

China's Motivation for Implementing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Indonesia within the Context of Southeast Asia (2015-2024)

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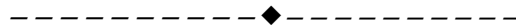
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Abstract

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) reflects Cina's grand ambition to strengthen its economic and geopolitical influence in the strategic Southeast Asian region including Indonesia through investment in transnational infrastructure. Cina sees Indonesia as a vital nation within the worldwide oceanic course due to the country's position that interfaces the Indian Sea and the Pacific Sea through the Strait of Malacca. This investigate employments a expressive subjective approach through different auxiliary sources such as official government reports, research reports, academic articles, sources and news media. The research aims to analyze the various factors behind Cina's motivation in launching BRI in the Southeast Asian region, especially in Indonesia. The knife in this research is the concept of national interest from Donald E. Nuchterlein to analyze more deeply the national interests underlying Cina's implementation of BRI in Indonesia. This study found that Cina's implementation of BRI in the Southeast Asian Region including Indonesia is to reduce dependence on foreign investment, utilize excess production capacity, secure energy supplies, maintain national defense stability, especially in maritime areas such as the South Cina Sea, and create a positive image in the eyes of the world by embracing BRI cooperation partner countries by emphasizing economic, cultural and non-intervention aspects.

Keywords: *Southeast Asia, Belt and Road Initiative, Indonesia, Infrastructure, Middle Power, National Interest.*



A. INTRODUCTION

In 1976, when the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) transitioned from Mao Zedong to Deng Xiaoping, China became a country increasingly recognized by nations around the world. One of the policies implemented by Deng as an effort to transform China's condition was the gaige kaifang or reform and openness policy, which involved formulating the Four Modernizations in the fields of Industry, Technology, Agriculture, Military, and Science (Fertasari, 2022). Deng placed special emphasis on the economic sector, as he believed that China's economy was severely weakened due to the implementation of a closed economic system. Other policies realized by Deng to support economic reform efforts included the One Country Two Systems policy, the One Child Policy, and the Open Door Policy (Fertasari, 2022).

Not stopping there, Deng introduced another initiative by providing incentives to individual farmers to sell their agricultural products in free markets (Ayuningtyas, 2022). In addition to offering incentives to farmers, the Chinese government also designated regions deemed economically strategic—namely Zhuhai, Xiamen (Amoy),

Shenzhen, and Shantou in Guangdong Province—to attract foreign investment, import high-tech products to China, and boost exports (Asiz, 2024). In the following decades, economic liberalization under Deng Xiaoping's leadership successfully generated rapid economic growth and transformed China into the largest economy globally in terms of economic power (Amaliah, 2023). Based on GDP data from the World Bank Group website (2024), China's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) increased continuously from \$175 billion in 1978 to \$17.89 trillion in 2023. According to several projections, China is expected to catch up with the United States by 2030. It is highly likely that China will surpass the United States as the world's largest economy if its growth continues over the next 30 years.

To further drive the growth of China's economy, the current Chinese President, Xi Jinping, introduced a mega-project program in 2013 known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This was announced during a speech delivered by Xi Jinping during China's state visits to several Southeast Asian countries and Kazakhstan (Sumbal, 2022). Following this, President Xi Jinping presented China's plans to enhance connectivity by investing in transnational infrastructure development and creating a new Silk Road for the 21st century. The BRI comprises two routes: the maritime route and the land route. The maritime route, also known as the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, passes through Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Africa along its journey from China's coast through the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, and Europe. Meanwhile, the Silk Road Economic Belt, the land route, connects China to regions in West Asia, Central Asia, Russia, and Europe. Leveraging its political and economic power, grounded in China's own principles, the launch of the BRI mega-project serves to solidify China's global dominance (Anam, 2021).



Figure 1. Map of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Source: Economist.com, 2019.

As one of the main areas along the trajectory of the BRI initiative, China has subsequently focused its efforts on implementing the BRI in Southeast Asia. Several reasons explain why China concentrates on this region: the rapid economic growth of ASEAN countries since 1967, its strategic location, and proximity to China (Toruan, 2021). Southeast Asia has long been a strategic partner for China, particularly in trade and economics. Despite being predominantly composed of developing countries, Southeast Asia holds significant economic potential, a large market force, and high

purchasing power, making Chinese commodities highly desirable in the region. Indonesia is one of the key countries traversed by the BRI, both through land and sea routes, as depicted in the map above. One element strengthening the collaboration between China and Indonesia is the Belt and Road Initiative. In 2015, Indonesian President Joko Widodo's state visit to China underscored this collaboration. To enhance diplomatic relations and economic-political cooperation, President Joko Widodo and Xi Jinping discussed several topics during their meeting, including public relations, trade, industry, infrastructure, finance, and tourism (Putri & Ma'arif, 2019). China views Indonesia as a middle-power nation in Asia and considers it a strategic country in the global maritime route due to Indonesia's position connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans through the Strait of Malacca, the world's busiest trade route (Putri & Ma'arif, 2019).

Many academics have studied the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative by China, particularly in Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia. The study "One Belt One Road and China's Regional Hegemony Efforts in Southeast Asia" by Amin and Wahyuni (2023) claims that China views Southeast Asia as a strategic region and a top priority for increasing its dominance and economic growth on a global scale. Specifically, OBOR has evolved into a channel for achieving China's hegemonic goals in Southeast Asia. The research by Putri and Ma'arif (2019), titled "Indonesia-China Economic-Political Cooperation on the Implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative," explains that BRI is part of China's foreign policy with both positive and negative impacts, depending on the perspectives of its partner countries. On the positive side, BRI provides access to international cooperation and accelerates development, particularly in infrastructure, transportation, and economic enhancement through various mega-projects in developing countries, including Indonesia. However, on the negative side, BRI also poses challenges for developing nations, where partner countries must bear the burden of loans from China and face risks of reduced competitiveness in strategic sectors, displaced by Chinese companies and products.

Another study by Saraswati (2019), titled "Examining the Indonesia-China Agreement within the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Framework from the Perspective of National Resilience," acknowledges the BRI as China's ambitious mega-project, demonstrating its willingness to participate in the global community. As one of BRI's partner countries, Indonesia can also leverage this major Chinese project to advance its national objectives from the perspective of national resilience. Maximizing the benefits of collaboration between China and Indonesia under the BRI scheme while maintaining vigilance internally and externally will help the country achieve its prosperity goals through infrastructure fulfillment, regional connectivity, and economic productivity enhancement. Unlike previous studies, this research is designed to explore the specific reasons motivating China to implement the BRI in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia. Unlike the research by Wahyuni and Amin (2023), which highlights the BRI as China's effort to strengthen its hegemony in Southeast Asia, this study will delve deeper into the specific case of Indonesia as a key

country for China's interests in the region. The difference between this study and the research by Putri and Ma'arif (2019), which outlines the positive and negative impacts of BRI on economic-political cooperation, including infrastructure development acceleration but with high debt burdens for developing countries, lies in this study's focus on China's motives for implementing the project in Southeast Asian countries, particularly Indonesia. This includes further analysis of how China views Indonesia as a potential market and a strategically located country connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Finally, differing from Saraswati's (2019) research, which associates BRI with Indonesia's national resilience perspective, emphasizing its importance in supporting Indonesia's national interests in infrastructure and economic development, this study will investigate how China's perspective on the strategic and economic position of Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, contributes to its decision to invest heavily through the BRI in the region.

The hypothesis proposed in this study is that China has economic and geopolitical motivations for implementing the BRI in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, primarily to strengthen its position as a global power. Economically, the BRI enables China to invest in the strategic infrastructure of Southeast Asian countries, create new market access, and secure resources. Geopolitically, Southeast Asia is a key location on maritime routes such as the Strait of Malacca, supporting China's ambitions to control major trade routes. Based on the background presented, the research question posed is: "What are the main factors driving China to launch the BRI in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia?"

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

National interest, also known as *raison d'État* in French, refers to the ambitions and goals of a country in military, economic, or cultural fields. Mainstream studies of international relations assert that a country's understanding of its own national interests serves as a vital foundation for the operation of its foreign policy. A country's destructive capabilities have a strong correlation with its national interests (Krasner, 1978). According to Hans J. Morgenthau (2018), the definition of national interest encompasses the national existence, territorial integrity, and economic welfare of a nation or state as its objectives. National interests can be classified into two categories: non-essential or secondary national interests and essential or vital national interests. The fundamental principles and existence of a country are subjects of vital national interests. On the other hand, non-vital national interests are those pursued through the country's foreign policy but are not directly related to its survival. In pursuing national interests, the state is the primary actor. Every country must have strategies and strengths that help ensure the fulfillment of its national interests. According to T. May Rudy (2020), national interests are goals that must be achieved to meet the needs of a nation and its people. In terms of security, such as survival, regional needs, and the welfare of its citizens, national interests are often quite similar across nations. National interests are designed and determined based on two key factors: security and prosperity.

In the international realm, a country's policies are the strategies used to achieve its national interests. These policies are designed based on the needs of the country and can involve openness with other nations and establishing good communication with them. According to Donald Nuechterlein (1973) in Aviano (2022), national interests are categorized into four basic dimensions: 1) Economic Interest: The interest in which the government strives to enhance its country's economy by cooperating economically with other nations. 2) Ideological Interest: A country's interest in preserving and protecting its ideology from threats posed by other nations' ideologies. 3) Defense Interest: The interest aimed at protecting the country's citizens and territory from political threats from other nations. 4) World Order Interest: The interest that seeks to sustain global political and economic structures that benefit the nation.

The four basic assumptions will then be used as variables by the author to address the research problem. The variables used are as follows: the economic interest variable will seek data on the reasons behind China's increased foreign direct investment in infrastructure projects in Indonesia and its impact on China's national economy. The ideological interest variable focuses on China's efforts to establish hegemony in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, through the BRI. The defense interest variable examines China's attempts to maintain maritime defense stability, particularly in the South China Sea. Finally, the world order interest variable explores how China creates a positive international image by engaging several countries in the Southeast Asian region, especially Indonesia, through the BRI.

C. METHOD

In this study, the researcher employs a descriptive study method with qualitative analysis. According to Sugiyono (2016), qualitative descriptive research aims to describe or explain phenomena occurring in the field systematically, factually, and accurately concerning the characteristics of a particular population or area. In qualitative descriptive research, the researcher acts as the main instrument for data collection. Meanwhile, according to Zellatifanny and Mudjiyanto (2018), qualitative descriptive research aims to characterize the topic or object studied objectively by methodically presenting facts and accurately explaining the quality of items and the frequency being examined. The scope of this study is limited to the period from 2015 to 2024. Data is collected from various secondary sources such as official government documents, research reports, academic articles, news sources, and media outlets. The purpose of this research is to analyze the various factors that motivate China to launch the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the Southeast Asian region, particularly in Indonesia, including economic, political, and strategic aspects.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. China's Economic Interests in Implementing the BRI in Indonesia

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) policy stems from the government's recognition of the need for a new growth model driven by high export rates and

domestic consumption. BRI is also envisioned as a strategy to reduce China's reliance on foreign investments while increasing China's investments globally. To reduce dependence on foreign investments, especially in the economic sector, China has established construction corporations and produced its own equipment to meet domestic development needs (Octorifadli, Sari, & Azzqy, 2021). One of the reasons behind the formation of the BRI is China's surplus production capacity, particularly in steel. In 2014, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, speaking before ASEAN leaders in Myanmar, stated that China had excess production capacity in sectors like cement manufacturing equipment, rolled glass, and steel. Through the BRI, China has been able to transfer its surplus production to ASEAN countries in need of infrastructure development.

Beyond addressing surplus production, China aims to secure its energy supplies via new pipelines at deep-sea ports in Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and Russia (Octorifadli, Sari, & Azzqy, 2021). Growth in the energy sector is critical for China, as a robust economy requires steady energy resources. Agreements with BRI partner countries over the past decade have given China greater access to various resources, such as oil, gas, and minerals, resulting in trade worth USD 19.1 trillion between China and BRI member countries (Wong, 2023). Indonesia stands out as the country with the highest export value to China. In 2022, Indonesia's exports to China reached USD 65.9 billion (Setiawati, 2023). Moreover, in 2023, Indonesia's coal exports to China surged by 61.23%, amounting to approximately 40.83 million tons (Mae, 2023). Below is the data on Indonesia's coal exports to China from 2017 to 2023:

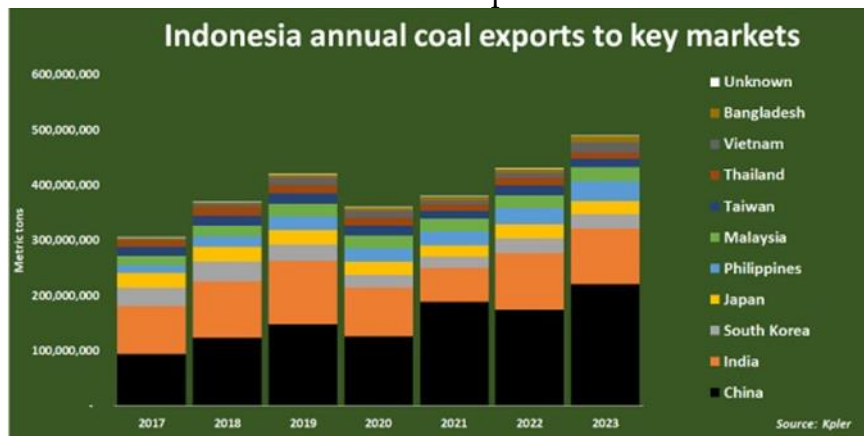


Figure 2. Data on Indonesia's Coal Exports to China

Source: IPOTNEWS, 2023.

From the data above, it is evident that China is the largest consumer of Indonesia's coal exports. In addition to coal, other energy resources imported by China from Indonesia include natural gas, palm oil, and wood pulp (Kemendag, 2019). Through the BRI, China invests in infrastructure in Indonesia, facilitating trade and logistics routes, including the shipment of commodities such as coal, nickel, fisheries, and palm oil to China. To streamline export-import activities, adequate transportation infrastructure between the two countries is essential. Without efficient transportation links, market potential may be limited. One BRI project in Indonesia aimed at easing export-import access to China is the Kuala Tanjung Port in North Sumatra.

Additionally, another notable BRI-related infrastructure project in Indonesia is the Morowali Industrial Park in Sulawesi, which serves as a hub for nickel production, a key material for electric vehicle batteries highly sought after by Chinese industries. This collaboration has positively impacted the economic relations between the two countries, where BRI offers benefits in the form of investments that facilitate Indonesia's commodity exports, while China gains easier access to the resources it needs to support its economy.

Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment, Luhut Binsar Panjaitan, stated during a High-Level Dialogue on the Cooperation Mechanism (HDCM) in Labuan Bajo that Indonesia needs direct port partnerships to enable seamless export and import activities. He highlighted the Ningbo Zhoushan Port in Zhejiang Province, China, and the Kuala Tanjung Port in North Sumatra as examples of such partnerships. This collaboration allows Indonesia to bypass Singapore's ports for export and import activities (Usman, 2024). The massive infrastructure development in Indonesia under the BRI framework reflects the significant foreign investment by China in Indonesia. In 2015, China's investment value in Indonesia rose to USD 628 million, making China the ninth-largest investor in the country. According to data from BKPM (Indonesia Investment Coordinating Board) as presented by Databoks, China's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Indonesia was USD 2.67 billion in 2016, USD 3.36 billion in 2017, and USD 2.38 billion in 2018, reflecting a slight decline from the previous year. However, in 2019, China's FDI in Indonesia increased to USD 4.74 billion. In 2020, China's FDI reached USD 4.84 billion, followed by USD 3.2 billion in 2021. In 2022, China's investment doubled from the previous year to USD 5.18 billion. By Q1 2024, China's FDI in Indonesia had reached USD 7.4 billion. These figures demonstrate China's strong interest in Indonesia's market, particularly in the infrastructure and economic development sectors. As the largest population in Southeast Asia, Indonesia offers substantial opportunities for Chinese companies. Infrastructure projects funded by China, such as ports, roads, and bridges, not only address Indonesia's infrastructure needs but also provide significant opportunities for Chinese companies to access natural resources and markets.

2. Belt and Road Initiative as a Bridge to China's Ideological and Hegemonic Interests in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia is one of the key regions for the global economy. The region's abundant natural resources and stable economies in Southeast Asian countries facilitate trade and investment. Thus, Southeast Asia is a prime location for international powers seeking to compete with important regional allies (Lunn, 2019). China aspires to surpass the United States and Japan as the dominant player in Asia's economy. Infrastructure agreements, including the construction of high-speed railways, ports, toll roads, power plants, industries, and economic cooperation zones, are how the BRI projects are implemented across Southeast Asia, including Indonesia. For example, in Laos, the BRI has led to the construction of power plants, highways, and high-speed rail systems. In Vietnam, power plants and railways are under

development as part of the BRI. In Malaysia, the BRI projects encompass industries, ports, and railways. In Cambodia, the initiative includes power plants, high-speed rail, and road infrastructure. Myanmar's BRI projects involve power plants, ports, smart cities, and oil and gas pipeline networks. In Brunei, the development focuses on ports and the oil industry. Finally, Singapore's BRI projects emphasize logistics and investment components (Kong, 2020). China aims to increase its influence as a key player in regional development plans, which is why it is heavily involved in BRI infrastructure projects across Southeast Asia.

The ongoing infrastructure projects in Southeast Asian countries directly support Chinese companies' contributions to the development of infrastructure in the region. The presence of Chinese companies as technology and capital providers indirectly benefits China. This allows China to exert power over trade route management policies through the ports it has built (Dewi & Akbar, 2019). China, a socialist country, emphasizes the importance of state control in economic and social development. Through the BRI, China promotes a development model focused on rapid economic growth, robust infrastructure, and social stability in Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia. One example of China's competition in infrastructure development in Indonesia is the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway project (KCIC). Initially, two countries, China and Japan, were competing to facilitate the construction of the project. However, Indonesia eventually chose China as the investor for the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway project. This decision was made because Japan required guarantees from the Indonesian government, while China was willing to cooperate under a business-to-business model without the need for any guarantees from Indonesia (Octarifadli, 2021). China's victory in this competition demonstrated its ability to surpass Japan and highlighted its strength as a leader in Asia.

Thanks to its capacity for synergy and expanding international markets, the KCIC project is seen as an added value for China. The KCIC project demonstrates that Chinese technology has advanced and successfully built and created high-speed rail projects from international companies that will be developed and produced globally by China (Ker, 2020). Considering the size of Indonesia and its need for foreign investment, China's collaboration in this project marks an initial step in expanding its influence in Southeast Asia. The KCIC project is the first high-speed rail project in Southeast Asia. In Southeast Asia, China is building the Pan Asia high-speed rail network after the high-speed rail project in Indonesia. The goal is to build a high-speed rail service from Yunnan Province in the south, crossing the Mekong River, to Singapore, where China is also implementing the same plan to connect it to the Indian Ocean, reflecting China's desire to connect with places in Southeast Asia (Duangdee, 2023). This proves that Indonesia is a key country for other Southeast Asian nations to contribute to China's BRI projects. China has successfully established a Sphere of Influence in the Southeast Asian region by spreading its influence through the development of connectivity in the area.

3. Defense and International Order Dimensions of China in BRI Projects in Indonesia and Southeast Asia

China and Southeast Asia have long maintained relationships. For various reasons, including political disputes, territorial conflicts, or historical precedents of communist movements, some Southeast Asian countries have had tense relations with China (Mahendra, Ramadhoan, & Suhermanto, 2023). The premise underlying such interactions is that China threatens regional stability. With the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the various benefits it offers, China has sought to present a cooperative image to its neighboring countries. China continues to promote the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a comprehensive initiative that will benefit all participating countries. A statement made by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the 2016 Communist Party of China meeting was one of China's key initiatives. The statement emphasized that the primary subject of the Silk Road development was development that benefits the countries it passes through. Furthermore, at a conference with Arab and Asian countries that same year, Xi Jinping stated that the BRI was established to bridge the gaps between individuals of diverse backgrounds and cultures. In order to be peaceful neighbors, Xi Jinping called on everyone to build roads and tear down walls (Gao, 2020). It is believed that Xi Jinping's statement reflects China's effort to enhance its image by building the BRI. Some concrete evidence suggests that the Belt and Road Initiative has successfully created a "non-threatening" image in several Southeast Asian countries.

The Philippines officially became part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2017. The Philippine government plans to build infrastructure worth \$17 billion, marking the country's first initiative of such magnitude. To achieve this, the Philippines targets an investment of \$1 trillion, with China committing to the BRI project involving 60 countries aiming to rebuild the Old Silk Road (Castro, 2019). Amid the growing need for infrastructure in the Philippines, which has hindered the country's progress, the BRI offers a viable solution (Rabena, 2019). Under the leadership of President Duterte, the Philippines shifted its foreign policy from his predecessor, Benigno Aquino III, who was known for his aggressive and anti-China stance during his term. By joining the BRI, the Philippines stands to gain greater access to the Chinese market and the potential for significantly higher investment flows.

Efforts to promote economic expansion, a major cause of conflict in the region, are expected to help address the ongoing insurgency in Mindanao from a security perspective (Rabena, 2019). China, for its part, has emphasized the strategic importance of the Philippines as a partner and the need for the country to advance the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (Sejko & Park, 2020). Furthermore, the Philippines' approach to handling the South China Sea (SCS) disputes has been influenced by the potential benefits from the BRI. Under former President Benigno Aquino, the Philippines was one of the countries opposing China's involvement in the region. However, Duterte has adopted a softer stance on the issue of the SCS, exemplified by his speech during the ASEAN conference in Laos, where he indicated that the

Philippines had decided to sever ties with the United States, its long-standing ally (Castro, 2019).

Malaysia's response to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has largely mirrored that of the Philippines, with early support from Prime Minister Najib Razak. One of the key benefits China offered to Malaysia for joining the BRI was the development of the Melaka Gateway project, which was estimated to cost around RM 42 billion. The project was expected to bring in about 2.5 million tourists annually, generate revenue of approximately RM 1.9 trillion, and create 40,000 to 45,000 new jobs (Hutchinson, 2019). Another critical infrastructure project related to the BRI in Malaysia is the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL), designed to connect the less developed East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia with the rest of the country. ECRL is expected to boost economic growth in the region, and it will also function as a link between the Port of Klang in the Straits of Malacca and the Port of Kuantan, facilitating overland transport to Singapore.

However, Malaysia's relationship with China has not been entirely smooth. In 2018, the election of Mahathir Mohamad as Prime Minister led to a shift in Malaysia's stance towards China. Mahathir's government initially delayed several major infrastructure projects, including the ECRL, the Trans-Sabah Gas Pipeline, the Multi Product Pipeline, and the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High-Speed Rail. Mahathir also expressed suspicion toward China, warning against a new form of colonialism in a press conference with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in 2018, where he stated that poorer nations would struggle to compete with wealthy ones (Fook, 2019). Despite these concerns, Mahathir did not fully turn away from the BRI. He acknowledged the significant economic growth opportunities and development benefits that the BRI brought to Malaysia. During a visit to China in 2019, Mahathir softened his stance, emphasizing that Malaysia would not take an aggressive approach against China, recognizing its importance for the country's future (Fook, 2019). This shift in Mahathir's position highlights how China successfully used economic influence to maintain its involvement in Malaysia's development, particularly in the context of the South China Sea (LTS) dispute.

Next, a country in Southeast Asia that is part of the framework of China's BRI cooperation is Indonesia. At the start of the BRI launch, Indonesia showed a positive attitude through President Joko Widodo. When Jokowi planned his ambition to boost Indonesia's national economic growth through the intensification of infrastructure development, such as the high-speed rail project, roads, and ports in 2015, he realized that domestic investment alone was not enough to achieve these goals. Therefore, in the following year, Jokowi implemented various regulations to ease foreign investors in investing in Indonesia. One of the countries that felt the positive impact of this policy was China. Since the early launch of BRI in Indonesia, China began to dominate the portion of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Indonesia, with total investment reaching US\$ 2.7 trillion (BKPM, 2020). The potential benefits of the BRI also influenced how Indonesia, under Jokowi's administration, responded to China's presence in the South China Sea (LTS). In 2016, Jokowi visited Natuna, signaling that

Indonesia would protect its sovereignty. However, on the other hand, the visit was seen as a way to mask Jokowi's accommodative stance. This was evidenced by Indonesia's regional diplomacy, which tried not to openly discuss China, due to the numerous benefits offered by Chinese investments. Indonesia's shift in stance in responding to the LTS conflict significantly influenced efforts to resolve the issue.

The change in stance shown by the leaders of countries in the Southeast Asian region demonstrates that China has successfully utilized the BRI to engage countries that initially opposed China. Xi Jinping continues to promote the BRI with a focus on cultural, economic, and non-intervention aspects as crucial elements to achieve China's national defense stability in the Southeast Asia region, including securing important routes in the South China Sea. The BRI enables China to maintain stability at its maritime borders, strengthen its presence without direct intervention, and expand China's global influence through mutually beneficial relationships while also showcasing a positive image of China in the international order.

E. CONCLUSION

Through the BRI, China moves surplus production such as steel to Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia, which needs infrastructure. Projects in Indonesia, such as the Morowali Industrial Park and the Kuala Tanjung Port, enhance China's access to natural resources and facilitate the trade of energy and strategic commodities such as nickel and coal. As the main investor, China funds infrastructure to strengthen regional connectivity, which further expands its influence in the Southeast Asian economy. Beyond the economic aspect, the BRI also demonstrates China's ideological ambition to maintain its hegemony in the region, with growing influence through cross-border infrastructure projects under the BRI umbrella. From the perspective of defense interests and international order, the implementation of the BRI in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, shows China's interest in becoming a dominant force in Asia, as well as countering competition from countries like the US and Japan, and strengthening ties with Southeast Asian countries that serve as strategic partners in BRI projects. China has garnered global attention due to its rise in the global economy, particularly through the large-scale BRI initiative. This strategy signals China's ambition to expand its influence both economically and geopolitically, leveraging strategic infrastructure investments in several countries, including Indonesia.

China's economic interests in the implementation of the BRI in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, based on the four types of interests according to Donald Nuechterlein's theory of national interests, show that China's implementation of the BRI in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, aims to reduce dependence on foreign investment, utilize overproduction capacity, secure energy supplies, maintain national defense stability, especially in its maritime regions such as the South China Sea, and create a positive global image by embracing BRI partner countries with a focus on cultural, economic, and non-intervention aspects.

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