

IMPACT OF THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE ON SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR VIETNAM

TÁC ĐỘNG CỦA SÁNG KIẾN VÀNH ĐAI VÀ CON ĐƯỜNG ĐẾN KHU VỰC HẠ SAHARA VÀ HÀM Ý CHÍNH SÁCH DÀNH CHO VIỆT NAM

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Tóm tắt - Từ năm 2013, Trung Quốc triển khai Sáng kiến Vành đai và Con đường (BRI) để khẳng định vị thế là một cường quốc kinh tế và chính trị trên thế giới. Khu vực châu Phi hạ Sahara được Trung Quốc đánh giá là rất quan trọng trong chiến lược này. Việc thực hiện BRI đã ảnh hưởng rõ rệt đến vị trí của Trung Quốc cả ở khu vực này lẫn trên toàn cầu. Vì vậy, nhiều nghiên cứu đã được tiến hành nhằm đánh giá tác động của BRI đối với các nước ở khu vực châu Phi hạ Sahara, nhưng hầu hết chỉ tập trung vào một số lĩnh vực nhất định. Nghiên cứu này hướng tới việc xem xét một cách toàn diện những ảnh hưởng của các chính sách BRI đến nhiều khía cạnh quan trọng trên các lĩnh vực như an ninh - chính trị, kinh tế, môi trường và văn hóa giáo dục ở các quốc gia thuộc khu vực này.

Từ khóa - Tác động; BRI; Trung Quốc; châu Phi hạ Sahara; Việt Nam.

1. Rationale

From the early years of the 21st century to the present, China has been experiencing a remarkable rise and has achieved significant accomplishments in various fields, demonstrating its position on the international stage. Cooperation based on establishing diplomatic relations with other countries is also one of the issues that this nation particularly focuses on, including countries in the African region. Twelve years ago, during a visit to Central Asia in September 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping first mentioned the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). During his Southeast Asia visit in October 2013, he also introduced the concept of the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”. These initiatives together form the BRI project, aimed at creating both “hard” and “soft” connectivity between China and the rest of the world. China's BRI is considered a major strategy to realize the vision and national goals of China.

Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, BRI has had an impact on Africa. President Xi has proposed numerous strategic initiatives and new projects to build China's position in various fields in Africa, amidst the many changes in the international environment. With China's ambition to establish itself as a leading global political and economic power, Africa has become a critical component of BRI. As a vast continent with abundant natural resources and diverse economic, political, cultural, and social development, Africa has undergone significant and profound transformations in many areas over the past two decades, becoming a dynamic development area attracting the attention of emerging powers. When implementing the BRI, China has paid particular attention

Abstract - Since 2013, China has been carrying out the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to establish itself as a prominent global political and economic force. As part of this national strategy, China has recognized the significance of Sub-Saharan Africa and its role within the initiative. The implementation of the BRI has had notable effects on China's position both in the region and worldwide. Consequently, numerous studies have been conducted on the BRI's impact on Sub-Saharan Africa, albeit with a narrow focus on specific areas. This study aims to comprehensively examine the effects of BRI policies on various crucial aspects such as security – politics, economics, environment, culture and education in Sub-Saharan African countries.

Key words - Impact; BRI; China; Sub-Saharan Africa; Vietnam.

to the Sub-Saharan countries, considered the poorest region of the continent. Despite the deep impact of the BRI on specific sectors within these nations, research on these impacts remains limited. Therefore, the research “*Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Sub-Saharan Africa and Policy implications for Vietnam*” focuses on in-depth research on the practical implementation of the BRI in the Sub-Saharan region, thereby clarifying the impact of this policy on the important sectors of the region, as a basis for drawing policy implications for Vietnam.

2. Literature Review

The impact of the BRI on Sub-Saharan Africa has garnered significant attention from researchers both domestically and internationally. Regarding international studies, Muhamad Sabil Farooq in “*Kenya and the 21st Century maritime silk road: implications for China - Africa relations*” [1], analyzed it boosts the economy and infrastructure but also creates risks of debt, trade imbalances, and social competition, reflecting the complex nature of China-Africa relations. However, this study solely focused on infrastructure and did not delve into other areas. Additionally, Hugo Coetzee in “*Belt and Road Initiative: The View from Africa*” [2], emphasized the benefits of the BRI, such as improved transport infrastructure, increased trade, and job creation, but also mentioned challenges related to public debt and cybersecurity.

Regarding domestic studies, Nguyen Dinh Thien and Pham Thi Bich Ngoc, in their article “*Vành đai và con đường, đồng thuận và thách thức*” (Belt and Road, Consensus and Challenges), explored both the

opportunities and difficulties China faced in implementing the BRI, including opposition from many Western countries [3]. Similarly, the study “*Sáng kiến “Vành đai, Con đường” của Trung Quốc: 5 năm nhìn lại*” (China's “Belt and Road” Initiative: 5 Years Looking Back) by Nguyen Thu Ha highlighted China's achievements and challenges in implementing the BRI and also provided responses from other global powers [4]. The existing studies have provided a theoretical foundation regarding the relationship between the BRI and various regions and highlighted obstacles and challenges. However, there are still relatively few in-depth studies on the comprehensive impacts of the BRI on countries within Sub-Saharan Africa, with most focusing on a single country or a specific sector. Furthermore, previous academic work has not fully exploited specific and highly applicable lessons for other countries, especially Vietnam - a developing country with many similarities in geopolitical context and infrastructure development derived from the experience of BRI implementation in Sub-Saharan Africa.

3. Research Objectives

The research aims to clarify the practical implementation of the BRI in the Sub - Saharan African region, serving as a basis to assess the initiative's impacts on countries in the region, and simultaneously propose several policy implications for Vietnam.

4. Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

4.1. Research Methodology

Policy Analysis Method: this method was utilized to analyze the policies implemented by China within the framework of BRI in Sub - Saharan Africa.

Historical - Logical Method: this method was applied to examine the historical development and logical progression of events related to the BRI's presence and impact in the region.

4.2. Theoretical Framework

In analyzing the BRI in Sub-Saharan Africa, both Realism and Liberalism offer valuable frameworks for interpreting state behavior and international engagement. From a Realist perspective, the BRI reflects a strategic pursuit of national interest by China, where power, especially economic and infrastructural influence is utilized to enhance its geopolitical position. China applies self-help strategies to secure their interests, including access to natural resources, strategic ports, and political influence in the region. In this view, China's investment and infrastructure development in Sub-Saharan Africa are driven by competitive motives, aiming to strengthen its relative power while simultaneously limiting the influence of rival states. Cooperation under the BRI is seen as transactional and temporary, sustained only as long as it aligns with China's broader strategic goals and the recipient states' immediate needs. In contrast, Liberalism interprets the BRI in Sub-Saharan Africa as a potential platform for sustained cooperation based on shared economic interests and mutual development goals. It emphasizes the possibility of interdependence, where both China and African nations can

benefit through trade, infrastructure, and knowledge exchange. Despite the anarchic nature of the international system, Liberalism suggests that collaboration can emerge even in the absence of overarching authority, particularly when driven by rational interests such as economic growth and regional connectivity. Furthermore, this perspective acknowledges that cooperation and competition may coexist; African countries may engage with China through the BRI while simultaneously maintaining diverse diplomatic and economic relationships. Thus, from a Liberal viewpoint, the BRI represents not only a tool of power projection but also a framework for building long-term partnerships grounded in mutual benefit.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. An overview of BRI

In 2013, Xi Jinping launched BRI in a speech in Astana, Kazakhstan. A month later, China's Maritime Silk Road was introduced in a speech in Indonesia. At that time, China revived the concept of the Silk Road which connected China with countries in Western Europe in the past. The BRI includes a chain of seaports stretching from eastern China to countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia, then extending to countries in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe. In addition, these seaports also have branches extending to African countries such as Ethiopia and Kenya. The content of the initiative focuses on five connectivity fields: policy, infrastructure, trade, finance, and people-to-people exchanges. China provides loans with high-interest rates to support the construction of infrastructure such as highways, power stations, railways, and airports in other countries. Most of the construction work is carried out by Chinese companies using labor and raw materials from their own country [5].

5.2. Sub - Saharan Africa

Sub - Saharan Africa, also known as Sub-Saharan region, is a geographical area located south of the Sahara Desert and contrasts with North Africa, which belongs to the Arab world and is located to the north. These regions encompass Central Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa, and West Africa. The exact number of countries included in Sub-Saharan Africa can vary between 46 to 48, depending on the organization using the definition (such as the UN, WHO, World Bank, etc.). However, African Union (AU) adopts a different regional breakdown, recognizing all 55 member states on the continent and categorizing them into five distinct and standardized regions. Sub – Saharan Africa is the home to over 1 billion people living in 49 countries [6] with diverse ethnicities.

The high population growth rate and the presence of a large youth population (43% of the population is under 14 years old) have demonstrated that this region has great economic potential but also many challenges due to rapid population growth [6]. Migration due to conflict and environmental changes has also contributed to the rapid demographic changes in Sub-Saharan Africa. Significant improvements in health and education, especially for women and girls, continue to be made, but a significant lag is still observed when compared to other regions.

5.3. The context for Sub-Saharan Africa before 2013

In the 2010s, the Sub-Saharan region was a hotspot of political instability, particularly due to issues such as armed conflicts between ethnic groups and religions. A prime example of this was the secession of South Sudan in 2011 after decades of prolonged conflict, the Mali civil war in 2012 when armed forces in the north rebelled against the government, the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, and others.

Since the 1990s, economic growth in Africa has been on the rise, with average per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increasing by 2.3% annually from 1996, resulting in a 50% increase since 1990. This change was due to the effectiveness of increased policies, foreign aid, and significant reductions in government debt [7]. From 2013, the economic situation in the region saw significant growth in GDP for some countries such as South Sudan, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Mozambique, etc., with growth rates exceeding 7%. According to International Monetary Fund (IMF) assessments, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows into the Sub-Saharan region reached about \$40.2 billion, an increase of about 30.4%, and the highest ever recorded until that time. Despite achieving impressive figures, some countries in the region still have ineffective economic management policies and even passive ones. Moreover, the challenges of the region, such as poverty, disease, and unemployment, have hindered economic growth and social stability. Additionally, life expectancy in the region has declined from 49.2 years in 1990 to 47.1 years in 2012. Epidemics are still rampant and show no signs of abating [8]. Sub-Saharan Africa has traditionally been a sphere of influence for the U.S. since the Cold War and for the West since the colonial era. At that time, the U.S. benefited from oil reserves in the region, while France, a typical Western power, sought to restore its past influence. In the early years of the 21st century, China took advantage of the U.S.' preoccupation with the war on terror to infiltrate the region through investment activities, loans, trading, infrastructure construction, and imports and exports. China's influence in the Sub-Saharan region before implementing the BRI was already significant and had surpassed that of the U.S. and the West. The implementation of the BRI in the region demonstrates China's determination to increase its influence in the area.

5.4. Objectives and methods of the BRI in Sub-Saharan Africa

BRI is a massive global infrastructure project launched by China in 2013 to expand economic cooperation and connectivity between China and countries around the world. Meanwhile, the objective of the BRI in the Sub-Saharan African region is to increase China's power and influence as the U.S. and Western countries gradually lose their sway there. One way to achieve this is by building relationships with local governments and leaders through funding economic development, infrastructure, and energy projects.

The BRI aims to create an economic infrastructure and communication network to connect China with Africa and other regions around the world. This will help open new markets and create new trade routes, benefiting both China and African countries. Additionally, this initiative is

designed to help African countries overcome their infrastructure deficits, a major barrier to the economic and social development of the region.

Another method of BRI implementation in the Sub-Saharan African region is through supporting sustainable development and addressing climate change. China is a leading investor in renewable energy projects in Africa, such as solar and wind energy, which can help reduce the region's dependence on fossil fuels and minimize the impact of climate change, etc.

5.5. The practical implementation of BRI

5.5.1. Infrastructure

In 2021, the trade volume between China and Africa increased by 35%, reaching \$254 billion. With the BRI, Beijing has invested in ports, roads, and other infrastructure in 43 Sub-Saharan countries. Since the implementation of China's BRI in Sub-Saharan countries, the Export-Import Bank of China has loaned Djibouti approximately \$1 billion, financing nearly 40% of Djibouti's important infrastructure and investment projects [9]. Thanks to the BRI, Ethiopia and Djibouti are now connected through the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway and the Ethiopia-Djibouti water pipeline [10]. In May 2014, a cooperation agreement with Kenyan government named Mombasa-Nairobi railway costs \$3.2 billion and is Kenya's largest infrastructure project since independence [11]. The Abuja-Kaduna railway line started commercial operations on July 27, 2016, after being built by China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC). This is one of the first standard gauge railway modernization projects (SGRMP) in Nigeria [12]. In Sudan, the country's Railway Authority is receiving 21 new locomotives from China's Ziyang Locomotive Company, departing from a Chinese port in mid-June 2022 and expected to arrive at the Port of Sudan in the first week of August. As an important achievement of the government, this project has received great attention from the Sudanese and Chinese governments. In Tanzania, on December 20, 2022, the country signed a \$2.2 billion contract with a Chinese company to build the final section of a railway line connecting its main port with neighboring countries [13].

These investments offer a dual benefit for both China and Sub-Saharan Africa nations. For Sub-Saharan Africa countries, infrastructure development serves as a crucial driver for economic growth, fostering job creation and boosting intra-regional trade. However, it also presents challenges regarding public debt and economic autonomy, as many nations incur substantial loans from China. The BRI not only helps secure access to raw materials and markets for its goods but also consolidates its geopolitical influence in a region of increasing importance in the global order. Controlling or having significant sway over strategic infrastructure like ports and railways provides China with a substantial advantage in expanding both its soft and hard power.

5.5.2. Trade and investment

In the current context of Africa, China's outward foreign direct investment (OFDI), which started at \$1.22 billion in 2004, has significantly increased to \$43.3 billion in 2017 and reached \$47.1 billion in 2021 [14]. This substantial increase

not only reflects Beijing's growing interest in Africa's markets and development potential but also serves as clear evidence of a long-term strategy to solidify China's economic and geopolitical standing on the continent.

To further boost trade and investment, particularly in Sub-Saharan African countries, China made a significant financial commitment: in 2015, it pledged to provide \$60 billion to African nations participating in BRI [15]; [16]. This substantial funding is channeled towards critical sectors such as infrastructure development, industry, and energy, thereby creating a comprehensive system of economic connectivity and development. This fosters mutual interdependence and expands China's influence.

China's OFDI has become a primary source of capital, technical assistance, technology transfer, and geographical expansion, covering over 44 countries in the region as an essential business partner [17]. This demonstrates that China is not merely an investor but a comprehensive partner, contributing to Africa's modernization and economic development while reshaping the continent's economic and geopolitical landscape in the 21st century.

5.5.3. Industry

In Sudan, China has provided support for the development of the oil and cotton agriculture industries [12]. Cooperation in the oil industry has brought in a significant amount of revenue for Sudan's budget and foreign exchange. Additionally, China has invested in projects aimed at improving Sudan's agriculture, leading to increased income for the people. There are also plans for future development, including railways, ports, and nuclear power plants [18]. In Ethiopia, the Eastern Industrial Zone built by China has become an important production center outside of Addis Ababa. Although many Chinese companies have invested in the area, the industrial zone has not played a catalyzing role in the overall economic development of Ethiopia [19]. In Uganda, China has supported the construction of two large hydroelectric projects, along with providing funding for these projects. However, some critics have warned of Uganda's increasing debt, of which one-third is owed to China [20].

To sum up, the evidence clearly demonstrates China's extensive economic presence and cooperation within Sub-Saharan Africa. On one hand, China plays a crucial role in providing essential capital and technical expertise for infrastructure and industrial development, thereby contributing to economic growth in specific sectors. On the other hand, these investments also come with concerns regarding their comprehensive impact, particularly the potential for creating economic dependency and challenges related to debt sustainability. This necessitates that countries in Sub-Saharan Africa adopt prudent management strategies to maximize the benefits gained while simultaneously mitigating potential risks.

5.6. The specific impacts of BRI on various sectors in Sub-Saharan region

5.6.1. In terms of security and politics

From a political security perspective, BRI serves as a strategic tool for China to expand its influence amid global

power competition. Beijing's provision of substantial financing and large-scale infrastructure investments has forged close bilateral relationships with many Sub-Saharan African nations. China's "non-interference in internal affairs" policy, coupled with capital provision under terms often perceived as more flexible than those offered by Western financial institutions, has made China an attractive partner. This not only solidifies China's position as a significant political power but also implicitly promotes its state-led development model as a viable option for Sub-Saharan African countries.

However, this relationship also harbors considerable risks to the sovereignty and policy independence of recipient Sub-Saharan nations. A primary concern is the potential for "debt traps", where Sub-Saharan African countries accumulating large public debts may become politically bound and pressured to make concessions to China on crucial policy decisions. For instance, the Export-Import Bank of China extended a loan of approximately \$1.2 billion to Djibouti, funding nearly 40% of that nation's key infrastructure projects, leading to concerns about debt sustainability [21]. This financial dependency can diminish the foreign policy space of Sub-Saharan African states, making them more cautious when engaging with China's geopolitical rivals or issuing critiques. Furthermore, the BRI's implementation has significantly intensified strategic competition between China and traditional powers (such as the United States and the European Union) in Sub-Saharan Africa, transforming the region into a focal point of global geopolitics.

5.6.2. In terms of economics

From the perspective of Liberalism in International Relations, the BRI can be understood as an effort to foster economic cooperation and shared development based on mutual benefit, even within an anarchic international environment. This theory posits that states, by identifying common interests, especially economic ones can establish cooperative relationships rather than solely focusing on power competition.

The BRI's implementation in Sub-Saharan Africa has created "hard connectivity" through infrastructure and "soft connectivity" through policy, trade, finance, and people-to-people exchanges between China and the region. Key infrastructure projects, such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti and Mombasa-Nairobi railways, valued at billions of USD, don't just help African nations address severe infrastructure deficits; they're also expected to reduce transaction costs, enhance transportation efficiency, and expand new trade routes. This reinforces the Liberalist argument that increased economic linkages generate common benefits, encouraging states to cooperate rather than confront each other. Furthermore, the significant surge in trade volume (reaching \$254 billion in 2021) and China's OFDI in Africa (totaling \$47.1 billion in 2021) clearly demonstrates a substantial degree of economic interdependence. From a Liberal perspective, this interdependence not only brings economic benefits to both sides (China gains market access and raw materials, Africa receives capital and technology) but also creates common interest groups that bind nations together and reduce the costs of conflict, thereby promoting peace.

While the BRI isn't a traditional multilateral institution,

the FOCAC, with its substantial financial commitments like the \$60 billion package in 2015 and its close alignment with the BRI, can be seen as an important institutional framework for managing and coordinating cooperation. Such institutions, according to Liberalism, are crucial for ensuring the sustainability of cooperation and managing emerging risks. Although challenges like public debt and a lack of transparency in some projects could potentially diminish cooperation's effectiveness, the Liberal perspective still emphasizes that these issues can be resolved through strengthening institutions, increasing transparency, and fostering dialogue among parties to effectively maximize common benefits and manage risk.

5.6.3. Other fields

In terms of environment: Large-scale infrastructure projects often raise concerns about the environment, and the BRI is no exception. China's past infrastructure investment experience in Africa has reinforced these concerns. The World Wildlife Fund estimates that the BRI passes through 1,739 important bird areas or primary biodiversity areas, as well as 46 biodiversity hotspots. Africa is vulnerable to extreme climate conditions. If environmental impacts are not fully considered, the economic impact of infrastructure investment will be lower than expected [22].

In terms of culture and education: BRI projects have helped build and upgrade hundreds of schools, universities, and technical training centers in countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Uganda. This has contributed to improving access to quality education for many people. China is actively promoting its culture through a network of Confucius Institutes located throughout the Sub-Saharan region and some countries in the region have branches such as Tanzania, Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, and Madagascar supported by China. These partnerships have helped enhance cultural, linguistic, and historical exchanges with China across the region [23]. In the long term, this helps cultivate a class of African elites - including politicians, entrepreneurs, and academics - who are knowledgeable about and sympathetic to China, thereby paving the way for future partnerships.

5.7. Policy implications for Vietnam

Vietnam's geostrategic position makes it a vital gateway for China to connect with Southeast Asia, a key link in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI, in return, offers significant potential to increase trade, investment, and tourism between the two countries. However, for Vietnam, a careful assessment of both the potential benefits and the inherent challenges of participating in the initiative is crucial.

Given its strategic geopolitical position and urgent need for infrastructure development, Vietnam can approach China's BRI and similar international cooperation projects with a comprehensive and flexible strategy. This approach needs to be a delicate blend of the inherent caution of Realism and the cooperative spirit of Liberalism, aiming to maximize national interests while minimizing potential risks. From a Realist perspective, Vietnam must always be keenly aware of the potential power and geopolitical implications behind large-scale projects such as the BRI. These are not simply

economic efforts but also strategic tools for China to expand its influence and consolidate its global position. Accepting significant Chinese investments through the BRI could leave Vietnam vulnerable to sovereignty, especially in relation to the South China Sea, where overlapping claims exist. Such economic dependence may severely limit Vietnam's political and diplomatic responses to China's actions. At the same time, according to the security dilemma, Vietnam's deep ties with the BRI may increase political misunderstandings between Vietnam and other influential regional powers (especially the U.S., which aims to contain its influence and maintain its indispensable leadership role in the region) in the context of increasingly tense strategic competition. This, in turn, puts Vietnam at risk of being drawn into geopolitical competition between China and other regional powers. Therefore, Vietnam needs to carefully assess potential political and security obstacles before committing to any BRI project, while maintaining an independent, autonomous, and diversified foreign policy to protect its national security.

On the other hand, Vietnam can and should take advantage of the economic opportunities brought by the BRI. "Hard connectivity" (transport, energy, telecommunications infrastructure) and "soft connectivity" (policy, finance, people-to-people) projects have the potential to help Vietnam address infrastructure gaps, reduce transaction costs, and open new trade routes. However, to ensure tangible benefits, Vietnam could learn from the experiences of sub-Saharan African countries, which often suffer from project delays, cost overruns, poor construction quality, and high maintenance costs due to projects being largely undertaken by Chinese companies using Chinese labor and materials. The risk of debt accumulation and the mortgaging of strategic assets (as seen in Sri Lanka) are major concerns, requiring the Vietnamese government to conduct extremely detailed cost-benefit analyses, establish transparent and competitive bidding mechanisms, and manage public debt closely. Vietnam should also proactively attract high-quality foreign direct investment (FDI) from China and other partners around the world in areas that are consistent with the national development strategy, while requiring technology transfer to serve national goals such as building the North-South high-speed railway and completing the entire line by 2045. Moreover, actively participating in and shaping regional institutions and forums led by ASEAN and relevant international organizations to ensure Vietnam's role and position on the world political chessboard. Furthermore, Vietnam needs to maintain multilateralization, diversify relations, and strengthen economic cooperation with countries around the world, especially in relations with major powers such as Russia, Japan, South Korea, etc. to avoid being hurt when Vietnam depends on a certain country. In the socio-cultural field, exchange programs such as the Confucius Institute should be selectively and proactively utilized by Vietnam to promote people-to-people diplomacy to enhance mutual understanding and promote Vietnamese culture, rather than being one-sided.

In short, Vietnam needs to approach the BRI and similar initiatives with a balanced, vigilant, and proactive mindset. This requires a harmonious combination of

strategies to protect national interests and maximize economic cooperation opportunities. By achieving this strategic balance, Vietnam not only promotes sustainable development but also maintains its independence, sovereignty, and position in the rapidly evolving global geo-economic and geopolitical context.

6. Conclusion

The BRI presents both opportunities and challenges for Sub-Saharan Africa, a region in critical need of infrastructure and economic development. Chinese investment through the BRI offers significant potential benefits, including improved transportation and energy infrastructure, job creation, poverty reduction. These developments can support long-term economic growth and integration into global markets. However, the implementation of BRI projects also raises serious concerns. Most significantly is the risk of debt trap, as many BRI-funded projects rely on large loans that can strain national budgets. This financial dependency may reduce policy autonomy and increase political leverage for China. Additionally, environmental degradation, resource exploitation, and social displacement are common issues linked to large-scale infrastructure initiatives. In some cases, weak governance and lack of transparency further undermine the long-term benefits of such projects. Considering this context, Sub-Saharan African countries must carefully evaluate each BRI project. Ensuring that benefits outweigh risks requires strong institutions, transparent negotiations, and sustainable development planning. In conclusion, while the BRI offers important opportunities for economic advancement, its success in the region depends on a balanced, cautious, and strategic approach that prioritizes both development and sovereignty. Vietnam needs a balanced strategy for the BRI: one that involves cautiously safeguarding national sovereignty and security by diversifying partners and enhancing domestic capacity, while proactively leveraging connectivity opportunities and attracting high-quality FDI to drive sustainable economic development.

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