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China's BRI: Ideology of Cooperative Globalism

BY

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The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the organization.

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Abstract

As the global order is transforming, China's peaceful rise highlights its ideological framework based on peaceful coexistence, cooperation, economic prosperity, and mutual development. The rise of China to the status of a global power is undeniable. This research work investigates China's ideological framework that is "Cooperative Globalism," a phenomenon that emphasises the significance of global collaboration for economic resilience and global development. Through BRI, China has invested over \$1 trillion in infrastructure projects in more than 140 states worldwide, which aims to strengthen cooperation and deepen economic integration through regional connectivity. In 2024, China achieved a record level of engagement by investing over \$51 billion. About \$70.7 billion has been invested towards infrastructure construction contracts. Additionally, BRI states accounted for about 30% of China's total foreign trade, and it has the potential to boost global GDP by as much as \$7.1 trillion by 2040. The political and economic behaviour has transformed the global power dynamics from unipolar to multipolar and challenges the prevailing hegemony and aims to promote peace and stability through economic diplomacy, resilience, and development. China's perspective provides a unique dimension to the evolving geopolitical landscape by placing a premium on regional prosperity rather than the global dimension. This study resolves that China's global perspective adheres to and promotes the ideology of "Cooperative Globalism" in the form of BRI and lays the foundation for a transformation in global leadership.

Keywords: *Cooperative Globalism, Belt and Road Initiative, Hegemony, Multilateral Cooperation, Economic Diplomacy.*

Introduction

In the last several decades, China has come a long way from being a politically and economically isolated underdeveloped state to a global power (Naveed, 2018; Morrison, 2019). China's foreign policy is constructed on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence: non-interference in domestic matters, non-aggression, equality and mutual benefit, mutual respect, territorial integrity, and sovereignty (CMP, 2024; Edward Wong, 2024). Through its pragmatic and geopolitical calculations, China has invested in a unipolar world and transformed it toward multipolarity. Throughout the Cold War, China maintained its position by adhering to its foreign policy of cooperation, stability, respect, and dignity.

Since its establishment, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence have piloted China's foreign policy globally. Some instances where these principles have been put into practice include the 1954 Sino-Indian settlement over Tibet, boundary disputes, and bilateral agreements between nations with very different political systems and histories (Yuan Zhengqing, 2015). China's Five Principles laid the foundation for the Non-Aligned Movement's Charter, thereby reinforcing China's global normative influence. From that point on, China has consistently upheld the principles of sovereignty, non-interference, collaboration, and a peaceful foreign policy (MFA, 2024).

In 2013, China unveiled the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which embodies its commitment to "Cooperative Globalism" based on these political, economic, and cultural norms. Scholars like Abdul Aziz Said and Alastair Iain Johnston laud the cooperative globalism framework (Charles O. Lerche, 1970; Johnston, 2003). The primary argument of this framework is that apart from the 'follow-me' hubris of hegemony or authoritarian rule, the cooperative globalism "leads to high levels of cooperation even with low levels of formality and intrusiveness (Johnston, 2003)." China does not hold hegemony and zero-sum power

politics; it prospects to create inclusive globalisation, economic prosperity, and mutual development through BRI. Over 150 states and international organisations are expected to become members of the BRI by mid-2025, with the vision of achieving \$1.3 trillion in infrastructure investments and \$2.5 trillion in trade by 2024 (Greenfdc, s.d.; Nedopil, 2025; Saei, 2025; Adetunji, 2017). Through BRI, a new paradigm in global politics is emerging on this scale, one that prioritises economic development, regional connectivity, and principles-based discourse while honouring the sovereignty and development ambitions of member states. It further demonstrates China's pioneering role in fostering global economic integration.

Since the Cold War, a unipolar system has prevailed; however, China advocates for a multipolar world. President Xi Jinping's asserts that multipolarity fosters more impartial, rational, and unwavering global arrangements facilitating cooperation and development in the Global South. China is ardently following the BRI's vision and advocating for global governance based on cooperation outside of Western-led organisations through its membership in international institutions such as the SCO, BRICS, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. China's policy statements and official rhetoric affirm that the Five Principles and the BRI are part of a larger ideological framework that promotes peaceful rise, shared prosperity, win-win collaboration, and mutual respect that underpins the 'China Dream' as well. Premier Zhou Enlai's 1950s diplomacy positioned the footing for this miraculous approach, and President Xi Jinping's 2024 vision of a "community with a shared future for mankind" reinforced the Five Principles' centrality to China's foreign policy.

This study initiates a discourse regarding "China's Cooperative Globalism." What impact do the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence have on China's international diplomacy today? How does the BRI operationalise these norms to promote global development and multipolar governance? Does China's regional connectivity and economic engagement undermine the hegemonic world order? In a rapidly changing geopolitics, how does China's

cooperative globalism influence international peace, stability, and sustainable development? This research work argues that China has an ideology that is based on a harmonious, and prosperous global order by considering its diplomatic history, ideological constructs, and engagement with global governance institutions. China's ideology, 'cooperative globalism,' is based on peaceful sharing, economic engagement, and sovereignty, which offer a corridor of peace and multipolar cooperation globally.

Ideological Underpinnings of China's Cooperative Globalism

China's foreign policy paradigm, exclusively the BRI, is based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. China first suggested these ideas in the early 1950s. They now underpin China's diplomatic philosophy and foreign relations. Traditional Chinese values and norms based on the post-colonial perspectives and the multipolar world order in the mid-20th century are reflected in the five principles: peaceful coexistence, equality and mutual benefit, non-interference in internal affairs, peaceful coexistence, and mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity (Xinhua, 2024).

China was able to preserve its objectives through cooperation rather than confrontation and bloc politics, though it was diplomatically isolated and geopolitically contained by Western nations. China's cooperative globalism, based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, aspires to construct a global community where nations respect one another's sovereignty and pursue economic development without interference or hegemonic control. The BRI has been implementing the ideology of cooperative globalism since 2013 (Wang, 2021). China advocates for mutual progress, economic prosperity, and development, rejecting the zero-sum geopolitical competition. China aims to create interstate connectedness through infrastructure development, economic prosperity, and political discourse. Its goal is to build a new global paradigm that opposes hegemony and interventionism.

In the past, the US has maintained its status as the preeminent unipolar global force since the Cold War ended. Conversely, China opposes hegemonic and interventionist policies that sow discord and instability around the world and supports state sovereignty and inclusive growth. The multipolar system, which President Xi Jinping supports, is more stable, inclusive, and robust; it will grant greater influence to all states, particularly those in the Global South. As President Xi Jinping proclaimed, “To build a global community of shared future, all peoples, all countries, and all individuals – our destinies being interconnected – must stand together in adversity and through thick and thin, navigating towards greater harmony on this planet that we call home. We should endeavour to build an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity, turning people’s longing for a better life into reality (mfa, 2023).”

Engagement through multilateral institutions, such as the SCO, BRICS, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, is evidence of China’s commitment to cooperative globalism, in which cooperation and mutual interest take precedence over competition and rivalry. China’s government emphasise that the Five Principles and BRI represent and promote ‘cooperative globalism’ ideology. This approach was established by Premier Zhou Enlai in the 1950s and reinforced by President Xi Jinping, who dubbed the Five Principles the “cornerstone” of Chinese diplomacy (Iqbal, 2024). China’s government white papers, senior official speeches, and policy communications emphasise “peaceful rise,” “win-win cooperation,” “shared prosperity,” and “mutual respect” to support its external engagements and vision for a harmonious international system.

President Xi, on the 70th anniversary of the Five Principles of Coexistence, called for a “community with a shared future for mankind,” underscoring the urge for cooperation and inclusive global governance to tackle economic inequality, climate change, and security threats (Xinhua, 2024). At the 2017 World Economic Forum in Davos, President Xi stated, “There’s

no point blaming economic globalization for the world's problems...Countries have the right to development, but they should view their interests in the broader context and refrain from pursuing their interests at the expense of others (CGTN America, 2017).” Therefore, the BRI operationalises China's desire to transform global governance through economic partnership and infrastructure connectivity. China leads the way in creating a more balanced, impartial, and prosperous global order based on peaceful cohabitation and a forward-looking vision of global harmony by emphasising multipolarity and constructive engagement.

BRI – An Embouchure of Economic Diplomacy

The BRI is a ground-breaking economic perspective that China has carefully constructed since 2013. It is a global infrastructure development initiative that promotes connectivity, trade, and economic cooperation among 150 states and international organisations in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America. China's BRI engagement reached \$1.308 trillion by mid-2025, including \$775 billion in infrastructure projects and \$533 billion in investment projects (Nedopil, 2025; Greenfdc, s.d.). Moreover, BRI-related construction contracts and investments reached record highs in the first half of 2025, with \$66.2 billion in deals and \$57.1 billion in investments, nearly double the previous year, which demonstrates China's global economic statecraft success (Hasanova, 2025).

Transportation networks (roads, trains, and ports), energy pipelines, telecommunication systems, and industrial parks are among the BRI's most extensive infrastructure projects. Energy, mining, and high-tech manufacturing are key to global supply chains and economic growth; thus the effort targeted them. In 2025, energy sector investments totalled \$44 billion, with half going to oil and gas projects and a growing share to renewable energy projects like wind, solar, and waste-to-energy, totalling approximately 12 gigawatts of capacity (Nedopil, 2025; IEA, 2025). A \$20 billion gas processing complex in Nigeria is one of BRI's major

projects, demonstrating its dual focus on energy and environmental development (News Central, 2025). The BRI goes beyond infrastructure to encourage regional connectivity and South-South cooperation, promoting economic integration among developing economies. The cooperative initiative reduces trade costs, improves market access, and boosts investment by strengthening regional transport and energy infrastructure. These physical linkages encourage economic prosperity and industry collaboration, which boost sustainable growth. By 2024, BRI states' trade volumes exceeded \$3.07 trillion, this trade volume accounted for over 50% of China's total foreign trade value that year, reflecting a significant economic interdependence fostered by the BRI (Assadi, 2025).

Chinese companies completed 340 deals worth \$121.8 billion in 2024, exhibiting project performance across regions and sectors (Nedopil, 2025). Middle Eastern states received \$39 billion through Chinese BRI engagement, highlighting energy-rich regions' geopolitical and economic prominence (Rasmal Press Room, 2025). China wants to connect Latin America to its broader network of collaboration, despite a recent drop in investments. BRI investments in Indonesia (\$9.3 billion), Pakistan (\$65 billion), Saudi Arabia (\$5.8 billion), and Kazakhstan (\$4.6 billion) demonstrate China's geographic reach and regional congregation (Nedopil, 2025). China's economic diplomacy through BRI is a sophisticated strategic economic statecraft that promotes a multipolar world order with shared development and reduced dependence on Western institutions.

China's development-oriented diplomacy contrasts with hegemonic and zero-sum geopolitics by using its industrial and economic prosperity to construct infrastructure and spread its influence through bilateral and multilateral engagements. As part of the BRI, participating states are contributing to reduce their economic vulnerabilities to external shocks by diversifying their trade partners, enhancing their logistics infrastructure, and becoming more integrated into global value chains. The \$51 billion invested in 2024 demonstrates that BRI

projects have significantly influenced GDP growth and job creation in partner states. The multipolar and egalitarian global order is supported by AIIB and BRICS New Development Bank institutions, which oversee funding, policy discourse, and project implementation. Participation in multilateral frameworks by Chinese commercial ventures strengthens the narrative of peaceful global integration and win-win cooperation by promoting shared ownership and joint advantages.

Addressing Criticisms: Debt Sustainability and Sovereignty Concerns

Critics anticipate that China may gain geopolitical dominance over the BRI member states through the debt scheduling and sustainability. Analysts are skeptical that the BRI loans have put poorer nations into a “debt trap” where they will have a hard time paying back their loans, particularly if they are not financially resilient. Many observe that China’s 99-year lease on Sri Lanka’s Hambantota port – obtained as a result of loan default – is a geopolitical and strategic advantage for Beijing. Pakistan and Zambia have encountered sovereign debt difficulty with a large share of external debt owed to China, raising concerns about BRI funding deals’ transparency and fairness. Reports suggest that developing countries will owe China \$35 billion in loan repayments by 2025, with \$22 billion of that amount due from 75 of the world’s poorest nations, which fear funding cuts to health and education (Kozul-Wright, 2025).

Despite these criticisms, various evidence-based counterarguments emphasise China’s commitment to “win-win cooperation” and customised agreements for each partner country. China insists that the BRI tailor negotiations to partner countries’ development interests, capacities, and national sovereignty. Chinese policy banks negotiate conditions that balance commercial and concessional interests in the spirit of mutual benefit, unlike some Western aid or financial structures. China has also recognised debt sustainability issues and improved transparency and debt-relief methods (AFRODAD, 2022).

As part of the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), China temporarily reduced the debts of participating states by \$4.2 billion in 2020 and 2021 (Duke, 2025). The pandemic's financial hardships forced the postponement of payments. If China accelerates payments in 2024 and 2025, it might be open to participating in international debt restructuring programs.

Recent BRI projects have significantly improved transparency, previously hindered by non-disclosure agreements and insufficient financial data. China has proposed that multilateral financial institutions, which follow international norms for governance reform, environmental sustainability, and project requirements, be modelled after the AIIB. In the case of budgetary problems, China can now renegotiate, extend the maturity of its loans, or restructure its debt – credit goes to changes to their debt-relief policy. The resolutions offered by China align with the government's rhetoric on peaceful cohabitation and national independence. They assist collaborating governments in managing their debt without compromising their sovereignty or strategic autonomy.

The BRI infrastructure enhancements boost economic growth and are based on real project results. Enhanced energy supply, industrial capacity, and transit links have contributed to the improvement of recipient nations' economies and the reduction in poverty levels. Resilient trade operations and reduced travel times were made possible by the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway in Kenya, which was built and financed by the BRI. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has improved Pakistan's infrastructure to the point where the country can generate more electricity, from 9,000-9,500 MW in 2015 to 42,00 MW by 2024 (PIDE, 2025).

This investment has increased industry and decreased power shortages. The BRI is now able to finance solar and wind farms in Asia, Central Asia, and Africa, which will help achieve sustainable development and climate change mitigation goals. Enhancing economic conditions and reducing debt burden are of utmost significance to China, in keeping with its goal of

friendly cooperation and mutual benefit. As part of its BRI, China aspires to construct a world, where every state can prosper well and respects one another. Contrary to the prophecies of hegemonic power, this alternative growth route nonetheless satisfies the unique requirements of countries in the Global South. China uses economic diplomacy to help its partner states deal with international economic instability, development gaps, and infrastructure constraints. The Chinese government's aims are debt reduction, win-win partnerships, and capacity-building conversations, despite reasonable worries about the long-term viability of the BRI projects.

BRI's Implications on Global Governance

As a global political and economic initiative, BRI holds a global governance framework that promotes constructive international collaboration and multipolarity (Chun, 2017). Borderless, inclusive, and diverse leadership is a passionate call for an era when nationalism and isolationism are on the upsurge. Cohesion is key to achieving success in the long run, according to proponents of the "community of common destiny for mankind" impression. This perspective advocates for an inclusive approach to international law making, challenging hegemonic domination and narrow national interests. The study argues that all states, not only those along with the BRI routes, should prioritise economic growth, social justice, environmental sustainability, and security. Balancing top-down institutional coordination with bottom-up voluntary cooperation among various states, the BRI increases the provision of public goods and establishes ethical standards in global connections.

Moreover, BRI contributes to the foundation of global governance (Bin, 2021). Through the BRI, China intends to promote multilateralism by establishing formidable global institutions. In the newly established multinational financial organization known as the AIIB, China has assumed leadership with a focus on global governance and investments in long-term infrastructure. Inclusiveness of the AIIB's leadership has fostered an environment where

members are comfortable enough to trust each other and share opinions on imperative matters. Aside from China's significant roles in Western groups, its participation in the BRICS and the SCO demonstrates that China is committed to regional stability, economic cooperation, and security (Azizi, 2024). These regional organisations are investing in better ways to communicate, work together, and coordinate policies in their quest for a more equitable global order.

The strategic relevance of the BRI projects will be enhanced if they are integrated into global frameworks, which will support a paradigm shift towards shared growth rather than rivalry and conflict. The BRI aims to build new institutions that will promote economic growth and regional stability, especially in the global South. By reducing trade barriers, the initiative improves connectivity, fixes infrastructural inadequacies, and makes economic conditions conducive to peaceful advancement. Greater regional connectedness can lessen the severity of environmental, security, and economic injustice-related collaboration demands. Growing trade between BRI nations, economic connectedness is promoted, lowering the likelihood of violence and increasing the likelihood of prosperity (Zreik, 2024). One distinguishing diplomatic aspect of China is its emphasis on growth, which is closely followed by its regard for national sovereignty. China demands a peaceful economic cooperation and demands a more equitable international system.

It is expected that the funding for the BRI would be preserved, and subsequent plans will prioritise sustainability and resilience. Nearly half of the estimated \$1.5 trillion in investments for green infrastructure would likely go towards renewable energy and environmentally friendly transportation networks by the year 2026. On a global level, the forthcoming plan is anticipated to strengthen sustainability initiatives. Post-2024, there was a more responsible policy change that prioritises project transparency, local development goals, and the long-term sustainability of partner nations' debt over global concerns. New health and

environmental programs, along with the BRI's Digital Silk Road, demonstrate a higher level of international engagement. Cooperation on a global scale is necessary to address new challenges that transcend traditional security and economic paradigms. The BRI combines sustainable development goals, economic diplomacy, and multilateral diplomacy to help with the transition to cooperative and multipolar global government. To implement its ideological underpinnings of inclusive governance and harmonious global growth in a global context, the BRI will keep investing, make sustainability a priority, and ensure resilience at the global level.

Conclusion

Through the lens of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, Chinese foreign policy and the BRI demonstrate a strong commitment to “Cooperative Globalism.” Ideas that affected Chinese diplomacy since the Bandung Conference and the Sino-Indian Agreement in the 1950s are still relevant in 2018. With the support of more than 140 countries, the BRI has matured into a current and concrete reflection of these values and norms. The ultimate objectives are mutually beneficial collaboration and the endorsement of state sovereignty. The Chinese government expects trade volumes to hit \$2.5 trillion by 2024, with BRI member states investing more than \$1.3 trillion in infrastructure.

This data demonstrates the initiative’s impact on the development of international financial ties. After witnessing how hegemonic frameworks and traditional unipolar dominance have marginalised many emerging countries, China has advocated for a multipolar global system. China supports international institutions that promote democratic values, such as the BRICS New Development Bank, the AIIB, and the SCO. This economic statecraft, which strengthens regional economies and promotes peace, contributes to global stability, particularly in the South. In its pursuit of a more cooperative global order, China intends to combine infrastructure development with multilateral diplomacy. China has strengthened the BRI’s

linkages to peaceful coexistence and mutual respect in response to global concerns over debt sustainability and sovereignty. According to empirical research, BRI projects have improved development, increased access to power, and reduced poverty in several partner states. The findings also indicate that BRI is assisting the states in closing the development gap. BRI will continue to promote sustainability and quality infrastructure, as well as larger sectors such as digital connectivity, health cooperation, and climate measures, as it seeks to demonstrate its importance in addressing 21st century global concerns. China hopes to contribute to global peace and prosperity by working to build a fairer global society. Both China's diplomatic rhetoric and the BRI advocate for a cooperative globalism that challenges conventional ideas of global hegemony. It promotes a framework based on a uniform, peaceful, and interdependent world by laying out a comprehensive framework for global politics based on multipolar cooperation, sovereignty, and mutual growth.

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