



Institutional And Human Dimensions Of The Belt And Road Initiative In The Context Of Sustainable Globalization

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Abstract: The article analyzes the institutional and human dimensions of the Belt and Road Initiative. It highlights the initiative's alignment with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, its role in fostering regional integration, enhancing transport and communication networks, promoting humanitarian exchanges, and shaping new mechanisms of global governance. The study underscores the necessity of strengthening institutional foundations, harmonizing large-scale infrastructure projects with "small but beneficial" social initiatives, and advancing "hard connectivity" (infrastructure), "soft connectivity" (rules and standards), and "connectivity of hearts" (humanitarian ties) simultaneously. The findings demonstrate the BRI's growing contribution to sustainable globalization and international cooperation.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative, institutional dimensions, humanitarian diplomacy, sustainable development, China's foreign policy, global integration.

Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, represents a large-scale strategic concept aimed at promoting economic interaction, infrastructure development, and deeper humanitarian exchange among the countries of Eurasia, Africa, and Latin America. It has become one of the key directions of China's foreign policy doctrine in the 21st century, simultaneously reflecting the country's ambitions to strengthen global influence and offer a new model of international cooperation.

The initiative is closely linked to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, presenting to the world a Chinese approach to solving global development challenges and building a new, fairer, and more sustainable globalization [1].

Today, six major economic corridors are being shaped

within the framework of the BRI (the New Eurasian Land Bridge, China-Mongolia-Russia, China-Central Asia-West Asia, China-Indochina, China-Pakistan, and Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar), demonstrating the unique role of the initiative as a catalyst for regional integration capable of revitalizing the stalled processes of global regionalization.

The decisions of the 20th CPC Congress and the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee emphasized the need to improve mechanisms for advancing high-quality Belt and Road construction. This course reflects China's aspiration not only to preserve the stability and efficiency of this megaproject but also to elevate it to a qualitatively new level, transforming it into a long-term strategic platform for integrating various regions and ensuring global development. In his speech at the fourth Belt and Road working conference, President Xi Jinping stressed that, despite growing risks and challenges in the international environment, opportunities for advancing the initiative outweigh threats; therefore, it is necessary to strengthen strategic confidence, demonstrate resilience, and form new prospects for cooperation [2].

During its "golden decade," the initiative has progressed from a large-scale strategic vision ("broad strokes") to detailed practical implementation ("fine brushstrokes"). High-level diplomacy has established key directions, while more than 200 cooperation documents signed between China and 150 countries and 30 international organizations have provided a strong legal foundation. At the same time, a network of sectoral mechanisms has been established (such as the Belt and Road Energy Ministers' Meeting), which has strengthened the "architecture of trust" and allowed broader participation of states.

Significant progress has been achieved in building platform formats of international interaction. The Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, the largest multilateral diplomatic platform in the history of the PRC, has acquired the status of a key institution for discussing and coordinating strategic issues. Alongside it, a matrix of high-level events is actively forming, including the China International Import Expo, the China Development Forum, and cooperation mechanisms such as "China-Africa" and "China-Arab States." These institutional forms provide not only platforms for integration discussions but also stable practical connections. Special attention is given to sectoral initiatives: the Belt and Road Green Development Partnership (31 countries), the Energy Partnership (33 countries), and the Taxation Cooperation Mechanism (34 countries). The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank remains the most

important financial instrument, with membership reaching 106 and a project portfolio of more than 230 approved initiatives.

By the end of 2023, Chinese investors had established 48,000 enterprises in 189 countries and regions, of which 17,000 were in BRI partner countries. In 2023, more than 70% of China's overseas enterprises operated profitably or without losses, and the amount of reinvested income reached USD 78.46 billion (44.2% of China's total outward FDI). This reflects the confidence of Chinese enterprises in the long-term prospects of the Belt and Road [3].

Equally significant are the results in connectivity. The initiative is building an integrated system of "land-sea-air-digital" communication. The development of economic corridors and transport arteries ("six corridors, six routes") has created a sustainable framework linking Asia, Europe, and Africa. Completed projects such as the Mombasa-Nairobi and Addis Ababa-Djibouti railways have become drivers of socio-economic development in entire African regions. In the maritime sphere, the Maritime Silk Road Alliance has been established with over 300 companies and research institutions; in aviation, agreements have been signed with 104 states, and direct air connections established with 57 countries. Multimodal transport has shown special dynamism, with China-Europe railway express routes and the New Western Land-Sea Corridor opening new trade routes connecting Eurasia's largest markets.

Great importance is attached to the humanitarian dimension of the initiative, aimed at improving the living conditions of partner countries' populations. An important tool here is "small but beneficial" projects in health, education, poverty reduction, and social protection. China has provided partner countries with more than 1,500 agricultural technologies, sent over 2,000 specialists, and implemented more than 300 social projects ("Happy Home," "Medical Assistance," etc.) covering over 50 countries. Such initiatives strengthen the social foundation of cooperation, fostering a positive perception of the Belt and Road among the public. These measures turn the BRI into a universal infrastructure of global development and an important element in improving international governance.

According to Li Wei, a researcher at the Institute of Foreign Economic Research of the State Development and Reform Commission of China, advancing BRI mechanisms requires a comprehensive response to challenges and risks, including overcoming the consequences of geopolitical conflicts, balancing the satisfaction of partner countries with China's own interests, and ensuring the security of China's overseas

assets.

In particular, unilateral aid models still prevail over innovative bilateral partnerships; traditional sectors receive more attention than new ones; while a developed network of bilateral formats exists, there is a shortage of multilateral platforms. Many newly established laboratories are not yet accompanied by effective integration of science, education, and production. The coverage of existing mechanisms remains limited. Institutionalization of cooperation in traditional areas such as energy, taxation, finance, and disaster management remains weak. At the same time, new areas—digital economy, green development, and artificial intelligence—struggle to keep up with the requirements of global transformation [4].

Moreover, the restrictive functions of mechanisms are not fully developed. Despite existing plans, a holistic interregional integrated infrastructure system has not yet taken shape. Complementarity of land, sea, air, and digital communication remains insufficient, while “soft connectivity” (rules, standards, procedures) lags far behind “hard connectivity” (physical infrastructure). Coordination difficulties also persist. In practice, large-scale projects and “small but significant” social initiatives are not yet sufficiently harmonized. The latter poorly support other areas of cooperation, and the overall evaluation system remains fragmented.

For the long-term sustainability of the initiative, strengthening the institutional foundation is essential.

First, improving the mechanism of scientific and technological cooperation. A key task is the creation of transnational innovation infrastructure, expanding the network of joint laboratories (to 100 or more), developing technology parks, and mechanisms for technology transfer.

Second, enhancing sectoral multilateral platforms. Priorities include expanding mechanisms in energy, taxation, finance, ecology, media, and culture. Further strengthening the authority of international forums such as the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation is planned, as well as developing cooperation within existing platforms (e.g., the China-Africa Forum, the China International Import Expo).

Third, creating an integrated infrastructure system. A strategic goal is the formation of a complete “land-sea-air-digital” network. This implies aligning national infrastructure plans and technical standards, jointly implementing transport corridor projects, developing multimodal transportation, and enhancing harmonization of rules and regulations. Special attention is given to promoting international standards and co-developing rules with the participation of developing countries [8].

Fourth, balanced promotion of large and small projects. It is important to organically combine flagship infrastructure initiatives with “small but significant” social programs that directly improve people’s lives in partner countries [7].

According to Chinese expert Zhao Lei, for the progressive advancement of high-quality joint BRI construction, it is necessary to improve the system of cooperation planning and management, and to strengthen such directions as: coordination of “hard connectivity” (infrastructure), “soft connectivity” (rules and standards), and “connectivity of hearts” (humanitarian exchanges); practical interaction in industrial and supply chains; international cooperation in new fields; diversified financial and investment mechanisms; comprehensive risk management; and the “Clean Silk Road” anti-corruption mechanism. It is necessary to consistently adhere to transparency and openness, removing barriers to foreign economic interaction [5].

Firstly, it is important to coordinate the deepening of “hard connectivity” in infrastructure, the development of unified rules and standards within “soft connectivity,” and the advancement of humanitarian “connectivity of hearts.” In recent years, landmark projects have been implemented annually in “hard connectivity.” In October 2023, the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway in Indonesia was commissioned, and in December 2024, construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway officially began, which will become a symbolic project and change the geo-economic position of Central Asia.

In turn, “soft connectivity” involves developing rules and standards recognized by all parties, creating the basis for integration with international norms and enabling developing countries to adapt them according to national specifics. “Connectivity of hearts” strengthens humanitarian ties: for example, in 2024, within the framework of the “China-ASEAN Year of Cultural Exchange,” numerous events in education, culture, sports, and tourism were held, reinforcing the social basis of integration.

Secondly, it is necessary to harmoniously advance both large infrastructure projects and “small but significant” social projects. If large-scale projects can be compared to the “arteries” of development, social initiatives are the “capillaries” that ensure the vitality of the entire system. In recent years, particular attention has been given to educational projects, such as creating a network of Luban Workshops in Asian, African, and European countries. These vocational training centers cover more than 70 fields—from robotics to renewable energy—helping train personnel for industrialization

and modernization in partner countries. Thus, it is precisely projects with a “human dimension” that build lasting trust and recognition from local populations.

Thirdly, it is necessary to combine the preservation and deepening of traditional areas of cooperation with the progressive development of new ones. The Belt and Road is gradually expanding from classical areas of infrastructure, energy, and trade to new directions—digital economy, artificial intelligence, green development, and medical cooperation. In 2024, within the framework of the China-Singapore Digital Policy Dialogue, cooperation was initiated in the field of cross-border data, creating conditions for new models of digital economy and digital trade.

The article demonstrates that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) functions not only as a comprehensive set of economic and infrastructure projects but also as a new model for global governance and sustainable development. During its “golden decade,” large-scale infrastructure projects, humanitarian initiatives, and international cooperation mechanisms have been progressively aligned, fostering stronger integration across regions. However, challenges remain, including underdeveloped institutional mechanisms, insufficient coordination between “hard connectivity” (infrastructure) and “soft connectivity” (rules and standards), and fragmented evaluation systems. Nevertheless, the BRI significantly contributes to establishing a stable foundation for international cooperation, reconciling the interests of developing countries with China’s strategic goals, and promoting a fairer and more sustainable globalization in the 21st century.

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