

THE SILK ROAD ECONOMIC BELT POLICY IN SUPPORTING CHINESE GEOPOLITIC PROJECTIONS IN THE REGION

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Abstract – The Chinese government's policy in The Silk Road Economic Belt aims to facilitate the infrastructure of land route transportation. Railway infrastructure projects and installation of oil and gas pipelines require a large investment, and Chinese political power to influence every country to support and be involved in the Belt Road Initiative project. The direction of the Chinese government's policy is certainly intended to underpin China's geopolitical projections in the region. The research question is analyzed through theory of geopolitics, geostrategy and geoeconomics. The research methodology, based on descriptive analytic, is supported by data collection techniques and is equipped with data sources relevant to the phenomena discussed. In conclusion, China's geopolitical projections become the main goal for the Chinese government in the Silk Road Economic Belt policy. The assumption of the geopolitical theory of the heartland illustrates that the mastery of the land logistics route supports China's efforts to influence globally by building a logistics path that further connects China with the global world, including Europe, Asia, the Middle East and North Africa.

Keywords: China, Geopolitics, The Silk Road Economic Belt

Introduction

Chinese President Xi Jinping initiated One Belt One Road (OBOR) in 2013 which has now changed to Belt & Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI adopts the construction of routes consisting of railways, cross-border roads, gas pipelines, to sea transportation facilities through integrated ports. The BRI is like a connecting bridge that stretches from China, Central Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, North Africa to Europe. The initiative is more than just a physical link, in fact, it pioneers the largest economic cooperation platform in the world, including policy coordination, trade

collaboration, funding, to cross-cultural cooperation.



SOURCE: MERCATOR INSTITUTE FOR CHINA STUDIES
Figure 1. Belt & Road Initiative Projection Map.

Source: Mecator Institute for China Studies²

China offers the prospect of sustainable cooperation which opens strategic opportunities for countries involved. The BRI focuses on the first two work systems on the land zone of The Silk

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² Hui Lu, Chalene Rohr, Marco Hafner, Anna Knak, China Belt & Road Initiative: Measuring the Impact of Improving Transport of Connectivity on International Trade in The Region - a proof of Concept Study, (Cambridge: The RAND Corporation, 2018), p, 17.

Road Economic Belt (SREB), while on the maritime zone of The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MRB), which will connect China starting from the South China Sea (SCS), West Pacific, Strait Malacca, Indian Ocean, Pakistan, Persian Gulf, Suez Canal to European sea waters. The Chinese government stated that BRI's development certainly involved 60 countries, with a combined GDP of USD 21 trillion each year.³

The Chinese government in the last decade has invested in development projects such as roads, railways, oil and gas pipelines, electricity networks and other infrastructure and connectivity related projects to support the sustainability of the SREB land zone. To support this idea, the Chinese government has actively promoted the nomenclature of infrastructure development, including roads and railways, as well as gas and oil pipeline facilities along with related ancillaries to build a logistics network for each participating country. There are around 60 countries that have expressed their interest in the initiative which represent more than half the world's population and about a third of global GDP.⁴

The China National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) is an institution that propose the establishment of SREB. As a systematic

and integrated project, the SERB aims to optimize the market full potential, expand investments, promote mutual prosperity across countries, and increased geographical access. But the question is whether the existence of the land logistics route is only for economic purposes only? or is this a first step to support China's geopolitical projections in the region? China's need in the energy sector is possibly a solid reason for the Chinese government to take control of the land logical route to the Central Asia, the Middle East to North Africa and Eurasia regions as those regions lie enormous amount of energy resources such as gas and petroleum.⁵

The Theoretical Basis of Geopolitics, Geostrategy and Geoeconomics

Rudolf Kjellen, a geography scholar at the end of the 19th century, understood geopolitics as a reference in the strategic considerations of western imperialist countries based on the the relationship between the physical earth and political strategies to maintain state power over its colonies.⁶ Kjellen in 1899 wrote "geopolitics as part of political geography that is essentially concerned with the external relations, strategy and politics of the state, and which is as close to employ

³ Tien Jinchun, "Road': Connecting China and the world, McKinsey & Company", Mckinsey.com, May 25, 2017 in <http://www.mckinsey.com/industries/capital-projects-and-infrastructure-our-insights-one-belt-and-one-road-connecting-china-and-the-world>, accessed on May 25, 2020.

⁴ Indermit Gill, Future Development Reads: China's Belt and Road Initiative (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2017), p, 12.

⁵ Jonathan Fulton, China's Changing Role in The Middle East, (Washington D.C: Atlantic Council, 2019), p, 4.

⁶ Gearoid O Tuathail, Simon Dalby, Paul Routledge (New York: Routledge, The Geopolitics Reader), p, 12.

as knowledge to political ends".⁷ Friedrich Ratzel argues that geopolitical scholarship is influenced by social Darwinism as the main driving factor of states in understanding geopolitical considerations as a reference for decision making.⁸ Ratzel emphasized that states are no different from living organisms that must survive in order to maintain their existence in the presence of other states. Like living organisms, states need power and influence to avoid the process of "decay".⁹

Karl Haushofer in his book *Geopolitics des Pazifischen Ozeans* explained that "geopolitics formulates the scientific foundation of the art of political transactions in the struggle for the existence of political living forms on the living space of the earth".¹⁰ The existence of states is the "key word" for how Haushofer understood geopolitics. Halford J. Mackinder, made geopolitics a new perspective in perceiving international politics. For the first time in his work entitled *The Geographical Pivot of History*, Mackinder understood that "geopolitics is a way of seeing the world", coining the term "God's eye".¹¹ Mackinder understood that the constellation of world politics at that time was centered in Europe so that in

Heartland theory he stated "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; Who rules the Heartland commands the World Island; Who rules the World-Island commands the World".¹² Entering the post-Cold War era, Colin Flint understood geopolitics as "situated knowledge", a branch of the field of geography that studies the conditions and situations in certain parts of the earth where political interventions are influenced by geographic factors.¹³

Andrew Gyorgy in a journal entitled *The Geopolitics of War: Total War and Geostrategy* stated that changes in the era of world war change the total strategy and tactics of the next war. Geostrategy can be categorized as a sub-field of geopolitical studies that specifically discusses the country's strategy in the form of foreign policy that is guided mainly by geographical factors such as informing, limiting, or influencing political and military planning. Geostrategy requires comprehensive planning, determining ways to achieve national objectives or securing significant military or political assets.¹⁴

Through geostrategy, geographical considerations is a stage to concentrate military power and direct diplomatic activities. Jakub J. Grygiel in his book

⁷ Martin Jones, Rhys Jones, Michael Woods, *An Introduction to Political Geography: Space, Place and Politics*, (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 29.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p 33.

⁹ Tuathail, Dalby, & Routledge, *op. cit.* p. 24.

¹⁰ Charles B. Hagan, *Geopolitics*, (*The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 4 Summer 1942, 478-490), p. 9.

¹¹ Klaus Dodds, *Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 7.

¹² Klaus Dodds & James D Sidaway, Halford Mackinder and the 'Geographical Pivot of History: a Centranial Restropective, (*The Geographical Journal*, Vol 170 no 4, 2004, 292-297), p. 291.

¹³ Colin Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 41.

¹⁴ M. Azam Chaudary & Gautam Chaudhary, *Global Encyclopaedia of Political Geography*, (New Delhi: Global Vision Publishing House, 2009), p. 22.

Great Powers and Geopolitical Change demonstrates the relationship between geography, geopolitics and geostrategy in the discussion of "Three Concepts: Geography, Geopolitics, Geostrategy". States must reflect geopolitical security in their foreign policy or geostrategy. The main variable influencing geostrategy is the national border. States struggle to protect their territories from invasion and attacks; and national borders are a good measure of territorial security. When borders are threatened or unstable, states must concentrate their power to maintain its territorial security, unable to effectively advance their foreign policies far from their territories.¹⁵

Diplomatic, economic and military resources must be projected to transcend the geographical boundaries. Making the outermost region the basis of the ability of state to project its power to strategically important regions to have full power over the regions. In addition, for economic purposes, geostrategy plays an important role in securing strategic access to trade and assets in the form of resources that require military presence. It also requires a network of alliances with other large forces that share common goals in supposedly important areas.

Furthermore, geoeconomics is the study of spatial, temporal, and political

aspects of economics and resources. The existence of geoeconomics according to Edward N. Luttwak is a branch of geopolitics.¹⁶ But in foreign terms, the word "geoeconomics" was first used by American scientist George T. Renner in *Human Geography in the Air Age*. The term geoeconomics according to Luttwak only presents the "name" of the new system of competition between developing nations as a result of the Cold War geopolitics.¹⁷ Roger M. Kubarych in his short article *Geo-economics Injects New Uncertainties into Troubled Markets* defines geoeconomics as an intersection of economics and finance with global political and security considerations in wider domination attempts.¹⁸

Geoeconomics links the "big picture" with the domination attempts of state practices in realm of market. The term geoeconomics began to emerge since the end of the Cold War. Geoeconomics shows the interrelations between economic interactions such as trade, broader political and international relations, and the pursuit of strategic interests by a state, including through military capabilities. This approach is rooted in the growing importance of economic factors in international

¹⁵ Jakub J. Grygiel, *Great Powers and Geopolitical Change*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), p. 15.

¹⁶ Edward N. Luttwak, *From Geopolitics to Geo-Economics: Logic of Conflict, Grammar of Commerce*, (The National Interest, No. 20 (Summer 1990), pp. 17-23), p. 21.

¹⁷ Sparke Matthew, *Geopolitical Fears, Geoeconomic Hopes, and the Responsibilities*

of Geography, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 2007, pp. 338-349.

¹⁸ Roger M. Kubarych, *Geo-economics Injects New Uncertainties into Troubled Markets*, Council on Foreign Relations, 20, May 2004, in <https://www.cfr.org/international-finance/geo-economics-injects-new-uncertainties-into-troubled-markets/p7039>, accessed on June 2, 2020.

relations.¹⁹ The neo-liberal paradigm places the market as the main base of the world economy at both regional and global levels. The large influence of states on the economy of a particular region reflects the practice of domination of powerful states to respond to the opportunities and challenges to global capital movements, markets, investment flows, and natural resource potential. In other words, the concept of geoeconomics is the encounter between geographical aspects of territorial and demographic with various forms of economic potentials that influence the practice of domination of core countries over periphery countries.

Research Methodology

In this study, the author used a descriptive analysis method with a qualitative approach, namely observatory research on certain objects or phenomena. In this research, the author collected data through desk research. The data collected are secondary data sourced from books, scientific papers, journals, reports, working papers, conferences and online or internet media. The secondary data are data in the form of analyzes that illustrate the problem equipped with information, facts, as well as symptoms and indications that lead to phenomena that have a direct relationship with the research problem, namely the Chinese government's policy

in the silk road economic belt to support geopolitical projections in the region.²⁰

In writing this article, the author used descriptive analysis techniques that provide a clear and relevant picture by linking the indicators to be examined. After that, the authors proceed with processing relevant secondary data to explain the two variables.²¹ The geopolitical, geo-economic and geo-economic theories are the theoretical frameworks to answer the research question of how the Chinese government policy in the silk road economic belt supports geopolitical projections in the region.

Result and Discussion

Chinese Geoeconomic Policy in the Silk Road Economic Belt Investment

As the main funding country for BRI, the Chinese government formed three financial organizations, namely the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the BRICS Development Bank and the Silk Road Fund. The AIIB focuses on financing infrastructure investments in the Asian region. AIIB was officially launched in 2014 and more than 50 founding countries, including Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand and South Korea. With the New Development Bank (NDB), it was founded by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, which was then abbreviated as BRICS. Meanwhile, the Silk Road Fund is a consortium bank of a combination of various financial institutions owned by

¹⁹ Juniawan Priyono & Purnomo Yusgiantoro, *Geopolitik, Geostrategi, Geoekonomi*, (Bogor: Unhan Press, 2017), p,

²⁰ Lexy J. Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*, (Bandung: PT. Remaja Rosdakarya, 2010), p, 32.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p 34.

the Chinese government to promote the implementation of BRI since 2015. As for the efforts to meet funding requirement, China also opens bilateral and multilateral cooperation with other financial institutions.²²

Initiating the realization of BRI funding in 2013, the Chinese government has taken into account opportunities related to the existence and potential influence of BRI on 126 countries, 56 international organizations that are based in Asia, the Middle East, Europe, America and Africa, so that the Chinese government could expand the cooperation platforms, especially on the infrastructure investment as the initial capital of China's geo-economic strategic policy in the regions. With this, maintaining economic growth and investment funding become important steps for China to ensure the success in projecting BRI to participating countries.²³ As for following up on banking reforms, China classifies BRI funding into four different funding sources namely; 1) Bank Policy, 2) State Owned Bank, 3) Sovereign Wealth Funds (SWF), 4) The Silk Road Fund (SRF).

China's banking reforms are directed at one vision, namely infrastructure development, economic globalization, political harmonization. Moreover, investment flows, resource allocation, market integration and policy

coordination could potentially encourage open, comprehensive and balanced regional economic cooperation. China subsequently maximizes the contribution of a number of state-owned banks involved in BRI financing. The Chinese government bank is involved in BRI financing because structurally it is a funder of Chinese construction companies, which are also working on a number of BRI mega projects. The following is the list of state-owned banks that contribute directly to the BRI mega project construction:

Table 1. Sources of Financing of BRI Policy Bank (in Billion USD)

Institution	Capital Financing	Rank
Industrial & Commercial Bank of China (ICBC)	4 (2018)	The first capitalism market in the world.
China Construction Bank (CCB)	3.4-15 (2018)	First land infrastructure funding and mining investment.
Agricultural Bank of China (ABC)	3.2- 63 (2018)	SERB Financing
Bank of China (BOC)	2.9	The 4th largest capitalism market in the world.

Source: The Research Institute of Finance.²⁴

²² Beltandroad.news, Financing and Funding for the Belt & Road Initiative, Belt & Road News, May 17, 2019, in <https://www.beltandroad.news/2019/05/17/financing-and-funding-for-the-belt-road-initiative/>, accessed on April 23, 2020.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Silkroadbriefing.com, Who is Financing the New Economic Silk Road? Silk Road Briefing, July 10, 2020, sumber <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2019/07/10/financing-new-economic-silk-road/>, accessed on April 23, 2020.

Through a special platform called China Investment Corporation (CIC), it manages an important part of China's foreign exchange reserves. About one third of the USD 814 billion funds are allocated to the private market, with priority given to developing countries, and more and more are in need of funds for BRI projects. Furthermore, China's financial reforms were actualized by the establishment of The Silk Road Fund (SRF). The SRF invests in projects in mining, precious metal mining, extraction infrastructure and to secure mining rights. The purpose of this fund is to share profits between the sovereign countries concerned and to increase the gold deposits of underdeveloped countries and their investors.²⁵

The China Research Institute of Finance estimates that the infrastructure financing needs of countries along the SERB route could possibly be approximately USD 1.4 billion until 2020. China needs a greater cooperation platform at bilateral, multilateral and global levels. The change in investment characteristics is a guarantee for China towards a binding global investment under the BRI platform. Characteristics of investments for SREB financing are implemented in several stages of method that are adapted to the region, including;

1. China refers to the Longer Investment Period. This step is based on the development of BRI, which is largely aimed at infrastructure development and industrial

collaboration with substantial project financing for a relatively longer period of time for developing countries in the region.

2. China has tightened the rationalization of financing towards developing countries in Asia involved in the BRI mega project. BRI encourages developing countries to strong desirely to promote socio-economic development.
3. China offers the use of RMB, while minimizing US dollar or other international currencies for the financing. As such, the drive for local currency financial cooperation is dominated by RMB.
4. China refers to the development financing strategy through the credit model and halting government subsidies. In this case, China clearly shows the direction of market-oriented economic policy.
5. China is active in international cooperation in engaging global financial institutions to support BRI investment and financing. China is encouraging border countries to apply for capital loans for infrastructure development to China.

Precisely in 2015, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi confirmed that BRI was the main focus of Chinese economic diplomacy for the Eurasian continent reform consisting of the construction of transportation, trade and investment infrastructure, monetary system standardization, business, exchange

²⁵ Xinhuanet.com, China sees stronger trade, investment ties with BRI countries, Xinhuanet.com, 29 September 2009, in

http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-09/29/c_138433949.htm, accessed May 1, 2020.

programs and tourism. Through geoeconomic strategic considerations based on energy needs, China has focused on the Middle East region in the SERB policy.²⁶

Railway Infrastructure Investment

Development of transnational freight train infrastructure from China to Central Asia, Afghanistan began in 2016. China Railway Corporation (CRC) has a railway with the length of 7,000 km, stretching from the city of Nantong, the eastern coastal region of China to Hairatan, Afghanistan. With this, several countries involved, such as China, Belarus, Germany, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Poland, Iran and Russia, have signed cooperation agreements to support China's rail services to Europe. Afterwards, in January 2017, China officially opened a transnational train line from the city of Yiwu, China to Europe.

Entering the end of 2018, it is recorded that the CRC has been connecting 108 cities in 16 countries in Central Asia, the Middle East and the Europe continents. A total of 13,000 trains carry more than 1 million tons of manufactured goods, mainly those exported directly by the Chinese government. As for financing, the Chinese government released a budget for the next development project plan of USD 122 billion. The China National

Machinery Industry Corp (Sinomach) signed an MoU with the Iranian government for the construction of railways in the western part of Iran worth USD 845 billion. Sinomach is focused on handling procurement engineering work and the construction of a 410 km railway that will connect cities in Iran. This collaboration is a follow-up to the long list of Chinese investments with the Iranian government.²⁷

As a single operator, Railway Engineering Corp has also built railways in the north to south lane between Tehran and Isfahan through the Qom region. The second one is the Yinchuan-Tehran freight train route in September 2016. China-Iran added an investment contract for the construction of a railway facility worth USD 543.6 million which was operated by the China Civil Engineering Construction Corp (CCECC) in 2018. With the strategic location of Central Asian countries as a link between China and the Middle East, China rebuilt the eastern-Tehran-Turkmenistan-Afghanistan corridor as the extension of the 3,200 km Tehran-Mashhad route that links Urumqi, capital of China's western Xinjiang Province with Iran's capital, Tehran, across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.²⁸

²⁶ Fulton, *op.cit*, p 6.

²⁷ Reuters, China's Sinomach to build \$845 million railway in western Iran, *The Reuters Business News*, March 21, 2018, in [https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-sinomach-iran/chinas-sinomach-to-build-845-](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-sinomach-iran/chinas-sinomach-to-build-845-million-railway-in-western-iran-idUSKBN1GX07L)

[million-railway-in-western-iran-idUSKBN1GX07L](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-sinomach-iran/chinas-sinomach-to-build-845-million-railway-in-western-iran-idUSKBN1GX07L), accessed on April 23, 2020.

²⁸ China Daily, Belt and Road Initiative Projects: Full List, *China Daily*, May 29, 2019, in <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/china-watch/business/belt-road-projects-list/>, accessed April 25, 2020.



Figure 2. Urumqi-Taheeran Railway

Source: China Daily²⁹

The Chinese state-owned investment agency CITIC Group in 2018 set a credit limit of more than USD 10-15 billion intended for new infrastructure development, ranging from highways and railways to ports and power plants. Xi Jinping believes that the investment projections is generally as a link between Iran's east-west crossing towards Turkey and Eastern Europe. In its development, China was indeed preparing a further investment contract worth USD 1.6 billion to finance the electrification of the 926 km high-speed railway from Tehran to the eastern city of Mashhad. Mashhad became an alternative route to Europe via the railroad route that was being built from the port of southern Iran to Azerbaijan and ended in Europe.³⁰

Installation of Oil and Gas Pipelines for Energy Exploration

The development of the D gas pipeline route connecting Central Asia and China

began in 2014. The construction of the pipeline has become one of the largest infrastructure projects with a length of 1,000 km, and 840 km across outside of Chinese territory. China is targeting the Route D gas pipeline to receive gas supplies from the Galkynysh Gas Field in Turkmenistan which runs through Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and ends on the western border of China. After the operation of D pipeline, the China-Central Asia gas pipeline will have an annual capacity of 85 billion cubic meters and will be the largest gas transmission system in Central Asia. China also cooperates with Russia in the construction of the Power of Siberia natural gas pipeline. With an investment of USD 400 billion, the Pipa route is capable to deliver gas from Russia to China in the amount of 38 billion cubic meters/year. This pipe will stretch along approximately 3,000 kilometers with a diameter of 1,420 millimeters.³¹

²⁹ China Daily., op.cit.

³⁰ Financial Tribune, Chinese Company Signs Rail Deal with Iran, Financial Tribune Economic Report, January 3, 2018, in [https://financialtribune.com/articles/economy-domestic-economy/79296/chinese-company-](https://financialtribune.com/articles/economy-domestic-economy/79296/chinese-company-signs-rail-deal-with-iran)

[signs-rail-deal-with-iran](https://financialtribune.com/articles/economy-domestic-economy/79296/chinese-company-signs-rail-deal-with-iran), accessed on March 5, 2020.

³¹ Oil and gas exploration, production, processing and storage in Serbia, the website of Gazprom, December 12, 2017, in <https://www.gazprom.com/projects/serbia/>, accessed on March 23, 2020.



Figure 3. The Power of Serbia Oil & Gas Pipeline Route

Source: Gazprom³²

The Power of Siberia will deliver natural gas from Irkutsk and Yakutia to China. The gas pipeline project being designed is definitely helping China meet natural gas needs. The Power of Siberia is the first step in reforming China's energy sector by diverting the use of coal energy sources to natural gas.

In 2015, China successfully signed an investment contract agreement for the construction of a 2,400 km long gas pipeline with Myanmar. The route provides efficiency for China's gas and oil supplies. A super capacity of 300,000 tons-super tankers can directly distribute oil and gas through the deep-sea port located on Maday Island. The oil and gas flows to Kunming, the capital of China's southeastern Yunnan province, which borders Myanmar.

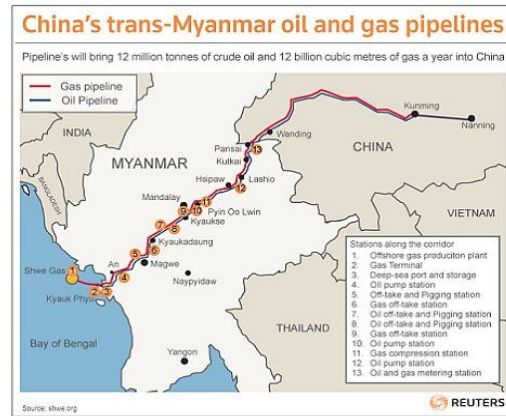


Figure 4. China's-Trans-Myanmar Oil & Gas Pipeline

Source: Reuters Geographic Center Transition³³

In addition to shortening the mileage to 700 nautical miles, the existence of the Kyaukpyu seaport is very beneficial for China. Under the agreement, Beijing promised to surrender a total of USD 53 billion in royalties in 30 years to the Myanmar government. China subsequently inaugurated the China-Pakistan route which will connect China's westernmost province, Xinjiang towards the offshore port of Pakistan, Gwadar which immediately opened Chinese maritime access to the Persian Gulf. This corridor will cut China's journey to the Indian Ocean without passing through the Malacca Strait. This corridor covers roads, railways and pipelines.³⁴

³² Globalresearch.ca, Power of Siberia: Putin and the 'Biden Memorial Pipeline' to China, Center For Research & Globalization, December 8, 2019, in <https://www.globalresearch.ca/putin-biden-memorial-pipeline-china/5697008>, accessed on April 29, 2020.

³³ The Reuters, First Freight Train from China Arrives in Iran in 'Silk Road' Boost, Reuters.com, February 16, 2016, in <https://www.reuters.com/article/uschina-iran-railway-idUSKCN0VP0W8>, accessed on April 25, 2020.

³⁴ Ibid., The Reuters.



Figure 5. China-Pakistan gas and oil pipeline

Source: Globasecurity.org³⁵

At the end of 2019, the China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) launched an oil and gas pipeline construction project to link it to the installation of a long-distance gas pipeline previously owned by CNPC. Chinese Deputy Prime Minister Han Zheng said that the project cost USD 80 billion to USD 105 billion entrusted to Wood Mackenzie, which indeed through the consortium mechanism of CNPC, China Petroleum & Chemical Corp (Sinopec) and China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC). The project is considered a Chinese breakthrough, especially in terms of the sustainability of SREB ahead of the second decade that covered a distance of 133,000 km or 82,600 miles.³⁶

Chinese Geostrategy on the Accessibility of Energy Resources in the Region

Since its inauguration in 2013, the world's energy resource producing countries in

the Central Asia, Europe and Middle East region to North Africa have become targets for China's grand strategy. With an estimate of more than 40% of total GDP in the world, the Central Asian mainland which intersects Eurasia directly to the Middle East certainly keeps various forms of Chinese interests both at regional and global levels. With such enormous GDP, it is quite reasonable that various forms of China's grand design in geopolitics, geoeconomics and geostrategy are centered on the regions.³⁷ As a dominant state in the regions that has even had an impact on US hegemony, it is possible for China to further utilize infrastructure as an instrument for mastering land logical lines. Considering that one of BRI's emphasis is on accessibility, it may be possible if the Chinese grand strategy will lead to controlling access to energy resources in the regions.

The China-Central West Asia Economic Corridor (CCWAEC) proves that China Central Asia is the starting point before entering the economic corridors of the Middle East, including Iran and Turkey. Developing countries in Central Asia are China's initial achievements to open up opportunities for mutually

³⁵ Thenews.com.pk, Pakistan, China Agree to Work On Four Key Projects For Oil, Gas Cooperation, The Internasional News, November 16, 2019, in <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/555357-pakistan-china-agree-to-work-on-four-key-projects-for-oil-gas-cooperation>, accessed on May 2, 2020.

³⁶ Reuters.com, China to Launch New State Oil and Gas Pipeline Group Next Week: Notice, The Reuters Economic Prospect, December 6, 2019, in <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-gas-pipeline/china-to-launch-new-state-oil-and-gas-pipeline-group-next-week-notice-idUSKBN1YA118>, accessed on April 26, 2020.

³⁷ Fulton, op.cit, p6.

beneficial development prospects.³⁸ Xi Jinping's meeting with a number of high-ranking Arab countries officials in 2016 is a milestone for China in its involvement in coordinating development strategies with Arab countries, and contributing to promoting each other's strengths and potentials in increasing production capacity to increase cooperation, ranging from infrastructure development, trade and investment facilitation, nuclear power, space satellites, renewable energy, agriculture to finance.³⁹

Another important element of SREB is Chinese soft-power projections. The socio-cultural approach is also important to fulfill the aspect of accessibility. It is proven when many countries such as Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey begin study Mandarin.⁴⁰ The socio-cultural approach carried out by China further shows that the control over the accessibility of energy resources is not an instant matter.⁴¹ Chinese President Xi Jinping in the opening session of The World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2017 has emphasized that China's interests in the Middle East are largely met by access to energy.⁴²

Cross Border Investment is so far one of the most effective way for China to

fulfill energy security in the midst of a market-based energy trading system. Thus the accessibility of energy resources as China's major interest can guarantee the energy needs for the continued growth of economic productivity. Energy resource accessibility for the sake of accelerating the country's economic growth requires energy security. China's energy security means its responsibility to secure the security of global energy resources sustainably. Energy security becomes a necessity for China as continuous GDP growth demands greater energy supply since in a certain point the domestic energy supply might no longer be able to supply the whole needs of the country.⁴³

As a guarantee of domestic security, accessibility is the impact of the sustainability of SREB which demands the actualization of a more cooperative approach in the form of market-oriented cooperation. Energy security is designed to develop binding cooperation with the world's major energy exporting countries. The availability of access to land logistics routes to Central Asia, the Middle East to Eurasia is a reinforcing foundation for the influence and ambition of Chinese hegemony in the

³⁸ Nadège Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century? Political and Strategic Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative*, (London: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2017), p 4.

³⁹ Fulton, *op.cit*, p 6.

⁴⁰ Al Arabiya, *Saudi Arabia to Include Chinese Language in Educational Curriculum*, Center of Gulf State Educational, February 22, 2019, in <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2019/02/22/Saudi-Arabia-to-include-Chinese-language-in-educational-curriculum.html>, accessed on April 23, 2020.

⁴¹ Jonathan Fulton, *China's Relations with the Gulf Monarchies*, (London: Routledge, 2018), p 13.

⁴² China.org.cn, *Xi Jinping: Responsibility of Our Times, Promote Global Growth*, Davos, Opening Session of the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, 2017, in http://www.china.org.cn/node_7247529/content_40569136.htm, accessed on March 13, 2020.

⁴³ Xuecheng Liu, *China's Energy Security and Its Grand Strategy*, (The Stanley Foundation, 2006, pp 5-16), p, 9.

regions. Even earlier, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao in 2006 formed what was called the State Energy Leading Group (SELG), a formulation of cooperation between producing countries and major energy suppliers in the world. China Energy, the main energy development and saving policies, energy security and external cooperation. The Chinese government has also formalized the energy law, which formulates a long-term energy strategy, regulates all aspects of energy exploration, production, consumption, to Chinese international cooperation.⁴⁴

The Silk Road Economic Belt as the Fulfillment of China's Geopolitical Desires for the "World Island"

The acceleration of economic growth through advanced industrialization is very massive, requires a strategic foundation for China for the mastery of land logistics lines to the accessibility of energy resources in the regions. With trillions of USD investments already poured out by China, it becomes a big question mark if the goal is limited to efforts to strengthen financial cooperation, strengthen road connections or infrastructure, by forming integrated cross-border transportation routes starting from mainland China-Eurasia, Asia Middle-South Asia, Middle East, North Africa to the European continent, involving more than 60 countries, with a combined GDP of USD 21 trillion annually and 40% of the world's population.

But in reality, the strategic battle between US as a hegemon and China as

an emerging power provides a different answer to what is being carried by China today. The SREB still leaves room to think in interpreting the urgency of China behind the BRI agenda. The control of land logistics lines to the accessibility of energy resources in the regions leads to the fulfillment of the land power element as a basis for main consideration in China. Thus, geopolitics becomes a logical consequence in understanding today's global Chinese politics. Geopolitical literacy that is dominated by discussions of power, war of interest and peace or "situated knowledge", as pioneered by Friedrich Ratzel (1897), reinforces the assumption of Chinese thinking to be able to survive, exist and influence the international world. As Ratzel explained in the theory of social Darwinism, China as a state is no different from living organisms that need power and influence to avoid the process of "decay".

This theoretical argument reflects the SREB as a form of modern "fantasy" of Halford John Mackinder's thought which came to be known as the Heartland theory: "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; Who rules the Heartland commands the World Island; Who rules the World-Island commands the World". In the world war situation, Mackinder proposed that a state with the ability to integrate trade routes and military logistics into Europe, Asia and Africa into one form of power or in the term "World Island" certainly might

⁴⁴ Liu., op.cit, China.org.cn.

dominate the world.⁴⁵ SREB, which is projected to bridge Tiongkok's interests in Heartland, China realizes that controls to integrate land and maritime routes towards control of the World Island are a reflection of the actualization step as a hegemonic state. Xi Jinping argued that the economic interests of the regions possesses a grand strategy which is a combination of geopolitics and geostrategy perspectives.

The shift in the dynamics of international politics centered on the Indo-Pacific region, redefines the initial assumptions in the Heartland theory of "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland". Southeast Asia, which is included in the periphery category, receives special attention from China, especially regarding the South China Sea conflict. But The Power of Serbia at the same time serves as an evidence that control of energy resource assets in Eastern Europe illustrates China's "strategic leap" towards Russia which so far play roles in the dynamics of international relations. Broadly speaking, China's current geopolitical vision aims to broaden its sphere of influence, foster new norms of international economic cooperation, and promote a new world order. China's emphasis on shared regional leadership eliminates US unipolarity, which for the umpteenth

time gets a serious test of China's presence in an increasingly intense geopolitical competition scheme in the Indo-Pacific region.⁴⁶

Amid the SCS conflict, China is certainly responsible for the future order of geopolitics which tends to be conflictual. In this way, the step to redefine The New Asia Security Order is when China is able to play an important role in the global security order in the midst of a strategic battle against the US. At the Nuclear Security Summit in The Hague in March 2014, Xi Jinping assured that China's global politics called The Peaceful Rise of China emphasized the country's vision of promoting inclusiveness and increasing collective security under each country's responsibility.⁴⁷ With the aim of maintaining Confidence Building and Security Measures (CBMs), each country combines efforts to build mutual trust and socio-economic integration. In this case, BRI plays an important role in Chinese global politics.⁴⁸

From the geopolitics perspective, China remains inseparable from the arguments related to the discourse of "neo-imperialism". The investment burden that led to the dependence of more than 40 developing countries on the BRI platform, has consolidated China's economic and political dominance

⁴⁵ Sony Iriawan, Strategi Diplomasi Pertahanan Indonesia Dalam Menciptakan Geopolitics of Cooperation di Kawasan Asia-Pasifik, (Bogor: Universitas Pertahanan, 2017), p. 18.

⁴⁶ Zhang Zhexin, The Belt and Road Initiative China's New Geopolitical Strategy? (China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies Vol. 4, No. 3, 2018, pp 327-343), pp. 329.

⁴⁷ Yang Jingjie, Xi Elaborates on Nuclear Security Concept," Global Times, The Global Times, March 25, 2014, in <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/850577.shtml>, accessed on March 21, 2020.

⁴⁸ Zhexin, op.cit, p. 577.

in Asia and Africa.⁴⁹ As an initiator and main funder for the 21st century Silk Road mega project, the "flow" created is predicted to be no more directed towards one-sided power direction for China. For this reason, it is quite reasonable if the assumption of the Heartland theory consolidates China's global politics of power ambitions towards the World-Island, which is a comprehensive depiction of Europe, Asia, the Middle East and North Africa as a guarantee of the practice of Chinese hegemony.

Conclusions, Recommendations, and Limitations

The policy of the Chinese government through the SREB offers the prospect of sustainable cooperation which opens strategic opportunities for each country involved. Carrying global scale infrastructure financing investments, especially on land logical lines, it is an important step for China to secure China's national interests in securing gas and oil supplies. As a geopolitical projection, the SREB underlies China's economic strength towards infrastructure development, economic globalization, political influence, and military power. Beijing relies heavily on land logical lines supported by the presence of infrastructure, ranging from cross-country toll roads, freight trains, to gas and oil pipelines.

The control of access to energy resources underlies China's geopolitical,

geo-economic and geo-strategic grand design of the regions. Investment in developing countries in Central Asia is an early achievement of China to open up opportunities for mutually beneficial development prospects. Inclusivity is the basis for China to gradually maintain accessibility to these countries. The availability of access to land logistics lines to Central Asia, the Middle East to Eurasia is a reinforcing foundation for the influence and ambition of Chinese hegemony in the regions. The control of land logistics lines to the accessibility of energy resources in the regions leads to the fulfillment of the land power element as a basis for main consideration in China. Thus, geopolitics becomes a logical consequence in understanding today's global Chinese politics.

The SREB as fulfillment of Chinese geopolitical interest refers to Mackinder's geopolitical thinking about the Heartland theory. China's success in integrating logistical trade routes and land transportation to Europe, Asia and Africa into one form of power or in the term "World Island" is certainly able to dominate the world. As an initiator and main funder for the 21st century Silk Road mega project, the "flow" created is predicted to be no more directed towards one-sided power direction for China. The Heartland's theory consolidates China's global politics of power ambitions towards the World Island, which is a comprehensive depiction of Europe, Asia,

⁴⁹ Jean-Marc F. Blanchard, Revisiting the Resurrected Debate About Chinese Neocolonialism, *The Diplomat*, February 8, 2018, in

<https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/revisiting-the-resurrected-debate-about-chinese-neocolonialism/>, accessed on April 15, 2020.

the Middle East and North Africa as a guarantee of China's geopolitical projections in the regions.

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