

Research on the Implementation of One Belt One Road Initiative in Ghana

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Abstract

This paper examines the potential implications of China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) Initiative for Ghana, offering a prospective analysis rather than an assessment of active implementation, as Ghana is not yet a formal participant in the initiative. Launched in 2013, OBOR—comprising the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road—aims to expand trade, investment, and infrastructure connectivity between China and emerging economies. Drawing on a qualitative research approach, the study employs a comprehensive review of existing literature, policy analysis of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) frameworks, and an evaluative case study of the Bui Dam project to explore the likely economic and developmental outcomes of Ghana's potential participation. The analysis focuses on key areas including trade relations with China, infrastructure development, employment generation, and possible effects on Ghana's balance of payments. Findings suggest that deeper engagement with OBOR could enhance infrastructure financing and accelerate economic growth through improved connectivity and large-scale development projects. However, the study also highlights significant risks, particularly the potential marginalization of local manufacturing industries due to increased import competition and structural trade imbalances. The paper concludes that while strategic participation in the OBOR Initiative may be vital for Ghana's long-term infrastructure and development goals, these benefits can only be sustained if accompanied by strong domestic industrial and trade policies. In particular, the government must prioritize the protection and expansion of local manufacturing capacity to ensure that engagement with OBOR supports inclusive growth and strengthens the domestic economy rather than undermining it.

Keywords

One Belt One Road (OBOR), Implementation, China-Africa, Ghana

1. Introduction

The One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative, also referred to as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), represents a major global economic and development strategy introduced by the People's Republic of China in 2013 (Lewis & Moise, 2018). The initiative encompasses two interrelated components: the Silk Road Economic Belt, which focuses on overland connectivity across Eurasia, and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which emphasizes sea-based trade routes linking Asia, Africa, and Europe. The idea was formally introduced by President Xi Jinping during official visits to Kazakhstan and Indonesia, where the two components were articulated as part of a broader vision to enhance international trade, infrastructure development, and economic cooperation (Zeng, 2016; Overholt, 2015; Yu et al., 2017). At its core, the OBOR initiative emerged in response to China's domestic economic conditions, particularly the overproduction of industrial goods, which necessitated the search for expanded external markets to sustain economic growth.

Africa occupies a central position within China's OBOR vision due to its extensive endowment of natural resources, including agricultural products, minerals, wildlife, and water resources. These resources are critical inputs for China's manufacturing sector, which continues to experience strong demand for raw materials (Wang et al., 2019). In contrast, many African economies are characterized by underdeveloped industrial bases and a heavy reliance on export-oriented models focused on raw materials and primary commodities. This structural imbalance has shaped trade relations between China and Africa, with African countries exporting largely unprocessed goods while importing manufactured products from China. As a result, the China-Africa trade relationship reflects both complementarity and asymmetry, creating opportunities for economic exchange while simultaneously raising concerns about long-term industrial development within African economies.

Chinese manufactured goods have gained a strong competitive presence in African markets. This competitiveness is not solely a function of production scale and cost efficiency, but also reflects differences in consumer preferences between African and Western markets. In many African countries, affordability plays a more significant role in purchasing decisions than factors such as brand prestige, aesthetics, or premium quality. Chinese firms have effectively responded to this demand by supplying products that are reasonably priced and of acceptable quality, thereby capturing a substantial share of African consumer markets (Helmold & Terry, 2017). While this dynamic has expanded access to affordable goods, it has also intensified competition for local industries, many of which lack the capacity to compete with low-cost imports.

Ghana represents an important case within the broader China-Africa economic relationship. As a sovereign West African nation with a population exceeding 32 million, Ghana offers a sizeable consumer market and a strategic gateway to the West Africa sub-region (Aning & Atta-Asamoah, 2011). The country's status as a developing economy, combined with its political stability and integration into the

global system, makes it an attractive destination for foreign trade and investment. Over the years, China has emerged as one of Ghana's most significant trading partners, becoming the second-largest exporter to the country. This growing trade relationship reflects Ghana's increasing reliance on Chinese manufactured goods and infrastructure support, while also highlighting the broader alignment between Sino-Ghanaian cooperation and the objectives of the OBOR initiative.

Beyond economic considerations, China's engagement with Africa has yielded notable diplomatic advantages. The African continent, which comprises a large concentration of developing countries, collectively holds approximately 25 percent of the voting rights in the United Nations (Alfassam et al., 2020). Through sustained economic cooperation and diplomatic engagement, China has strengthened its political alliances across Africa, thereby enhancing its influence within international institutions. China-Africa economic cooperation has therefore functioned not only as a mechanism for trade and development, but also as a strategic tool for expanding China's global political standing.

China's broader economic ambitions further contextualize the significance of initiatives such as OBOR. The country has articulated a long-term objective of becoming the world's leading economic power by 2030 (Lee & Khor, 2019). Its economic model is often characterized by three key advantages: pragmatism in policy implementation, the scale of its domestic and external markets, and strong competitiveness in manufacturing and trade. While these strengths have driven China's rapid economic transformation, they have also contributed to concerns regarding dependency among partner countries. In some cases, the dominance of Chinese goods and capital may limit opportunities for autonomous industrial development in less industrialized economies, underscoring the need for strategic engagement by recipient states.

Africa's partnership with China has evolved into one of considerable global significance. This alliance has been shaped partly by Africa's historical marginalization within the international system, where developed countries have often constrained Africa's voice in global decision-making. Against this backdrop, China and Africa increasingly view one another as indispensable partners. The establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 marked a major institutional milestone in formalizing this relationship (Jonah, 2021). FOCAC has provided a durable platform for dialogue, policy coordination, and development cooperation, enabling both parties to articulate shared goals and implement structured development agendas.

The 8th Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, held in Dakar, Senegal, resulted in the adoption of the Dakar Action Plan (2022-2024). This plan emphasizes enhanced production capacity cooperation across a wide range of sectors, reflecting a more diversified approach to China-Africa economic engagement. Resource-intensive industries such as food processing, beverages, tobacco, wood, and building materials have experienced notable growth, while labor-intensive sectors including textiles, clothing, leather, and metals have

also been significantly impacted. In addition, technology- and capital-intensive sectors—such as pharmaceuticals, chemicals, automobiles, machinery, electronics, and science and technology—have begun exploring new areas of cooperation, including modern services and innovation-driven industries. The Dakar Action Plan thus represents a strategic effort to align industrial cooperation with Africa's developmental realities while supporting economic diversification.

Africa's interest in China's development experience has further strengthened this partnership (Tesfaye, 2020). Historically perceived as a continent defined by conflict, poverty, and disease, Africa has increasingly looked to China's reform and opening-up experience as a potential model for accelerated development. Elements of China's development approach—such as gradual reform, pilot-based experimentation, people-oriented policies, and pragmatic adaptation of economic principles—are widely regarded by African policymakers as key contributors to China's success. These methods are often viewed as more compatible with African development conditions than externally imposed models, reinforcing ideological and policy alignment between China and African states.

In addition to trade and investment, China has provided economic assistance to African countries in various forms, including concessional loans, grants, and technical cooperation. This assistance has contributed to infrastructure development and economic growth while simultaneously strengthening diplomatic relations. The implementation of FOCAC commitments, particularly under the Dakar Action Plan (2022-2024), signals a sustained commitment to deepening China-Africa cooperation and shaping a long-term development partnership.

Analytical framing is essential in assessing the relevance of the OBOR initiative to Ghana. It is critical to clarify that the Republic of Ghana does not currently fall under the formal purview of the OBOR initiative, which includes approximately 60 participating countries (Gyamerah et al., 2021). Consequently, this study does not evaluate an ongoing OBOR implementation in Ghana. Rather, it constitutes a prospective analysis of potential future implications based on the longstanding Sino-Ghanaian relationship that has existed since the 1960s. This distinction is important for managing analytical expectations and differentiating between current trade realities and future possibilities.

The objectives underpinning Sino-Ghanaian cooperation—particularly trade expansion, infrastructure development, and industrial collaboration—closely align with the broader goals of the OBOR initiative (Amo-Agyemang, 2021; Penney et al., 2017). As such, Ghana's experience with Chinese trade and investment provides a valuable basis for examining the potential benefits and challenges of deeper engagement under an OBOR framework. While this relationship has generated tangible gains, it has also produced mixed outcomes, including concerns related to trade imbalances, local industrial competitiveness, and economic dependency. These considerations form the foundation for evaluating the possible future implications of OBOR for Ghana and underscore the need for strategic policy responses that support sustainable and inclusive development.

2. Literature Review

As global economic integration deepens, scholarly attention has increasingly focused on the potential economic, environmental, and trade-related implications of China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative, also known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Extensive research across regions has examined how large-scale trade and infrastructure initiatives influence development trajectories, particularly in emerging economies. The OBOR initiative, introduced by President Xi Jinping in 2013, represents one of the most ambitious international economic blueprints undertaken by China in recent decades (Herrero & Xu, 2017; Johnson, 2014).

The initiative is designed to promote regional economic development across Europe, Africa, and Asia through enhanced trade connectivity, infrastructure development, and investment flows. Although official documentation on participating countries remains fluid, announcements suggest that approximately 63 countries are involved, including 18 European states, with the overland route terminating at the edge of the European Union (Huang, 2016). Collectively, trade between China and the European Union alone accounts for nearly 64% of the global population and approximately 30% of global GDP, underscoring the initiative's expansive economic reach.

Scholars consistently describe the OBOR initiative as China's most important international development framework, aimed at expanding export markets while securing raw materials essential for sustaining its manufacturing sector. Africa occupies a central position in this strategy due to its abundance of natural resources and growing consumer markets. Within this broader context, Ghana represents a relevant case study given its longstanding trade relationship with China and its role as a resource-exporting economy.

It is important to clarify that Ghana is not currently a formal member of the OBOR initiative. Consequently, this analysis should be understood as a prospective examination of potential implications rather than a review of an ongoing implementation. This framing manages reader expectations by focusing on future possibilities informed by existing Sino-Ghanaian trade relations rather than formal OBOR participation.

Empirical studies indicate that Ghana's trade relationship with China has already yielded measurable economic benefits. Increased demand for Ghanaian exports such as cocoa, timber, and other natural resources has contributed to improved terms of trade and export revenues (Okyere, 2021; A Lody, 2024). At the same time, the importation of affordable Chinese manufactured goods has contributed to a decline in domestic inflation and an improvement in Ghana's Balance of Payment (BOP) position (Takyi-Annan et al., 2018).

Beyond macroeconomic indicators, scholars highlight broader socio-economic outcomes associated with Sino-Ghanaian trade. Increased Chinese investment has contributed to job creation, poverty reduction, and rising foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows. Notably, evidence suggests that Ghanaian workers employed

by Chinese enterprises often earn higher wages than those employed within comparable public-sector roles, further reinforcing the developmental impact of bilateral trade (Agostini, 2023). These trends were reinforced by President Xi Jinping's 2021 commitment to deepen cooperation with Ghana under the broader Global Development Initiative framework (Asamoah, 2024).

In addition, recent literature emphasizes the role of agricultural trade within the OBOR framework. Studies examining agricultural product quality and trade cooperation conclude that improvements in product standards are positively associated with increased international trade engagement. This suggests that Ghana's agricultural sector could benefit from deeper integration into China-led trade networks, provided that domestic production capacity and quality standards are strengthened.

Overall, the literature positions the OBOR initiative as a transformative global economic strategy with significant implications for Africa. While Ghana remains outside the formal structure of the initiative, existing trade dynamics suggest that potential engagement could amplify both opportunities and challenges, warranting careful policy analysis and strategic planning.

3. Potential Impacts of the Belt and Road Initiative in Ghana

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as One Belt One Road (OBOR), is China's flagship program aimed at enhancing regional connectivity across Asia, Europe, and Africa (Du & Zhang, 2018). As of May 2017, the initiative included 65 countries, with only four African members: Egypt, Ethiopia, Tunisia, and Kenya, while Ghana is notably not a formal member. Nevertheless, Ghana maintains a longstanding Sino-Ghanaian relationship, which positions it to potentially benefit from BRI-related opportunities. The initiative's overarching goal is to integrate China's economy with global markets, bridge regional development gaps, and facilitate trade and investment (Brautigam & Hwang, 2017). In the Ghanaian context, these objectives translate into potential impacts across infrastructure development, economic growth, employment, and industrial capacity building. The Chinese government sees the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) programs as a fantastic way to integrate China's economy with those of Europe, Africa, and Asia. As of May 2017, a total of 65 countries, excluding China, were identified as being a member of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) program. With the majority of the members being in Asia, this figure only comprises four (4) countries in Africa, with Ghana being the sole exception. Egypt, Ethiopia, Tunisia, and Kenya make up the group of four African nations. Kenya is the newest member and the only country from eastern Africa to take part in this project. However, it is crucial to remember that any nation is welcome to join this endeavor if and only if that nation is prepared to not oppose trade and investment with China. The OBOR plan aims to close the income gap between western China's provinces and the rest of the country by improving underdeveloped areas in that region (Freymann, 2022).

The belt and road initiative in Ghana has the following objectives and goals:

To enhance policy coordination between Ghana and China: The belt and road project seeks to advance more bilateral cooperation and effective policy coordination between the two nations. The Belt and Road plan has this objective in Ghana. Policies are aimed to promote growth, mutual understanding, and benefits between both countries. In addition, from September 3 to 4, 2018, President Akufo-Addo attended the third summit of the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which was held in Beijing and had as its topic “China and Africa: Towards an Even Stronger Community with a Shared Future Through Win-Win Cooperation.” In addition to facilitating the creation of a shared political and economic agenda to enhance productive South-South cooperation for the benefit of both parties, FOCAC established a diplomatic platform to encourage discussion between China and Africa. The Government of China founded FOCAC in 2000 to support the development, strengthening, and expansion of relations between China and Ghana.

To enhance financial integration: Ghana’s banking sector is expected to grow thanks to the belt and road plan. Between 2013 and December 2021, China’s participation in the BRI through investments and building contracts—often backed by Chinese financial institutions—amounted to around USD 890 billion in BRI member nations (Lady et al., 2023; Nedopil, 2022). This frequently has a large amount of funds that might help Ghana’s financial integration improve and be strengthened.

To improve infrastructure connectivity: Infrastructures, such as large dams, are “one of the ways in which the state actualizes power over its territory” or makes an effort to exert force over other states. The terms of the BRI initiative tend to concentrate on discursive macroeconomic and political issues rather than local practices, thus the project-level implications of China’s BRI typically have good practices in Ghana.

To improve Trade and investment cooperation: Playing a significant part in fostering trade between Ghana and China is one of the belt and road initiative’s main goals. The number two exporter to Ghana is China. China is most certainly the top exporter to Ghana in terms of BRI objectives.

To support the people: The degree of ties between the Republic of Ghana and China is one of the objectives of BRI. Most Chinese corporations may be found trading in Ghana in a number of cases, and when there is a relationship between the two parties, trading and investing can be successful. In order to improve cooperation and cordial ties, the belt and road program wants to foster positive relationships with Ghana’s citizens.

3.1. Developmental Stimulation of Infrastructure through the OBOR

In 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of the Chinese government launched a scheme to build infrastructure across Asia, Europe, and Africa. According to the Steering Group for The Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese companies completed

contracts worth \$400 billion between 2013 and 2018 in nations along the BRI (Hillman et al., 2021). BRI is now taking shape at the project level: in 2015, China's Silk Road Fund made its first investment in large dam construction as a shareholder of a subsidiary of the Three Gorges Corporation. China has established new financial institutions and pledged to invest USD 1 trillion in foreign infrastructure projects (Chow, 2016).

By working together with the government to support the construction of roads, dams, and agricultural infrastructure, the Belt and Road program in this region encourages the development of infrastructure. The proposal would construct both hard infrastructure, such as rail and road linkages, and soft infrastructure, such as trade agreements and a single commercial legal structure with a court system to police the agreements. With the implementation of this program, trade obstacles between China and Ghana might potentially be reduced, which would have an impact on where agricultural products are positioned in global value chains (GVCs). Ghana has trade hurdles with China; therefore, lowering these barriers could potentially benefit both countries. Using a global computable general equilibrium (CGE) model and concentrating on China and Ghana, the Belt and Road initiative will affect the GVC rankings.

Additionally, there will be an improvement in the removal of non-tariff and tariff obstacles between Ghana and China. In the best-case estimate, Ghana along the BR route will profit from the removal of trade obstacles, with agricultural products holding better positions in GVCs, particularly those with comparative advantages. Agriculture is one of the primary contributors to carbon emissions, and BRI heavily relies on agricultural commerce. Since that is what the Belt and Road program seeks to do, it will enhance the agricultural sector.

3.2. Economic and Employment Growth through the OBOR

The BRI framework has demonstrated considerable potential to stimulate economic growth and employment in participating countries. Investments in transportation, energy, health, and education infrastructure directly create jobs and improve living standards. Mustafa Hyder Sayed, executive director of the Pakistan-China Institute, notes that BRI projects in Africa have enhanced trade, increased employment, and strengthened access to education and healthcare. Similarly, Frederick Golooba Mutebi, an independent Ugandan researcher, observes that the initiative promotes African self-transformation rather than exploitation, countering perceptions of neocolonialism. The BRI framework has demonstrated considerable potential to stimulate economic growth and employment in participating countries. Investments in transportation, energy, health, and education infrastructure directly create jobs and improve living standards. Mustafa Hyder Sayed, executive director of the Pakistan-China Institute, notes that BRI projects in Africa have enhanced trade, increased employment, and strengthened access to education and healthcare. Similarly, Frederick Golooba Mutebi, an independent Ugandan researcher, observes that the initiative promotes African self-transfor-

mation rather than exploitation, countering perceptions of neocolonialism. The value of China's Belt and Road Initiative for Africa. China is not in Africa to exploit it as the West believes since, when it comes to infrastructure development, the BRI is assisting Africa in self-transformation.

OBOR Increase Salary in Economics: "China's Belt Initiative has given a framework for economies with low or middle incomes in Africa to document significant improvements and growth in terms of infrastructure development, job creation, and enhanced trading prospects. By launching initiatives that increase agricultural productivity, BRI has improved the infrastructural development in Africa.

Each country benefits economically from One Belt One Road by promoting trade between them. For instance, because to its landlocked location and severe winters, Kazakhstan, a nation in Central Asia, produces almost no vegetables. The Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of northwest China and Kazakhstan are linked by One Belt One Road. Vegetable trading across international borders meets the demands of the people of Kazakhstan. More than \$11 billion is traded annually between Xinjiang and Kazakhstan, which accounts for 40% of all trade between China and Kazakhstan.

The trade channels of Brunei is another illustration of OBOR. Despite having a lot of oil and gas, Brunei lacks the resources to build pipelines for these commodities. The financial loans of \$2.123 million are provided by the northeastern Chinese province of Liaoning, and 100,000 tons of oil and gas pipes are produced by Huludao City Steel Pipe Industrial Co., Ltd. In addition to generating \$100 million from this investment, it also creates more than 300 jobs.

OBOR Increase Salary in Health Care: Within two months, China was able to quickly deploy both human and material resources in Wuhan, Hubei, and the Chinese mainland as a whole. The fact that China has developed unparalleled organizational and logistical capabilities over the past 30 years, creating the most advanced infrastructure in human history, is one of the key causes of this. Transport, power, water, and telecommunications were all important components of this endeavor. Building a new 1000-bed hospital in Wuhan (Huoshenshan Hospital) in just 10 days was a clear demonstration of China's industrial and construction capacity.

China's industries were able to provide for the domestic market as well as export PPE, testing kits, and ventilators to 83 different nations. This is an extraordinary accomplishment. Chinese physicians supported hospitals with medical assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic, and numerous hospitals were built in southern African nations to house COVID-19 patients. The OBOR entails building infrastructure, facilitating commerce and investment, and fostering intercultural contacts with the goal of enhancing connectedness on a transcontinental scale. For more than a decade, China has been the top trading partner of Africa. The two parties have increased their attempts to collaborate as part of the Belt and Road Initiative.

3.3. Industrial Cooperation and Capacity Building

A key aspect of the BRI's potential in Ghana is industrial cooperation, which fa-

cilitates technology transfer and capacity building. Chinese firms increasingly collaborate with Ghanaian private-sector companies, providing advanced machinery, technical expertise, and managerial skills. Notable collaborations include the Jospong Vehicle Assembly Plant and the Sunon Asogli Power Plant Phase II Project, where Chinese technology and know-how have strengthened Ghana's manufacturing and energy sectors. Other Ghanaian firms, including Africa Slipway, Prefos, Danadams, and Kantaka, have also partnered with Chinese enterprises, enhancing industrial capacity and creating employment opportunities.

The integration of Chinese technology into Ghanaian industries serves multiple purposes. It enables Ghana to move beyond primary commodity exports toward value-added production, fosters skill development in the local workforce, and strengthens the domestic industrial base. While BRI discourse occasionally references environmental initiatives, such as marine conservation in coral-related projects, the primary impact in Ghana remains industrial capacity building. These collaborations exemplify a shift from simple resource extraction toward self-sustaining growth, supporting long-term economic development and resilience.

3.4. Broader Policy and Diplomatic Implications

Beyond economic and industrial impacts, the BRI reinforces policy coordination and diplomatic engagement. Initiatives such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) provide a platform to align Ghanaian and Chinese development agendas, promote mutual understanding, and facilitate South-South cooperation. President Akufo-Addo's participation in the 2018 FOCAC summit in Beijing exemplifies the commitment to fostering shared political and economic priorities, creating a foundation for long-term collaboration. Financial integration through Chinese-backed investments further consolidates bilateral ties, enhancing Ghana's capacity to participate in regional and global markets.

Overall, the BRI represents a multidimensional framework with the potential to transform Ghana's economic landscape. While Ghana is not a formal member of the initiative, its longstanding relationship with China positions the country to benefit from potential infrastructure upgrades, industrial capacity development, increased employment, and strengthened diplomatic engagement. These outcomes collectively support Ghana's transition from a resource-dependent economy toward diversified, self-sustaining growth.

4. General Implementation History of the Belt and Road Initiative in Ghana

This project was developed by China with a purpose in mind, while other people believe it offers the participating nations limitless prospects. The "21st Century Maritime Silk Road Economic Belt," which the Chinese government announced in 2013, aimed to forge economic ties with nations that were connected to China, build political confidence, and encourage economic integration and reciprocity on a cultural level. With the aid of local alliances and successful strategies, the

initiative had the drive to advance and borrowed historical emblems from earlier periods.

Both the “New Silk Road Economic Belt” and the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road” were proposed by the chairman. The “National Vision and Actions for Promoting the Joint Construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road,” released by China on March 28, 2015, sought to forge a community of interests, community of destiny, and community of responsibility with the countries bordering the route. China’s official network and the Xinhua news agency both published articles in 2015. China’s investment in Africa over the years has been marked by a sharp rise in investments, an expansion of the industries covered by investments, and the shift of the investment sector from state-owned to joint-stock enterprises.

Over 3000 projects have been contracted since the “Belt and Road” economic zone opened. Chinese businesses made direct investments in 49 countries that were part of the “Belt and Road” program in 2015, increasing the total amount of investment by 18.2% over the previous year. 2019 (RenmingNet). China signed service outsourcing agreements totaling USD 17.83 billion in 2015 with nations involved in the “Belt and Road” project. These contracts had an executed value of USD 12.15 billion, up 23.45% from the previous year and 42.6% from the previous year.

A total of 1881 trains, including 502 round journeys, were opened for China-Europe freight trains as of the end of June 2016, resulting in an import and export trade volume of US \$17 billion. China and 171 nations and other organizations have signed 205 cooperation agreements as of January 30, 2021, to work together to develop the “Belt and Road”. The initiative was incorporated into the Constitution of China in 2018. The Xi Jinping Administration calls the initiative “a bid to enhance regional connectivity and embrace a brighter future.” The project has a target completion date of 2049, which will coincide with the centennial of the People’s Republic of China (PRC)’s founding. The land route, primarily the China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor, and the maritime route, commonly referred to as the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, make up the Belt and Road Initiative in the ASEAN region. The latter involves five ASEAN maritime nations (Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Brunei), whilst the former involves five ASEAN continental nations (Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand). Although this project is being carried out throughout the ASEAN community with impressive development, there are still many concerns that need to be addressed.

4.1. Implementation of the Belt and Road in Ghana

The implementation of the belt and road initiative in Ghana has been long due. Africa, especially the eastern and southern parts, are the historical and natural extension of ancient maritime silk road. In the early 15th Century, Zheng He, a famous Chinese navigator in the Ming Dynasty, made seven voyages to the Pacific

and Indian Ocean, four of which had reached the East African coast, establishing friendship between China and Africa and promoting friendly cooperation since then. China invited three African leaders to attend this Forum, i.e., President of Kenya H. E. Uhuru Kenyatta, Ethiopian Prime Minister H. E. Hailemariam Desalegn, Deputy Chairman of the AU Commission H. E. Thomas Kwesi Quartey, which shows that China attaches great importance to China-Africa cooperation. With the presence of the late Thomas Kwesi Quartey who was a minister of Ghana showed the interest of the government in the belt and road initiative.

Ghana is a significant partner, with projects like the Sunon Asogli Power Plant already providing a “boost in connectivity”. The “Silk Road Spirit” of mutual benefit guides current collaborations. Economic and trade ties between China and Ghana are expanding. The Chinese side has carried out numerous aid, financing, investment, and contract engineering projects in Ghana, including the gas infrastructure project, the backbone network, the distance learning project, the Africa World Airlines, and a number of roads and highways. These projects have not only aided Ghana’s economic and social development but have also given the country a strong boost in connectivity. For the time being, the Chinese side is collaborating with the NPP government to outline the subsequent batch of infrastructure and people’s livelihood projects so as to kick and bring great yield to the people of Ghana.

While collaborating with Ghana, China upholds the principles of sincerity, practical results, affinity and good faith as well as the ideals of friendship, justice, and shared interests. China also remains committed to the spirit of the Silk Road, which is one of peace and cooperation, openness and inclusivity, mutual learning, and mutual benefit. To increase mutual trust and recognize the complementarity of each other’s advantages, we shall promote policy interconnection. We will intensify our collaboration in the industrial sector and the building of infrastructure to support Ghana’s self-sustaining growth. To facilitate trade and investment and enhance the business environment, we will expand trade connections. To alleviate the funding shortage in collaboration, we will improve financial connection and develop fresh forms of financing. In order to build a strong basis for China-Ghana relations, we will encourage people-to-people interaction, increase exchanges and cooperative efforts in the fields of culture, education, sports, tourism, the press, think tanks, and youth and women. It is safe to say that Ghana will soon begin to implement the Belt and Road Initiative.

4.2. Areas where the Belt and Road Initiative Could Be Implemented

The One Belt One Road initiative is likely to thrive to in following places in Ghana:

Accra: Most of Ghana’s financial industry is located in this city, which serves as its capital. It goes without saying that the belt and road will prosper here, which will eventually aid in fostering economic progress.

Tema: This is the Ghana’s is locally nicknamed the “HarborCity” because of its

status as Ghana's largest seaport. There are 25 distinct communities within it, each of which is identified by a number and has simple access to the necessities. One of the cities with a wide variety of industries and one that acts as a center of commerce for numerous businesses is Tema. The Belt and Road plan is likely to succeed in the city with the greatest concentration of businesses because of its widespread presence.

Kumasi: This city is renowned for its resource exporting, trade, and manufacturing industries. It has natural resources that raise the GDP of the nation. Here is where the Belt and Road Initiative can be put into action.

4.3. Sectors in Which the Belt and Road Initiative Could Be Implemented

The main goals of the Belt and Road initiative in Africa, and specifically Ghana, are to address resource scarcity, expand the market, remove trade obstacles, and conduct industrial transfers. Infrastructure, power, and agriculture are the three industries in which the initiative might invest primarily.

Infrastructure

When compared to other African nations with low incomes, Ghana possesses a sophisticated infrastructure base. Impressive country coverage levels for GSM signals, rural water, and electricity. The majority of the road system is in good or fair condition. ICT, ports, highways, and water supply all have institutional reforms in place. The most pressing issues facing Ghana are in the power sector, where outdated transmission and distribution infrastructure, rapid demand growth, and regular hydrological shocks force the nation to rely on expensive oil-based generating. The BRI would be very helpful if it were put into practice in this industry since it might lead to massive investment and assist upgrade the nation's infrastructure. Ghana is a crucial partner; thus China is currently a benchmark in terms of technology and the building of significant infrastructure.

Power

Sino Hydro's initial venture in Ghana was The Bui. The business actively sought additional contracts in the nation both during and after constructing the dam. China Exim Bank, one of China's policy banks, has no presence in Ghana and hence plays no part in marketing. Therefore, Sino Hydro and other Chinese dam players were in the marketing industry. Sino Hydro has pursued financing from Beijing, but in order to secure contracts and work with non-Chinese parties, it has adhered to market principles. Beyond the construction of dams and Sino Hydro's business strategy, several Chinese dam businesses operating in Ghana have expanded their product lines. Throughout 2013, more electrification projects have been carried out by Chinese firms in the fields of production, transportation, distribution, and marketing of power thanks to the cooperation between China and Ghana in the energy sector.

The connections between the Bui ensemble and the Dams Dialogue assemblage show how external factors have an impact on Chinese involvement in interna-

tional dam projects. Here, the BRI plan can be put into practice in this area to improve the power sector, stop electricity outages, and promote reliable power across the nation. A list of the key players and supporting Chinese dam firm operations in Ghana is provided below.

Agriculture

Minerals and natural resources have significantly improved Ghana's economic structure, having a significant impact on people's livelihoods. More than 60% of the population depends on the agriculture industry for both a living and a source of income. The fact that the agricultural sector only accounts for 15% of the GDP, however, highlights the urgent need for more investment in this industry. If the BRI were used in this industry, it would be successful. China has had a negligible impact on Ghana's agricultural industry from the start of their partnership. Chinese investments were mostly concentrated in the business and infrastructure sectors. Nevertheless, after the One Belt One Road Initiative and Road Initiative (BRI) proposal was put into action, both nations realized they needed to increase their agricultural sector investments. As a result, they launched a number of initiatives to support Ghana's mass production and food security.

5. Case Study: The Bui Dam as an Analogue for Future Belt and Road Initiative Dynamics in Ghana

The Bui Dam on Ghana's Black Volta River constitutes a significant case study for understanding the dynamics of large-scale Chinese-financed infrastructure projects and their implications for future Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) engagement in Ghana. Although the dam was inaugurated in late 2013—coinciding with the formal launch of the BRI—it is essential to emphasize that its planning and contractual foundations substantially predate the initiative. Initial proposals for the Bui Dam date back to 1915, while the formal Engineering-Procurement-Construction (EPC) contract was signed in 2007 between the Government of Ghana and Sinohydro, with financing provided by the China Export-Import Bank (Hensengerth, 2017). As such, the project should be understood not as a BRI project per se, but as a precursor that offers valuable insights into the operational, political, and socio-environmental dynamics likely to characterize future BRI-related infrastructure developments in Ghana.

The Bui Dam was constructed as a hydroelectric facility intended to address Ghana's persistent energy deficits and support long-term national development objectives. With an installed capacity of 400 megawatts, the project was promoted by the Ghanaian government as a transformative intervention capable of stabilizing electricity supply and catalyzing industrial growth. Political elites framed the dam within nationalist and developmental discourses, presenting it as a symbol of modernity and self-reliance. However, the project also generated substantial controversy due to its environmental and social impacts. The construction of the dam resulted in the submergence of approximately 444 square kilometers of land, including sections of Bui National Park, forest ecosystems, and several rural settle-

ments. Critics argued that these impacts would lead to irreversible ecological damage and the displacement of vulnerable communities, raising questions about the equitable distribution of development benefits.

From a bilateral perspective, the completion of the Bui Dam marked a turning point in China-Ghana relations. Whereas earlier interactions between the two countries were largely episodic, the dam institutionalized sustained cooperation through financial, technical, and diplomatic channels. Using the analytical framework of soft power, scholars have argued that China's involvement in the Bui Dam was not solely driven by commercial or developmental considerations, but also by strategic efforts to enhance its international image and facilitate the overseas expansion of Chinese enterprises. Large infrastructure projects such as Bui functioned as visible demonstrations of Chinese engineering capacity and developmental partnership, reinforcing China's reputation as a reliable alternative to Western donors.

Nevertheless, evidence from the Bui case suggests that the effectiveness of such soft power strategies varies across scales. While cooperation at the national level strengthened diplomatic ties and expanded commercial opportunities for Chinese firms, local-level outcomes were more contested. The project illustrates the limits of soft power when confronted with localized environmental degradation, resettlement challenges, and livelihood disruptions. These findings are particularly relevant for assessing future BRI projects, which similarly combine geopolitical ambitions with localized socio-environmental consequences.

Methodologically, the analysis of the Bui Dam draws on extensive fieldwork conducted in both Ghana and China, complemented by open-source materials. Primary data were collected through 28 semi-structured interviews with Chinese officials, engineers, and workers from major dam-building companies—including Sinohydro, Gezhouba, and the Three Gorges Corporation—as well as representatives from recipient countries, academics, and non-governmental organizations. Many of these interviews were conducted during and after the World Hydropower Congress held in Beijing in May 2015. Additional field visits to the Bui Power Authority and resettlement sites were undertaken between July and October 2015, alongside interviews with Ghanaian government officials, Chinese embassy staff, and researchers based in Accra. Secondary data were obtained from news reports, official yearbooks, and institutional websites, including the Chinese Embassy in Ghana's *Ghana Chinese Business Directory* (2014), which documents the presence and activities of Chinese firms in the country.

The Bui Dam also provides insight into the financing and governance structures that often underpin Chinese overseas infrastructure projects. Although the project was funded by China Exim Bank, subsequent attempts by Sinohydro to secure financing for additional dam projects in Ghana were unsuccessful. This outcome challenges the widespread perception that Chinese firms operating abroad benefit from unconditional state backing. Instead, the Bui experience suggests that Chinese companies frequently compete for contracts under conditions similar to

those faced by other international firms, relying on host governments and non-Chinese financiers for project support. In this regard, the financial ties between Chinese corporations and the Chinese state outside China appear more limited and contingent than is often assumed.

One of the most contentious aspects of the Bui Dam concerns resettlement and social impacts. Sinohydro declined direct involvement in resettlement activities, citing limited expertise and a preference to minimize risk. Responsibility for resettlement therefore fell primarily on Ghanaian authorities. Subsequent research indicates that resettled communities experienced declines in economic stability and food security, underscoring the long-term social costs of large dam projects (Obour et al., 2016). Furthermore, limited transparency regarding China Exim Bank's environmental and social monitoring mechanisms has raised concerns about accountability. These outcomes sit uneasily with official BRI discourse, which emphasizes sustainability, mutual benefit, and responsible development under the banner of the "Silk Road Spirit."

Despite these challenges, the Bui Dam remains a valuable analogue for anticipating future BRI dynamics in Ghana. The project illustrates how Chinese financial and technical assistance can address critical infrastructure needs, while simultaneously exposing governance gaps related to environmental protection and social inclusion. As the BRI continues to evolve, similar tensions are likely to emerge in Ghanaian projects involving energy, transport, and industrial infrastructure.

At the global level, the relevance of the Bui case is reinforced by China's expanding role in dam construction through BRI-linked institutions. Of the 34 projects approved by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, three involve large dams, including the Tarbela Dam expansion in Pakistan and rehabilitation projects in Indonesia and Tajikistan. Chinese dam builders are also involved in projects financed by the Silk Road Fund, using these platforms to expand their international operations beyond formally designated BRI projects. The Bui Dam thus highlights how future BRI initiatives in Ghana are likely to intersect with complex networks involving Chinese firms, host governments, multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, and local stakeholders.

In conclusion, although the Bui Dam predates the formal launch of the BRI, it offers critical lessons for understanding how future BRI projects may unfold in Ghana. Its experience underscores the importance of transparent governance, robust environmental safeguards, and inclusive social policies in ensuring that large-scale infrastructure investments contribute to sustainable and equitable development.

6. Suggestions for Future Developments of This Project

The potential effects of Ghana's participation in the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) Initiative can be assessed through its implications for the country's balance of payments, infrastructure development, and employment creation. These outcomes must be examined in light of OBOR's stated objectives, Ghana's existing economic

relationship with China, and the developmental priorities of the Ghanaian population. Infrastructure development, particularly in transport networks, remains central to Ghana's long-term economic transformation.

Historically, infrastructure investment has played a decisive role in Ghana's economic progress. The construction of major railway lines between 1901 and 1923 enabled access to forest zones, facilitated cocoa cultivation, and contributed significantly to Ghana's emergence as the world's leading cocoa producer. Empirical evidence supports this linkage, as efficient infrastructure services are widely recognized as a critical driver of market development and output growth in developing economies. OBOR's emphasis on infrastructure connectivity therefore aligns closely with Ghana's development needs.

Although Ghana's infrastructure base is more advanced than that of many low-income African countries, significant deficits remain, particularly regarding quality and maintenance. Ghana has expanded infrastructure coverage, concerns persist over service reliability and long-term sustainability (Gutman & Chattopadhyay, 2015). Since 2000, successive governments have prioritized infrastructure development, including a reported six-billion-dollar investment to modernize road networks and construct new north-south rail links. These initiatives underscore the urgency of securing complementary external financing and technical expertise, which OBOR could potentially provide.

However, maximizing the benefits of OBOR participation requires deliberate policy choices. First, Ghana must shift its focus from expanding infrastructure quantity to ensuring quality, resilience, and value-for-money outcomes as it approaches middle-income status. Second, robust legal and institutional frameworks are essential. The engagement of qualified local legal experts can help ensure compliance with national laws, safeguard public interests, and manage contractual risks associated with large-scale international projects.

Finally, Ghana should adopt targeted industrial policy measures to protect and strengthen its domestic private sector. Drawing on experiences from other OBOR-engaged countries, policy tools such as local content requirements, mandatory use of local labor and materials, and tax incentives for firms investing in domestic processing can help ensure that foreign investment complements rather than displaces local industry. Coordinating effectively with labor organizations will further support inclusive growth and employment sustainability.

7. Conclusion

This research has stated that Ghana is not yet a formal benefactor of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative. Nevertheless, the longstanding Sino-Ghanaian relationship, rooted in political and economic cooperation since the 1960s, provides a strong foundation for potential future implementation. This historical bond has facilitated the formation of robust trade relations, with China currently serving as Ghana's second-largest exporter. These factors, coupled with Ghana's political stability, peace, and growing demand for manufactured goods, make the country

an attractive candidate for OBOR investment.

The potential benefits of OBOR participation are significant. Infrastructure development is central to the initiative, aiming to improve connectivity through roads, railways, and other transport networks. Historically, infrastructure has been a critical driver of economic development in Ghana; for example, the construction of two essential railway lines between 1901 and 1923 enabled access to tropical forests, facilitating cocoa cultivation and securing Ghana's global export position. Modern OBOR projects could similarly enhance trade, attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), stimulate industrial growth, and generate employment opportunities.

The Bui Dam on the Black Volta River exemplifies how pre-BRI projects can serve as analogues for future OBOR dynamics. Although the dam was inaugurated in 2013, planning and agreements predate the formal launch of OBOR, with concepts originating in 1915 and contracts signed in 2007. Implemented with Chinese financial and technical support (China Exim Bank and Sino Hydro), the project addressed national energy needs while highlighting the importance of managing environmental and social impacts, including resettlement and food security. The Bui Dam demonstrates the potential for integrating local industrial capacity with foreign expertise while emphasizing the need for careful regulatory oversight.

Despite these opportunities, challenges persist. A primary concern is the redundancy of local manufacturing industries caused by cheaper imported goods, which could lead to bankruptcy among domestic producers. To address this, Ghana must prioritize local industrialization while creating an enabling policy environment that protects the private sector. Specific measures could include local content requirements mandating the use of domestic materials and labor in construction and manufacturing, tax incentives for firms investing in local processing of natural resources, and strengthened legal frameworks to ensure compliance with labor, environmental, and commercial regulations. Drawing on the experiences of other BRI-engaged countries, these policies can help foreign investment complement rather than replace domestic industries, promoting sustainable economic growth.

In conclusion, Ghana's immediate priority remains local industrialization. However, given the historical Sino-Ghanaian bond, OBOR participation represents a prudent future step. By implementing targeted industrial policies and regulatory protections, Ghana can leverage Chinese investment to strengthen its domestic economy, enhance infrastructure, and achieve self-sustaining growth. Ultimately, the success of future OBOR projects in Ghana will depend on the government's ability to balance foreign investment with the development and protection of local industries.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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