



Research Article

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Analyzing the Impact of China's Belt and Road Initiative on South Pacific Countries' Pursuit of Self-Reliance and Sustainable Development

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Abstract

This study is focusing on analyzing China's Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) within the broader context of geo-political and geo-economic interests in the Indo-Pacific region. The primary goal is to fill a gap in the academic literature by using analytical tools and methods to gather data from various sources. The collected data is then analyzed within historical and contemporary geo-political contexts to draw conclusions and offer recommendations based on the findings.

Keywords: *Belt and Road Initiatives, Beijing consensus, Washington consensus, Strategic alliance, Geo-politics, South Pacific Islands etc*

1. Introduction

The historical Silk Road, established during the Han Dynasty over 2,000 years ago, was a crucial network of trade routes connecting China to the Mediterranean through Eurasia. This ancient route facilitated commerce for centuries, fostering new sea and land trade infrastructure networks that spanned vast distances. China drew inspiration from this historical legacy, developing new trade routes to connect regions like Gilgit-Baltistan to Gwadar and Baluchistan through Afghanistan to Central Asia. These routes, spanning

over four thousand miles, aim to reach Europe and enhance trade connections. Central Asia played a pivotal role in early globalization, bridging Eastern and Western markets and facilitating the exchange of goods, wealth, and cultural traditions. The Silk Road's significance peaked during the first millennium, benefiting civilizations like the Roman and Byzantine Empires and the Tang Dynasty in China.

2. Modern Silk Road Economic Belt Initiative

The modern Silk Road Economic Belt Initiative, also known as the 'One Belt One Road' initiative, consists of two main components: the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road. The Silk Road Economic Belt is a land passage connecting China with Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Russia, and Europe. On the other hand, the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road is a sea route linking China's coastal regions with Southeast and South Asia, the South Pacific, the Middle East, Eastern Africa, and Europe. This maritime route plays a crucial role in transporting over 50% of the world's trade containers to their destinations. To support this, deep-water ports are being expanded, logistical hubs are being built, and new traffic routes are being established. The maritime Silk Road route starts by connecting Chinese coastal areas to cities like Hanoi, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and Jakarta, then extends westward to Colombo, Male, Mombasa, Djibouti, and eventually reaches the Mediterranean via cities like Haifa, Istanbul, and Athens before reaching Trieste in northern Italy. Trieste, with its international free port and rail connections to Central Europe and the North Sea, serves as a critical link in the maritime Silk Road route (Wilt, 2019). Poland, the Baltic States, Northern Europe, and Central Europe are part of the maritime Silk Road, connecting them to East Africa, India, and China through Adriatic ports and Piraeus. This logistical link will reorganize container transports between Asia and Europe. Unlike the longer route through northwest Europe, the southern sea route via the Suez Canal to Trieste significantly shortens goods transport by at least four days. This strategic shift in shipping routes enhances efficiency and connectivity between regions, benefiting trade and economic relations (Triest, 2018).

China's infrastructural projects, such as the Economic Corridor, the Silk Road Economic Belt, and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, have played a crucial role in connecting regions across the Indo-Pacific. These initiatives have facilitated sea routes from Southeast Asia to South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, promoting increased connectivity and economic development. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a key project under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), links Gwadar Port in Pakistan to Kashgar in Xinjiang, China, through ports, railways, highways, and pipelines, enhancing connectivity between the two countries and providing access to the Indian Ocean. The Silk Road Economic Belt aims to revive ancient trade routes between China and Europe by developing transportation infrastructure like railroads, highways, and pipelines to boost trade with Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. The 21st Century Maritime

Silk Road focuses on maritime connectivity, improving trade between China and countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Infrastructure investments under the BRI include ports, railroads, roads, bridges, airports, dams, power stations, and tunnels, contributing to economic growth and development in the regions involved. These projects have not only enhanced connectivity and trade but also fostered economic prosperity in the connected areas (Kuo & Kommenda, 2018).

The One Belt One Road Initiative, also known as the Silk Road Economic Belt Project, was launched by China in 2013 and is considered one of the largest infrastructural development initiatives in modern history. This initiative, integrated into China's national economic strategy, spans approximately 8,000 km and connects nearly 155 countries through land and sea routes. As of August 2023, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is active in 150 countries, representing a significant portion of the world's population and GDP. China's investment in the BRI has reached USD 8 trillion, making it a substantial economic endeavor. The BRI encompasses a wide range of infrastructure projects, including seaports, highways, railways, bridges, airports, energy pipelines, power plants, and telecommunications networks, engaging with 150 countries and contributing to around 75% of the world's GDP. China's financial institutions have provided loans totaling approximately US\$687 billion for BRI projects, with total investments exceeding US\$1 trillion since the initiative's inception. China's trade in goods and services is projected to exceed US\$32 trillion, with foreign reserve currency holdings reaching US\$5 trillion from 2024 to 2028. To mark the 10-year milestone of the Belt and Road Initiative in October 2023, China announced over US\$106.6 billion in financing for the initiative, outlining plans to enhance connectivity, promote green development, and support people-to-people exchanges in developing economies. The Belt and Road Initiative endeavors to forge connections between China and the continents of Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, thereby facilitating enhanced market penetration for Chinese multinational enterprises. The convened Forum, emblematic of this endeavor, witnessed the participation of delegates from upwards of 140 nations. According to assessments by the World Bank, the majority of nations engaged in the infrastructural ventures of the BRI have reaped significant dividends, manifesting in a commendable augmentation of their Gross Domestic Product by 3.4%, alongside a notable surge in international trade by 4.1%.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) harbors ambitions of crafting the preeminent unified market access on a global scale, achieved through a sophisticated orchestration of international and domestic resources, employing a novel paradigm of capital infusion, talent aggregation, and technological repositories. It confronts the pervasive infrastructure deficit spanning the Asia-Pacific, Africa, as well as Central and Eastern Europe. Projections indicate that Asia, excluding China, necessitates an annual influx of up to US\$900 billion in infrastructure investments over the forthcoming decade, a figure exceeding current expenditure rates by a staggering 50%. The BRI meticulously targets an array of sectors encompassing infrastructure investment, education, construction

materials, railway and highway construction, automobile manufacturing, real estate development, power grid augmentation, and iron and steel production, with the following overarching aims:

Enhancing infrastructure connectivity to foster regional economic-trade-financial amalgamation.

Cultivating geo-political, geo-economic, and geo-strategic alliances conducive to nurturing sustainable and inclusive multilateralism, thereby advancing the trajectory towards a multipolar world order.

Facilitating people-to-people connectivity on a global scale, fostering cross-cultural exchanges and mutual understanding.

China's Dual Circulation Economy via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Preceding 1978, China's share of the global GDP lingered at a mere 2%, with a stark 90% of its populace entrenched beneath the poverty threshold. However, with the advent of a novel economic reform policy in 1978, China's imprint on the global economic stage has burgeoned to a formidable 18%, while the specter of poverty has been markedly assuaged to a mere 1% as of 2023. Propelled by this trajectory, China has ascended to the mantle of the world's foremost manufacturing nucleus, boasting a GDP towering at 19 trillion dollars, trailing only behind the United States. Furthermore, the nation has meticulously crafted a domestic infrastructure paradigm of global repute, featuring state-of-the-art highways, rail networks, and technologically advanced industrial enclaves.

In 2013, China unfurled the expansive tapestry of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on a planetary scale, spanning the continents of Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe, and Oceania. This groundbreaking endeavor facilitates the utilization of Chinese currency for commercial transactions within these realms. Astonishingly, the Asian Development Bank has discerned an annual chasm in infrastructure financing eclipsing the colossal sum of \$900 billion across the Asian expanse. In response, China has marshaled considerable resources towards the establishment of myriad special economic zones and industrial precincts, aimed at fostering employment opportunities, while concurrently advocating for the adoption of its technological prowess, exemplified by the ubiquitous presence of Huawei's 5G network.

The stewardship of BRI endeavors falls under the purview of the Silk Road Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, with the B&R Summit Forum assuming the mantle of technical coordination.

The terrestrial corridors encompass:

The New Eurasian Land Bridge, an expansive route traversing from Western China to Western Russia via Kazakhstan, featuring the illustrious Silk Road Railway coursing through China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region, Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Poland, and culminating in Germany.

Another corridor originating from Northern China meanders through Mongolia, extending its trajectory to the Russian Far East. In 2012, the Russian Direct Investment

Fund and China's China Investment Corporation, a formidable Chinese sovereign wealth fund, jointly established the Russia-China Investment Fund, with a steadfast focus on fostering avenues for bilateral integration.

- The China-Central Asia-West Asia Corridor stretches expansively from Western China, extending its reach all the way to Turkey.
- The China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor unfolds a vast expanse from the southern regions of China, ultimately reaching the bustling metropolis of Singapore.
- The Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network sets its sights on Nepal's transformation from a landlocked entity to a nation intricately linked via myriad dimensions.
- The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a monumental endeavor valued at US\$62 billion, encompasses an array of infrastructure ventures spanning Pakistan. Its overarching objective lies in the modernization of Pakistan's transportation networks, energy infrastructure, and overall economic framework. Notably, CPEC marked a pivotal milestone on 13 November 2016, as Chinese cargo commenced its journey overland to Gwadar Port, heralding the onset of maritime shipment routes destined for Africa and West Asia.

Initially conceived to forge connections with East Asia and Europe via physical infrastructure, the project has since evolved to encompass Africa, Oceania, Latin America, and Europe by land and maritime networks. The overarching objective is to bolster regional integration, amplify trade flows, and galvanize economic expansion. Concurrently, China has unveiled blueprints for the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, envisaging its role as a conduit for burgeoning maritime trade, coupled with substantial investments earmarked for port infrastructure development spanning the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia, East Africa, and the western extremities of Europe. These interconnected routes have been collectively christened the Silk Road Economic Belt.

Furthermore, China's secondary ambition revolves around the construction of a 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, aimed at intertwining the Southeast Asian region with China's southern provinces through a meticulously orchestrated network of ports and railways (Cai, 2017).

China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, alongside its technologically propelled economy, assumes a pivotal role in fortifying stability within the domestic economic sphere while concurrently advancing China's geo-economic, geo-political, and geo-strategic interests through the prism of regional economic amalgamation. This ambitious initiative has witnessed China forging robust partnerships with 150 nations spanning the continents of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe.

Driven by expansive geostrategic imperatives, OBOR's most conspicuous manifestation materializes in the form of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), initially unveiled with a staggering investment of US\$46 billion, subsequently augmented to US\$62 billion by 2020. This corridor's overarching objective lies in interlinking Kashgar

in Xinjiang, China's westernmost region, with the Port of Gwadar in Baluchistan, Pakistan, thereby furnishing an alternative transshipment nexus for China's vital energy supplies, circumventing the need to navigate through the Strait of Malacca in Southeast Asia.

According to Justin Yifu Lin (2015), OBOR's inception was propelled by China's aspiration to counterbalance US policies such as the pivot and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Leveraging its economic prowess, including its substantial foreign reserves and extensive experience in infrastructure development, China seeks to consolidate its foothold within the region. Through the strategic deployment of preferential policies, substantial fiscal infusions, state-led investments, and a technologically adept OBOR framework, China endeavors to cultivate a regional production ecosystem wherein it stands as the nucleus of advanced manufacturing and innovation, with a pronounced emphasis on enhancing quality standards.

Moreover, OBOR serves as a catalyst for fostering regional development within China by facilitating deeper integration with neighboring economies, catalyzing the evolution of Chinese industries, exporting Chinese norms and benchmarks, and ameliorating the challenge posed by Chinese overcapacity. This multifaceted approach underscores China's unwavering dedication to regional economic convergence and its aspiration to wield a preeminent role in shaping the economic landscape of the region (Cai, 2017).

China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, coupled with its technologically advanced economy, assumes a pivotal role in fortifying stability within the domestic economic framework, while simultaneously advancing China's geo-economic, geo-political, and geo-strategic interests through the lens of regional economic integration. This far-reaching initiative has engendered the consolidation of China's ties with 150 countries across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe.

Propelled by expansive geostrategic ambitions, OBOR finds its most prominent exemplar in the form of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), initially unveiled with an audacious investment projection of US\$46 billion, subsequently augmented to US\$62 billion by the year 2020. The primary aim of this corridor is to establish a link between Kashgar in Xinjiang, situated in China's westernmost region, and the Port of Gwadar in Baluchistan, Pakistan, thereby furnishing an alternative transshipment nexus for China's vital energy supplies, circumventing the need to traverse the Strait of Malacca in Southeast Asia.

According to Justin Yifu Lin (2015), China's initiation of the OBOR project was spurred by the imperative to counterbalance US policies such as the pivot and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Leveraging its formidable economic resources, including its substantial foreign reserves and extensive infrastructure development expertise, China endeavors to fortify its position within the region. Employing a strategic amalgam of preferential policies, substantial fiscal injections, state-guided investments, and a technologically sophisticated OBOR framework, China aspires to forge a regional

production ecosystem wherein it occupies the apex of advanced manufacturing and innovation, with a pronounced emphasis on elevating quality standards.

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The enhanced infrastructure facilitated by the BRI is anticipated to assume a pivotal role in alleviating the historical impediments that have long hindered world trade. Consequently, the ramifications of the BRI's impact are expected to reverberate across diverse sectors and geographical regions, fostering the emergence of more streamlined and extensive global trade networks (Belt and Road Initiative to boost world GDP by over \$7 trillion per annum by 2040, 2019).

The Chinese leadership is orchestrating a strategic paradigm shift, positioning China as the gravitational nucleus at the epicenter of global economic dynamics. This endeavor is intricately interwoven with the collective aspirations of the BRICS bloc, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. In pursuit of this vision, China has embarked upon a series of 'De-dollarization Initiatives' designed to mitigate the hegemony of the American dollar. The longstanding dominance of the dollar has been a source of persistent concern, particularly given the trade deficits and balance of payments challenges confronting many developing nations.

China's 'De-dollarization Initiatives' represent integral components of a broader strategic blueprint, encompassing the ambitious 'One Belt One Road' initiative. This monumental undertaking, aimed at revitalizing the ancient Silk Road trade routes, is poised to reshape the prevailing global economic order, which has hitherto been predominantly influenced by Western imperialist powers. By recalibrating the balance of global economic forces, China aspires to catalyze accelerated growth, foster sustainable and inclusive development, and advance the principles of multilateralism and a multipolar world order.

The BRICS countries, constituting a substantial portion of the global population, territorial expanse, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), international trade volume, and intra-trade interactions, have emerged as pivotal stakeholders in this evolving economic milieu. The establishment of the New Development Bank by the BRICS nations signifies a

significant milestone, affording member states access to financial resources for infrastructural development endeavors. For instance, South Africa has availed itself of US\$5.4 billion for the execution of five distinct projects, underscoring the palpable efficacy of collaborative initiatives within the BRICS framework.

One of the paramount advantages conferred by the BRICS lies in the expanded array of financial avenues it extends to its constituents, thereby diminishing dependence on conventional Western-dominated financial institutions. Moreover, the scope of BRICS collaboration transcends mere economic realms, encompassing domains such as healthcare, thereby engendering a shared ethos of progress and autonomy from the prevailing hegemony of the US dollar.

The significance of the BRICS summit, slated to convene in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 22-24 August 2023, resonates profoundly within the global South. The anticipated participation of representatives from sixty-seven nations underscores the palpable interest in affiliating with the BRICS bloc, signifying a burgeoning momentum towards its expansion. Among these nations, forty-five hail from the global South, with twenty-three formally submitting applications for BRICS membership in May 2023.

The aspirant member states encompass a diverse array of nations, including Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, Bahrain, Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Egypt, Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Morocco, Nigeria, the State of Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, and Vietnam.

Central to the BRICS ethos is the pursuit of South-South cooperation across economic, trade, technological, investment, and financial domains, with the overarching objective of diminishing global dependence on the US dollar-centric international financial and payment framework. Additionally, the bloc advocates for reforms within international financial institutions to amplify the voice and representation of developing nations.

In tandem with the BRICS framework, China assumes a leadership role in fostering sustainable and inclusive economic growth and development through robust trade and investment endeavors. The collective emphasis extends beyond the realm of global governance management to encompass the provision of essential financial and technological assistance for infrastructural and sustainable development ventures.

Integral to this initiative is a comprehensive \$32 billion package earmarked for green energy initiatives, urban mobility enhancements, and digital infrastructure development. Furthermore, the ambitious 'One Belt One Road' project, comprising the construction of highways, railways, and sea port networks, epitomizes the BRICS commitment to facilitating global connectivity and development. Underpinning these initiatives is the pivotal role of the New Development Bank (NDB), positioned as an alternative financial institution challenging the hegemony of Western-dominated entities such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Critiques of the Beijing Consensus

The Beijing Consensus epitomizes China's distinctive approach to economic

development, underscored by a fusion of technological and financial prowess, an infrastructure-centric growth model, and a governance strategy centered around export orientation. This idiosyncratic Chinese paradigm is characterized by a robust central government steering what is termed as "state-led market socialism." The communist regime in China actively promotes citizen participation in economic endeavors, particularly through initiatives such as rural industrialization and urbanization, aimed at bolstering domestic demand and supply. This approach further nurtures an "export-oriented growth model," prioritizing economic and commercial partnerships founded upon mutual interests and collaboration, notably exemplified by infrastructural ventures like the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI). The expansive scope of the BRI extends across the 'BRICS-SCO-EAC-RCEP regions,' alongside engagements with various economic and business counterparts in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, with the overarching objective of fostering economic, financial, trade, and technological cooperation towards a paradigm of multipolarity and sustainability.

This collaborative Chinese strategy stands in stark contrast to the principles espoused by the "Washington Consensus," epitomized by the policies championed by institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The Washington Consensus advocates for free markets, privatization, trade liberalization, financialization, and the corporate privatization of the economy, often spearheaded by conglomerates such as Big Tech and multinational corporations (MNCs).

Critics such as James McBride, Noah Berman, and Andrew Chatzky (2023), as noted in their analysis for the Council on Foreign Relations on February 2, 2023, express apprehensions regarding the Belt and Road Initiative. They perceive it as an expansive China-led infrastructure endeavor aimed at spanning the globe. They view the BRI as a potent manifestation of Chinese power projection, highlighting the United States' challenge in articulating a compelling counter-narrative. Moreover, the initiative has encountered resistance in certain Belt and Road participant countries, particularly those grappling with debt crises.

3. China-Africa Investment Cooperation

China-Africa investment cooperation has garnered substantial global attention, with numerous nations closely scrutinizing the Chinese developmental paradigm. According to the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, China emerges as the fourth-largest source of investment in Africa, with investment inflows soaring notably to an impressive \$3.4 billion in 2022 alone.

The palpable magnitude of this investment finds expression in the diverse sectors wherein Chinese companies actively engage across the African continent. With over 3,000 Chinese enterprises investing fervently in Africa, the breadth and depth of this investment endeavor are extensive and multifaceted. It spans a spectrum of sectors encompassing infrastructure development, energy, mining, manufacturing, technology,

and beyond.

Chinese presence in Africa is characterized not merely by financial investment but also by a steadfast commitment to forging enduring partnerships and collaborative ventures. Chinese entities frequently forge joint ventures with local African enterprises, facilitating the transfer of technology, nurturing skills enhancement, and catalyzing job creation within the continent's borders.

Furthermore, China's investment endeavors in Africa align harmoniously with the objectives delineated in the African Union's Agenda 2063, which seeks to actualize inclusive and sustainable development across the continent. This investment impetus transcends mere economic calculus, encapsulating a genuine aspiration to contribute meaningfully to Africa's socio-economic advancement and overall prosperity.

China's robust investment commitments in Africa epitomize the deepening economic entwinement between the two regions. They underscore China's unwavering dedication to cultivating mutually enriching partnerships and catalyzing Africa's sustainable developmental trajectory. As China continues to expand its investment footprint across Africa, the horizon brims with promise for further collaboration and shared growth (Reporter, 2023).

China's direct investment in Africa has surged, reaching a remarkable \$1.38 billion in the first four months of this year alone. This represents a notable year-on-year increase of 24 per cent, underscoring the resilience and vitality of economic and trade cooperation between China and Africa. It also signifies the unwavering confidence of Chinese companies in the African market.

The recent "third China-Africa Economic and Trade Expo," held from June 29 to July 2 in Changsha, the capital of Hunan province, was a significant event that attracted participation from 50 African countries and eight international organizations. This expo served as a platform to further strengthen economic and trade ties between China and Africa.

Over the past decade, the total bilateral trade between China and Africa has exceeded an impressive \$2 trillion. The first five months of 2023 alone saw a total import and export volume of 822.32 billion yuan (approximately \$113.5 billion), marking a substantial 16.4 per cent year-on-year increase. This continuous upward trend reflects the robust nature of China-Africa trade relations.

Data reveals that China's trade with Africa has experienced remarkable growth, with the bilateral trade volume surging from less than 100 billion yuan in 2000 to a staggering 1.88 trillion yuan in 2022. This represents a cumulative increase of more than 20 times, with an average annual growth rate of 17.7 per cent. In 2022 alone, bilateral trade between China and Africa stood at an impressive \$282 billion.

The year 2023 has also seen a significant increase in China's new direct investment in Africa, reaching \$1.38 billion in the first four months alone, marking a 24 per cent year-on-year increase. Given this substantial growth trajectory, it is anticipated that China-Africa trade will continue to thrive, with trade volume expected to reach \$300

billion by the year 2025.

The deepening economic and trade cooperation between China and Africa, as evidenced by these figures, underscores the strong and mutually beneficial relationship between the two regions. As China continues to invest in Africa and vice versa, the potential for further growth and collaboration remains promising (Xinhua, 2023).

Table 1: Chinese Investment in Top 20 Destinations & Sectoral-wise number of Projects (1998-2012)

Country	Number of Projects	Sectoral-wise	Number of Projects
Nigeria	404	Business Service	1053
South Africa	280	Wholesale & Retail	693
Zambia	273	Import & Export	539
Ethiopia	255	Construction, Transportation, Storage, Postal Services	392
Egypt	197	Mineral Products	319
Congo	193	Base Metals & Articles of Base Metals	148
Ghana	192	Articles of Stone, Plaster, Cement	96
Angola	189	Machinery & Electronics	76
Zimbabwe	167	Textiles & Articles	75
Tanzania	149	Vegetable Products	72
Sudan	148		
Kenya	137		
Algeria	123		
Mozambique	94		
Uganda	89		
Gabon	71		
Mali	68		
Namibia	66		
Mauritius	65		
Cameroon	60		

Source: <http://brook.gs/1KWTFcX>

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects exert profound ramifications across all 55 African countries, attributable to the comprehensive infrastructure enhancements encompassing bridges, dams, ports, railways, roads, airports, and seaports. These endeavors have not only catalyzed economic growth but have also engendered a plethora of job opportunities.

For instance, the Entebbe Expressway in Uganda stands as a testament to transformative transportation infrastructure, significantly ameliorating connectivity between the capital city of Kampala and Entebbe National Airport, thereby effecting a marked reduction in urban traffic congestion. Furthermore, Uganda's Karuma and Isimba hydropower plants stand as beacons of progress, supplying electricity to millions of people, thus fulfilling the region's burgeoning energy demands.

In Nigeria, the Lagos-Kano railway project has emerged as a game-changer, while Mozambique's Maputo-Katembe Bridge, the largest suspension bridge in Africa spanning 3041 meters, has significantly bolstered regional connectivity. Concurrently, the ongoing construction of the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) in Kenya by Chinese firms Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) and China's Communications Construction Company (CCCC) heralds a new era of connectivity, envisaging a seamless link between the pivotal Indian Ocean port of Mombasa and the capital, Nairobi.

China's BRI initiative further underpins the East African Rail Master Plan, designed to establish pivotal rail corridors linking the Indian Ocean ports with the hinterland. The Port of Doraleh, a collaborative effort between China and the Djibouti government, stands as a testament to strategic foresight, boasting state-of-the-art terminals for handling containers, heavy cargo, and oil, thereby facilitating Ethiopia's unfettered access to maritime trade routes. Additionally, the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway, financed by China, has emerged as a linchpin for bolstering trade for landlocked Ethiopia, which relies on Djibouti for over 90% of its trade volume.

Moreover, China's contributions extend to the Cherchell Ring Expressway and Port in Algeria, effectively bridging the Mediterranean with Africa's hinterland, thus augmenting regional connectivity and trade dynamics. These emblematic instances underscore the transformative impact of BRI projects on Africa's infrastructural landscape and economic trajectory.

3.1 China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the Asia Pacific Region

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the Asia Pacific region constitutes a monumental endeavor geared towards augmenting connectivity and cooperation among nations in this expansive and culturally diverse domain. Spanning from the Arctic to the Antarctic, the Asia Pacific region encompasses a plethora of countries and cultures, hosting a substantial portion of the world's populace.

The Pacific Ocean, from which the region derives its nomenclature, stands as the largest ocean on the planet, enveloping approximately one-third of the Earth's surface. Stretching from the Arctic in the north to the Antarctic in the south, the Pacific Ocean is flanked by Asia and Australia to the west, and the Americas to the east. Within its confines reside eighteen sovereign nations, including Australia, Fiji, Japan, and New Zealand, among others. Moreover, the Indian Ocean Rim Association boasts twenty-three member nations, further accentuating the region's diversity and global influence.

Encompassing the Pacific Rim, Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia, and Eastern and Southern Africa, the Indo-Pacific region is inhabited by approximately 2.5 billion individuals, constituting 64% of the global populace. The strategic significance of this expanse cannot be overstated, owing to its abundant resources, burgeoning economic potential, and profound geopolitical ramifications.

The BRI endeavors in the Asia Pacific region are geared towards fostering connectivity and collaboration through an array of infrastructure ventures, trade accords, and cultural exchanges. Its overarching objectives include bolstering trade routes, nurturing transportation networks, and nurturing economic development across the region. Additionally, the BRI strives to fortify diplomatic relations and engender mutual comprehension among participating nations.

In essence, the BRI initiative in the Asia Pacific region epitomizes a comprehensive and ambitious undertaking with vast potential to engender regional integration and prosperity. It serves as a testament to China's unwavering commitment towards fostering peace, stability, and development within the region.

The Pacific Ocean, renowned for its vast expanse and immense diversity, harbors approximately 25,000 islands, a figure surpassing the total number found in all other oceans combined. Predominantly situated south of the equator, these islands contribute to the region's distinctive geographic and cultural tapestry.

Within the Pacific Ocean lie numerous sub-seas, each endowed with unique characteristics and significance. Among these are the Celebes Sea, Coral Sea, East China Sea, Philippine Sea, Sea of Japan, South China Sea, Sulu Sea, Tasman Sea, and Yellow Sea. Each of these aquatic realms plays a pivotal role in the marine ecosystem and holds profound implications for the surrounding regions.

Situated to the west, the Strait of Malacca stands as a critical maritime conduit linking the Pacific and Indian Oceans. This strategic water passage facilitates trade and navigation between Asia and the global arena, rendering it an indispensable artery for international commerce. Conversely, on the eastern front, the Strait of Magellan serves as a pivotal juncture connecting the Pacific with the Atlantic Ocean, offering another vital conduit for maritime traffic.

To the north, the Bering Strait emerges as a pivotal gateway between the Pacific and the Arctic Ocean. This narrow channel assumes significant ecological and geopolitical importance, serving as a migratory corridor for marine fauna and a crucial trade thoroughfare for nations bordering the Arctic.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) holds substantial relevance in the South Pacific Islands, where China emerges as a pivotal investor and donor of foreign aid. Over the period spanning from 2008 to 2020, China's investments in the region have amounted to approximately US\$3.148 billion, encompassing US\$3.145 billion in bilateral investments and US\$2.7 million in regional investments. Notable examples include contributions towards a national sports stadium, the National University, a comprehensive medical center at the National Referral Hospital, and the erection of 161 mobile phone towers. Moreover, China has spearheaded over 100 ongoing projects across various sectors in the Pacific region.

Against the backdrop of China's growing presence, other nations such as the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom are intensifying their engagement in the Pacific to counterbalance China's influence. However, China is

strategically deepening its ties with the Pacific Islands, particularly through state-owned infrastructure enterprises and corporations. This strategic maneuver involves the establishment of six new platforms encompassing agriculture, climate action, poverty reduction, disaster preparedness, emergency supplies, and mushroom grass technology. Unlike traditional infrastructure projects, these initiatives provide an avenue for China to deliver cost-effective aid projects while facilitating technical transfer and knowledge sharing. Additionally, they afford opportunities for Chinese aid contractors to engage with local communities, thereby enhancing China's image as a donor attentive to the needs of both elites and ordinary citizens in the Pacific.

Furthermore, Chinese provinces and cities are actively seeking to enhance bilateral relations with Pacific Island nations through various initiatives. For instance, provinces like Shandong and Fujian have forged sister-province relations with entities in the Solomon Islands, while cities such as Liaocheng and Qingdao have established sister-city relations with counterparts in Tonga and Kiribati. Moreover, Guizhou Province dispatched China's inaugural medical team to the Solomon Islands, underscoring China's commitment to bolstering healthcare infrastructure in the region. Educational exchanges are also thriving, exemplified by the provision of vocational and technical training in China for Pacific students, supported by initiatives such as educational scholarships.

Looking ahead, the role of Chinese local governments in diplomacy with the Pacific Islands is poised to expand further, bolstered by initiatives such as aid provisions and collaborative projects. In January 2022, the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) organized online training sessions for Chinese companies and social organizations on the utilization of an aid reporting portal, underscoring China's commitment to transparency and capacity building. Additionally, China has pledged substantial government scholarships and professional training slots for Pacific candidates between 2020 and 2025, indicating a sustained commitment to fostering human capital development and socio-economic progress in the region.

Between 2006 and 2017, China allocated approximately USD 1.5 billion in foreign aid to the Pacific Islands, marking a significant investment in the region. Collaborating closely with countries such as The Solomon Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, and Timor-Leste, China has embarked on initiatives aimed at fostering the blue economy, notably through the development of a marine spatial plan. Furthermore, China has extended its support through Belt and Road Initiative packages, directing investment towards a spectrum of infrastructure projects encompassing road construction, airports, seaports, bridges, dams, hydropower electric plants, solar plants, and satellite and cyber parks, among others. Notably, agreements have been forged with several South Pacific countries, including Samoa, Kiribati, and Niue, signifying a collective commitment to advancing common development objectives.

In addition to these economic endeavors, China has taken steps to promote cultural and educational exchange in the region. The establishment of Confucius Institutes in the

South Pacific Islands exemplifies this, deploying Chinese-language consultants, teachers, and volunteers to facilitate language acquisition and cultural understanding. Noteworthy achievements include the training of over 1000 Samoans by the Confucius Institute at the National University of Samoa. A comprehensive five-year action plan outlines further initiatives, including the appointment of a Chinese special envoy to the region, the establishment of laboratories, the provision of hundreds of training opportunities for law enforcement personnel, and the facilitation of high-level forums. Such efforts have solidified China's reputation as a dependable partner, particularly in the realm of physical infrastructure development, encompassing critical areas such as roads, bridges, airport construction, hydro-thermal electrification, and solar panels.

Scholars such as Chang (2017) argue that the Beijing Consensus offers a valuable framework for comprehending and dissecting economic dynamics. Central to this consensus is the emphasis on infrastructure investment and state-led development, principles that underpin China's engagement with the region. Echoing this sentiment, Denghua Zhang (2017) asserts that China's involvement in the region has catalyzed economic growth and poverty reduction, laying the groundwork for political stability and socio-economic progress.

In contrast, the United States, in concert with strategic allies such as Australia, Japan, and England, has historically wielded influence in the Pacific region, leveraging military presence and exploiting natural resources and labor through outsourcing to American multinational corporations. This dominance extends beyond the Pacific to encompass the broader Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific regions, where ideas of liberalism and capitalism are actively promoted and perpetuated.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the "Washington Consensus" wielded considerable influence, spearheading an agenda under the auspices of the IMF and the World Bank. This agenda was characterized by ten policy prescriptions or core principles, which included fiscal discipline, redirecting public spending from subsidies towards the broad-based provision of key export-oriented pro-growth GDP, tax reform, labor laws reform, broadening the tax base, adopting moderate marginal tax rates, interest rate liberalization, competitive exchange rates, trade liberalization, liberalization of inward foreign direct investment, privatization of state/public enterprises, deregulation, securing property rights, and privatization of educational and healthcare systems, alongside a focus on infrastructural investment.

These reforms, rooted in the liberal economic ideology of the West, were designed to perpetuate economic dependencies on Western economies, thereby facilitating their political, social, military, and cultural influence. However, esteemed economist and former World Bank president Joseph Stiglitz challenged the efficacy of the Washington Consensus, contending that it failed to acknowledge the unique circumstances of developing countries and the transformative role of technology in shaping markets. Stiglitz argued that the market alone could not effectively guide the economy in the desired direction, as espoused by the Washington Consensus.

4. India's Role in the Pacific Region

India's role in the Pacific region is emblematic of a delicate balance between cooperation and competition, reflecting its nuanced approach to international relations since gaining independence. The Indian ruling class bourgeoisie has adeptly maneuvered through a complex landscape, engaging with both Western imperialist factions and communist China, all while striving to maintain a strategic equilibrium. In the aftermath of the dissolution of the Socialist Soviet Union, India strategically deepened its ties with the USA and the European Union through bilateral trade agreements and economic collaborations. Concurrently, India's bilateral relations with China have expanded, emphasizing both cooperative ventures and competitive dynamics. Guided by its leadership of the non-aligned movement (NAM), India's overarching aim has been self-reliance, achieved through the establishment of state-owned joint ventures and multinational enterprises, thus facilitating the process of industrialization.

In 2009, India forged a strategic partnership with Australia, culminating in the signing of a Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement in September 2014. Over time, this relationship evolved into a fully-fledged bilateral partnership, reaching the pinnacle of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) in 2020. The operationalization of the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement ("IndAUS ECTA") on 29 December 2022 further solidified their economic ties. India currently stands as Australia's ninth-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade in goods and services amounting to US\$27.5 billion in 2021. Notably, India's exports to Australia, encompassing refined petroleum, medicaments, and pearls, experienced a remarkable surge of 135% between 2019 and 2021. Conversely, India imports coal, copper ores, and natural gas from Australia, further cementing their economic interdependence.

The defense collaboration between India and Australia encompasses a spectrum of activities, including research, development, and industry engagement, with both nations actively participating in maritime exercises. India's membership in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) alongside Australia, Japan, and the USA underscores their collective efforts to counter potential military threats and trade influences emanating from China. The QUAD's naval forces, as evidenced by their joint participation in Exercise Malabar 2021 and other collaborative ventures, reaffirm their shared commitment to upholding regional security and stability (INDIA - AUSTRALIA BILATERAL RELATIONS, 2023).

Australia and India have entered into a collaboration aimed at reducing the cost of ultra-low-cost solar and clean hydrogen, underscoring their joint commitment to combatting climate change and advancing sustainable energy solutions. This partnership carries significant weight as it amalgamates the formidable strengths and expertise of both nations within the renewable energy sector.

Australia, endowed with abundant solar resources and renowned prowess in solar technology, has been a trailblazer in the realm of solar energy advancement. Conversely,

India stands as one of the world's largest energy consumers and harbors ambitious aspirations to augment its renewable energy capacity. Through concerted efforts, these two nations can harness their respective proficiencies to forge ahead in pioneering innovative and economically viable solar and hydrogen technologies.

The collaboration is poised to concentrate on research and development, technology dissemination, and capacity enhancement. It will entail a robust exchange of knowledge and skill sets among Australian and Indian scientists, engineers, and researchers. The overarching objective is to pioneer novel technologies capable of slashing the production costs of solar and hydrogen, thereby rendering these solutions more accessible and cost-effective on both domestic and global scales.

Beyond the economic dividends, this collaborative endeavor holds profound environmental ramifications. Solar and hydrogen represent clean energy alternatives, emitting zero greenhouse gases and thus aiding in curbing air pollution and mitigating the adverse effects of climate change. By pooling their resources and expertise, Australia and India can make significant strides toward fostering a more sustainable and ecologically sound future.

In essence, the synergy between Australia and India in the domain of ultra-low-cost solar and clean hydrogen epitomizes a constructive stride toward realizing their shared objectives of championing renewable energy and combating climate change. It underscores the imperative of international collaboration in addressing pressing global challenges and underscores the catalytic potential of innovation and cooperation in driving positive transformation.

5. A Critical New Realistic Approach to Analyze the Geopolitical Situation

The geopolitical dynamics within the Indo-Pacific and Asia-Pacific regions, encompassing the South Pacific Ocean, are characterized by a labyrinth of complexities and nuances, laden with both formidable challenges and promising prospects. Spanning from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, this expansive territory boasts abundant natural resources, notably oil and gas reserves, and serves as a pivotal conduit for international trade. However, amidst its splendor, the region grapples with formidable obstacles such as climate change, environmental degradation, and the unsustainable exploitation of marine resources.

The intricate geopolitical fabric of this region is woven from a tapestry of historical rivalries, economic imperatives, and strategic calculus. The prevailing hegemony of Western imperialism, notably spearheaded by the United States, has long exerted a dominant influence over regional affairs. Nonetheless, the denouement of this hegemonic narrative looms on the horizon, particularly catalyzed by pivotal events such as the Russia-NATO War in Ukraine in 2022, heralding the dawn of a new global order.

Geopolitical tensions reverberate across myriad fronts, from the Black Sea to the East and South China Seas, and from the Indo-Pacific to the Asia Pacific Oceans. The

polar extremes of the Antarctic and Arctic regions have also become arenas of contention, witnessing geopolitical posturing and strategic manoeuvres between powers such as Russia and the United States. These conflicts manifest not only through overt military confrontations but also through subtle yet impactful actions such as nuclear tests, strategic military deployments, and geopolitical brinkmanship.

The Pacific Ocean, boasting a staggering expanse of 169.2 million square kilometres, emerges as a linchpin in global geopolitics, transcending mere geographical significance to wield profound influence over international affairs. Encompassing a realm larger than the combined landmass of Earth, the Pacific Ocean serves as a vital conduit for trade and connectivity, bridging the East and the West in a symbiotic nexus of commerce and cultural exchange.

Against this backdrop, the Indo-Pacific and Asia-Pacific regions emerge as crucibles of geopolitical significance, where economic, strategic, and environmental imperatives converge. Navigating the convoluted geopolitical currents of this region demands astute comprehension and nuanced analysis, essential for policymakers and stakeholders alike to chart a course through the manifold challenges and opportunities it presents.

The demarcation of the Pacific Ocean by the equator into the North and South Pacific Oceans belies a geopolitical landscape fraught with escalating tensions and volatility, catalyzed by pivotal events such as the Russia-NATO War in 2022 and the China-USA trade and military conflicts in 2017. From the Baltic Sea to the Antarctic Sea, from the Black Sea to the East China Sea and the South China Sea, extending further to encompass the Asia-Pacific, Indo-Pacific regions, and the Arabian Sea, the Pacific regions have become veritable cauldrons of geopolitical and geo-economic friction. The protracted power struggle between the primary superpowers, namely the United States and the amalgamated might of China and Russia, intensifies with each passing day.

For centuries, dating back to the 18th century, Western colonial powers have wielded dominion over the bountiful natural resources of the Pacific regions, driven primarily by the imperative to fuel their burgeoning industrial apparatuses through the auspices of multinational corporations (MNCs). These endeavors have indelibly shaped the political and economic dynamics between European nations and the sovereign states of the South Pacific Islands, with aims to further their economic, political, cultural, and social development agendas. Despite attaining sovereignty and independence, the entrenched colonial powers persist in perpetuating their traditional economic hegemony over the South Pacific Island nations, predominantly through the machinations of their formidable conglomerates in the realms of big tech and multinational finance.

The vestiges of colonialism linger palpably within the South Pacific nations, manifesting in entrenched production systems, the stranglehold over natural resources and markets, and the perpetuation of unequal and unjust trade paradigms. Across epochs, both antecedent to and post the attainment of independence, the South Pacific

nations have fallen prey to the exploitation wrought by Western colonial overlords, encompassing the likes of the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France, along with their strategic cohorts such as Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. These nations remain deeply enmeshed in all facets of economic and commercial enterprise within the South Pacific region, steadfastly committed to the unrelenting extraction of local resources in service of their economic imperatives.

Table 2. Foreign MNCs are the following

OK Tedi (Copper & Gold)	Western Province
Porgera (Gold and Silver)	Enga Province
Lihir (Gold and Silver)	New Ireland Province
Ramu (Nickel and Copper)	Madang Province
Hidden Valley (Gold and Silver)	Morobe Province
Tolukuma (Gold)	Central Province
Simberi (Gold)	New Ireland
Sinivit (Gold)	East New Britain Province

Source: Author’s Interview Based

Table 3. Sector-wise Employment in 2018

Variables	Construction	Transport & Storage	Administration & Support Services	Manufacturing Industry
No. of Business	35	30	29	70
Total Employment (in thousands/ 000)	10,000	7000	6000	23000
Total Full-time employment (in %)	69.2	89.3	92.0	85.2
Total Casual / Part-time	19.7	5.5	6.3	10.4
Total Expatriate (in %)	11.1	5.2	1.7	4.3
Growth rate (2017-18) in %	+3.4	+5.7	+19.2	-3.5

Source: National Business Statistical Office, Papua New Guinea

According to the National Business Statistical Office of Papua New Guinea, the international merchandise trade (IMT) exhibited a surplus in trade balances from 2015 to 2020. Since the inception of the liquefied natural gas (LNG) project in mid-2014, Papua New Guinea's export sector has demonstrated robust performance, while imports have maintained stability, albeit with a slight dip in 2018 attributable to reduced gold and crude oil exports. Notably, Papua New Guinea's exports surged from K25.4 billion in 2015 to K35.1 billion in 2020, while imports witnessed an uptick from K14.2 billion in 2015 to K16.1 billion in 2020. Consequently, there was a noteworthy 68.7% augmentation in the balance of trade, with the trade surplus escalating from K11.3 billion in 2015 to K19.0 billion in 2020.

In 2020, notwithstanding the adversities posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdown measures, exports experienced a marginal decline from K35.3 billion in 2019 to K35.1 billion in 2020. Similarly, imports registered a modest downturn from K16.8 billion in 2019 to K16.1 billion in 2020. This culminated in a 3.0% augmentation in the balance of trade in 2020, as reported by the National Business Statistical Office of Papua New Guinea.

Foreign multinational corporations (MNCs) engaged in the mining sector, encompassing gold, silver, copper, and oil & gas, contribute a substantial 25% to the national GDP and account for 8% of the total tax revenue accrued by the government of Papua New Guinea. Conversely, Papua New Guinea exports raw materials, including crude oil, fruits and vegetables, milk, and cocoa, to Australia. In reciprocation, Australia dispatches finished products derived from these commodities to Papua New Guinea. For instance, mineral products sourced from bituminous minerals were imported to the tune of Kina 2.8 billion, liquefied natural gas (LNG) amounted to Kina 12.9 billion in 2020, base metals and associated articles in the form of aluminum casks, drums, cans, boxes, and analogous containers were imported to the value of Kina 1.4 billion, and machinery, mechanical, and electrical appliances were imported to the tune of Kina 4.1 billion in 2020.

5.1 PNG's Australian Dependency

Since achieving independence in 1975, Papua New Guinea (PNG) has forged a multifaceted and interdependent relationship with Australia, its former colonial overseer and the largest, most influential nation in the region. This dependency has been shaped by a confluence of historical, economic, political, and cultural factors.

Economically, PNG, endowed with abundant natural resources including natural gas, minerals, and timber, has grappled with challenges in developing its economy and infrastructure due to factors such as underinvestment, corruption, and political instability. Consequently, PNG heavily relies on aid and financial assistance from Australia, its foremost donor, which disburses over \$500 million in aid annually, predominantly for critical sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure.

Beyond economic realms, PNG looks to Australia for security assistance, given its history of internal conflicts and violence, often straining its own police force and military capacities. Australian police and military personnel are frequently deployed to PNG to bolster efforts in maintaining law and order.

Moreover, Australia wields significant influence over PNG's political landscape, with Australian politicians and diplomats exerting considerable presence and involvement in PNG's parliamentary affairs. This dynamic has sparked accusations of neocolonialism from some quarters within PNG, advocating for greater autonomy in governance without external interference.

Culturally, PNG maintains close ties with Australia, with many Papua New Guineans

having relatives residing in Australia, fostering strong cultural and social bonds between the two nations. Additionally, Australia serves as PNG's primary trading partner, with bilateral trade valued at billions of dollars annually.

While Australia's assistance has been pivotal in supporting PNG's development, concerns persist regarding the extent of Australia's influence in PNG's affairs. As PNG progresses, it becomes imperative for both nations to collaborate as equal partners, ensuring PNG's ability to realize its full potential while safeguarding its sovereignty and independence.

According to data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, over 4,000 Australian companies actively engage in intra-industry export and import activities within the South Pacific region, highlighting Australia's significant economic role therein. Moreover, bilateral trade between Australia and Papua New Guinea surpassed \$6 billion in 2020, solidifying Australia's status as PNG's primary trading ally.

Additionally, Australia's commitment to PNG's economic advancement is underscored by substantial investments totaling \$24.8 billion in 2021, alongside a notable increase in foreign aid, reaching AUD 1.4 billion (US\$877 million) over four years, with a substantial portion allocated to South Pacific countries in 2021. This financial support aligns with Australia's broader strategy to foster regional stability and development.

Furthermore, the United States of America (USA) has demonstrated its commitment to the Pacific Island countries by unveiling a significant foreign aid package worth US\$800 million over a decade, underscoring the growing recognition of the region's strategic importance and the imperative for heightened global engagement and support.

These developments underscore the pivotal role played by Australia and other global actors in driving economic development and stability across the South Pacific region. Increased investment, aid, and debt/loan support from Australia, coupled with the USA's commitment, underscore the imperative of international cooperation in addressing the unique challenges confronting the Pacific Island countries.

China's Investment and Trade Relationships with the South Pacific Region

The South Pacific Islands countries have embarked on a substantial "de-colonization" endeavor aimed at reducing their reliance on the traditional Western colonial powers' hegemony. Over the past two decades, these nations have cultivated a robust relationship with China, a bond further fortified by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a monumental infrastructural endeavor that has gained significant traction in the Pacific Island region.

China's engagement in the region traces back to the 1970s when it commenced providing financial aid for numerous projects, furnishing extensive in-kind support, and imparting training to approximately 10,000 local professionals (Wroe, 2018). Between 2008 and 2020, China injected nearly US\$3.148 billion into the South Pacific region, with a substantial portion of this investment channeled both bilaterally and regionally (Lowy

Institute, 2022). This financial influx has primarily targeted infrastructure-related projects, encompassing roads, ports, and telecommunications (McGibbon, 2019).

Furthermore, tourism and trade relations between China and the South Pacific Island nations have experienced noteworthy enhancement. Bilateral trade volumes between China and the South Pacific Islands surged from US\$4.512 billion in 2012 to US\$8.66 billion in 2018, reflecting an impressive average annual growth rate of 11.48%. According to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China's direct investments in Pacific Island Countries exceeded USD 2.72 billion in 2021.

The South Pacific countries have come to realize that investments by Western nations in the Pacific region have often been manipulative and fraught with suspicion since gaining independence. These nations have frequently found themselves exploited for their natural resources, with minimal involvement in genuine infrastructure development initiatives.

6. Conclusion

It is prognosticated that developing nations necessitate an annual investment of two trillion dollars to propel physical infrastructure development forward. International financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) merely furnish one-fourth of this requirement. Consequently, over the past few decades, China has positioned itself to bridge this gap by extending substantial investments, coupled with other forms of financial and technological aid, to the developing nations across Africa, Asia, and Latin America through the Belt and Road initiative.

The Belt and Road initiative has not only facilitated massive investments but has also forged alternative avenues for global market access for China's preeminent 14 state-owned corporations. Through this initiative, China has forged new trade connections, cultivated export markets, bolstered Chinese revenues, and alleviated its surplus productive capacity. China has succeeded in reshaping global trade dynamics, positioning itself as the focal point rather than the U.S. or Europe. Moreover, the BRI serves China's long-term 'geo-economic, geo-political, and geo-strategic interests', securing sustained energy supply from Gulf countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Central Asia, where China has directed over a quarter of its GDP into OBOR projects. As of August 2023, 155 countries have signed up for the BRI, encompassing nearly 75% of the world's population and over half of the world's GDP (Caridi, 2023).

The era of Western-dominated globalization is waning, paving the way for emerging regional power centers such as "China-Russia-India" to challenge U.S.-led economic, trade, technology, finance, and military dominance, and endeavour to supplant the "older economic world order" through 'de-dollarization' and 'investment initiatives' on a global scale.

To attain the goal of 'self-reliance' with sustainability, the South Pacific region must bolster its resilience capacity. Embracing the blue economy is imperative to generate wealth, foster job creation, and rejuvenate the Ocean's ecosystems. This approach can diminish reliance on imported goods and services, chiefly tourism activities, fisheries, and agriculture while fostering the expansion of marine biotechnology, aquaculture, and ocean renewable energy. Sustainable business models hold the potential to generate at least US\$ 12 trillion by 2030, spawning 380 million jobs annually, alongside numerous other businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, which are still nascent and could yield fresh economic opportunities.

Urgent implementation of 'green finance' and 'green technology' is imperative for the South Pacific region to realize 'self-reliance' and sustainable development goals (SDGs) by conserving biodiversity towards sustainability. In this pursuit, India and China possess ample capacity to erect infrastructures by augmenting investments and technology transfer to the South Pacific region.

Recommendations

The South Pacific region ought to fortify economic and trade collaborations with the Global South, encompassing ASEAN+5 (RCEP), and notably with China and India, to allure investments and technological advancements for infrastructural development and industrialization across various sectors. These sectors include Green Hydrogen, Renewable Solar Energy, infrastructures, science and technology, agriculture, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), along with the establishment of a multi-sectoral network of production. Furthermore, emphasis should be placed on fostering the blue economy, underpinned by sustainable development and inclusive growth.

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