted. Consequently, the act to rebalance by the lesser state could prevent a domination act that has been done by the stronger state. Thus, the Chinese government wants to “balance” Indian influence in the Indian Ocean so that India will not dominate the region. The second reason is Gwadar’s proximity to the Arabian Sea. The

Arabian Sea is notorious for acts of piracy. According to the reports of the International Maritime Organization, there were at least five-act of piracy that happened in the Arabian Sea in 2017 (International Maritime Organization, 2017). Consequently, China wants to deploy its Marines to tackle piracy in the region. With the presence of their military units in the Arabian Sea, they can guard the Chinese cargo ships and significantly reduce piracy in the region. If the Chinese military presence in the Indian Ocean, Piracy could be decreased. Pirates will think twice to attack a Cargo Ship which is being guarded with Military Warships. Thus, they can prevent loose of profit caused by piracy. That is why Military presence in the Indian Ocean essential.

China and Pakistan's Common Interest

China and Pakistan's common interests could be related to political issues with their neighboring country, that is India. The hostile relationship between Pakistan and India can be traced back to 1947 due to territorial claims over Jammu and Kashmir (Horimoto, 2015). Both India and Pakistan contested their claims over these territories at the United Nations (Majid & Hussain, 2016). This condition has prevented any socio-economic or military cooperation as well as the other advantageous relations between the two countries. Pakistan India dispute over Kashmir also led to another concern such as a nuclear war. This issue started to rise on December 13th, 2001 when five Pakistani gunmen began an attack on the Indian parliament building in the city of New Delhi (International Relations Organization, 2016). The government of India then brought 500,000 troops to the border and prepared their nuclear missiles as they responded to this attack. In response to India's military mobilization, Pakistan deployed its nuclear missiles (International Relations Organization, 2016).

China, on the other hand, also has bilateral issues with India. In 2017, China and India stumbled into the Doklam Crisis. Doklam is a plateau located near the Bhutan-India-China border. Doklam Plateau is claimed by China and Bhutan, which makes it a disputed area. This crisis started when Chinese soldiers were found building a paved road towards the disputed area (Kalyanaraman & Ribeiro, 2017). But India and Bhutan have a treaty over the Doklam Plateau to not use the territory for both countries interest. The Chinese act provoked the Indian Government to send its troops to the disputed area and both nations were engaged in a military standoff. This marks the lowest point of the relationship between India and China (Kalyanaraman & Ribeiro, 2017). The effect of this crisis led the Indian government to boycott China's Belt & Road Initiatives. India sees Belt & Road Initiatives as a China's act to surround India, especially the presence of China – Pakistan Economic Corridor. For China, the boycott was a sign of Indian hostility towards China's most ambitious initiatives (Lidarev, 2018).

Furthermore, the rivalry and hostility shown by both countries do not happen only inland but also in the sea. In the past several years India and China contested the influence over the Indian Ocean. India as the traditional major power seeks to maintain its influence in the Indian Ocean. But since the Chinese Economy has reached two-digit numbers development, China wants to expand its influence, especially in the Indian Ocean. With this clashing national interest from both countries, the Indian Ocean is now the new “battleground” of influence. But China shows more determination in securing and dominating the Indian Ocean. It is shown by Chinese foreign investment in the Maldives and Sri Lanka (Nainggolan, 2018). In April 2018, state-run China Railway Beijing Engineering Group Co. Ltd won a more than \$300 million contract to build 40,000 houses in Jaffna district in the Northern Province, which suffered extensive damage during Sri Lanka’s 26 years civil war (Ramachandran, 2018). Not only that, but China also built a huge port in the south (Miglani & Aneez, 2018). Meanwhile, in the Maldives, Sri Lanka has formally handed over its southern port of Hambantota to China on a 99-year lease (Stacey, 2017). The construction of this \$1.3 billion port was also using Chinese debt. But due to Maldives’ incapacity to repay its debt, China will have control over the port and make Maldives’ sovereignty eroded. India, on the other hand, could not keep up with the heavy flow of Chinese investment, therefore China gains the upper hand in the Maldives and Sri Lanka. With the control of Maldives and Sri Lanka, the Chinese government can secure and dominate the Indian Ocean. Moreover, China has gained access to Maldives’ and Sri Lankan port to refuel and resupply its Navy, which India has a big concern and threaten by it.

Those brief explanations about Pakistan and China relations with India show that the partnership between China and Pakistan is not only based on economic foundations but also a political concern. Both countries have the same interest regarding their hostile relations with India. China and Pakistan seem to perceive their partnership through multiple aspects such as politics, military, and economy in order to counter India’s power especially in the South Asia region (Lidarev, 2018).

Analysis of China Strategic Ambition

Based on several concepts mentioned above, we could really see how actually China strategies on Pakistan through CPEC. The Stag Hunt Game Theory applies to China – Pakistan Economic Corridor. China wants cooperation with Pakistan to get more advantages such as ease of oil transportation access, secure cargo ships from piracy, etc. On the other hand, Pakistan also needs China to cooperate with them because there are several aspects that will indirectly be secured by the presence of China in Pakistan such as economic and national security. For instance,

it seems both of the countries receive equal advantage from this relation. While in fact, China has a lot more advantages because of their strategy. Relations with Pakistan have transformed China into one of a big and strong actor in the region. Note that there are already India with their fellow United States beforehand. China's existence in the region will hold and prevent India from confronting Pakistan. While China will also hold the United States influence in the region because both the countries have the same power and abilities. This condition finally led to the existence of the *balance of power* and *security dilemma* in the region. The exact result of what *stag hunt* game theory explained.

Other than the *stag hunt* strategy, a lot of western countries also accused China plays the debt trap strategy to Pakistan. Through the CPEC, Chinese loans to Pakistan have increased significantly. No doubt CPEC will give advantages to Pakistan such as increased FDI and other external funding inflows but it will be heavy for Pakistan to transform without making them a colony of China. In fact, China is not partnering with any local companies meanwhile Pakistan eases the access of Chinese firms such as tax exemptions. This led to the condition where Pakistan's local markets are flooded by goods made in China (Khaliq, 2018). Other than that, each facility built by China to integrated its B&R initiative through CPEC also gives less much advantage to Pakistan. For example, is the Gwadar Sea Port this facility will be managed by China at least on a 43-year lease contract and every business affair will also be controlled by China (Khaliq, 2018). Although a lot of western countries accused China with this debt trap strategy, China Daily report on October 26th October that a debt trap for Pakistan false and baseless. It is because both China and Pakistan are actually well aware of the importance of their strategic relationship, vital to the region's development, peace, and stability. This claim based on the frameworks that fall under the B&R initiative that carried out mutual and meaningful consultation for a win-win result (Assadi, 2018).

CONCLUSION

It can be seen that the cooperation between China and Pakistan would not have been possible without common interests. Pakistan and India have a hostile relationship because namely, they have a different view of politics and ideology. China, on the other hand, sees India as a hostile country because they have a clash of interest between them. Such as the Doklam Plateau military standoff and India's boycott on China's Belt and Road Initiatives. China and Pakistan decided to cooperate and establish China – Pakistan Economic Corridor because they share a common rival, which is India. That is why both countries hope that by the establishment of CPEC, they can achieve their own national goals and of course their common goal. Although both countries have

common interests, China plays a bigger role in the CPEC by applying some strategies that give more advantages to them. The strategies would likely put Pakistan into more vulnerable conditions because the Chinese influence is deeply vested in the region because the deployment of the Chinese Navy in Gwadar Port could weaken Pakistan's sovereignty. Not to mention the Chinese Navy will have control over Pakistan's water due to the establishment of the Chinese military in Gwadar. But on the other side, Pakistan's national security in the region also being secured by the existence of the Chinese Navy because China provides protection from Indian Threats in the region since India and Pakistan are rivals and sometimes actively hostile to each other.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to express our biggest gratitude to Mr. Rafał Lipka, as a lecturer from Poland, for his kindness in helping us and also giving his insights and suggestions if we had any problems in the process of writing this Journal article.

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