

**ENTERING THE DRAGON'S DEN: CONTEMPORARY RISKS AND  
OPPORTUNITIES OF CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE FOR AFRICA**

**By**

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## **ABSTRACT**

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, has emerged as a prominent driver of Sino-African relations, with the potential to significantly impact Africa's economy. This study critically examines the contemporary risks and opportunities of the BRI for Africa, aiming to contribute to the academic discourse on the effects of this initiative in the region. This investigation sheds light on the complex dynamics at play by exploring the potential implications for economic growth, development strategies, and long-term engagements. Through an in-depth analysis of the opportunities offered by the BRI, including infrastructure development, industrialisation, and digital development, as well as an examination of the associated risks related to debt sustainability, security, and dependency, this research provides valuable insights into the BRI's impact on African nations. The findings emphasise the need for African stakeholders and decision-makers to carefully assess the trade-offs between opportunities and risks. Employing a qualitative methodological approach grounded in various international political economy theories, this study offers nuanced analysis and recommendations. Ultimately, this research underscores that while the BRI holds immense potential for Africa, strategic risk management and tailored approaches are essential to maximise the benefits and navigate the challenges in this multifaceted landscape.

## ABSTRAK

China se gordel-en-pad-inisiatief (GPI), soos geloods in 2013, is 'n prominente drywer van Sino-Afrika betrekkinge, met die potensiaal om 'n aansienlike impak op Afrika se ekonomie te hê. Hierdie studie ondersoek krities die kontemporêre risiko's en geleenthede van die GPI vir Afrika en dra daarmee by tot die akademiese diskoers oor die effekte van hierdie inisiatief in die streek. Hierdie ondersoek werp lig op die komplekse dinamika wat betrokke is deur 'n omvattende ondersoek van die moontlike implikasies vir ekonomiese groei, ontwikkelingsstrategieë en langtermynbetrokkenheid. Deur 'n deeglike analise van die geleenthede wat deur die GPI gebied word, insluitende infrastruktuurontwikkeling, industrialisering en digitale vooruitgang, tesame met 'n grondige ondersoek van geassosieerde risiko's soos skuldvolhoubaarheid, sekuriteit en afhanklikheid, bied hierdie navorsing waardevolle insigte in die impak van die GPI op Afrikalande. Die bevindinge beklemtoon die noodsaaklikheid van noukeurige assessering en oorweging van die ooreenkoms tussen geleenthede en risiko's vir Afrika-insethouers en besluitnemers. Deur 'n kwalitatiewe metodologiese benadering te gebruik wat gewortel is in verskeie internasionale politieke ekonomiese teorieë, bied hierdie studie goed deurdagte analise en waardevolle aanbevelings. Uiteindelik beklemtoon hierdie navorsing dat, terwyl die GPI groot potensiaal vir Afrika inhou, dit noodsaaklik is om strategiese risikobestuur en pasgemaakte benaderings te volg om maksimum voordeel te behaal en die uitdagings in hierdie veelsydige landskap te hanteer.

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## **DEDICATION**

To Africa, the land of boundless potential and resilience,

This thesis is dedicated to the pursuit of your economic development and prosperity. Your rich history, vibrant culture, and diverse resources have laid the foundation for a thriving continent.

I am humbled by your resilience in the face of challenges and inspired by your unwavering determination to overcome them. Through this research, I aim to contribute to your sustainable growth, equitable opportunities, and inclusive progress.

May this work serve as a catalyst for innovative solutions, policy reforms, and transformative investments that empower your people, unlock your vast potential, and create a brighter future for all.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>Abbreviation/ Acronym</b>	<b>Definition</b>
4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Agreement
AfDB	African Development Bank
AFRICOM	United States Africa Command
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
B3W	Build Back Better World
BDS–3	BeiDou-3 Navigation Satellite System
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CDB	China Development Bank
Chexim	Export–Import Bank of the Republic of China
CIDCA	China International Development Cooperation Agency
COIDIC	China Overseas Infrastructure and Investment Corporation
CRBC	China Road and Bridge Corporation
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DSR	Digital Silk Road
DSSI	Debt Service Suspension Initiative
EAC	East African Community
EU	European Union
eWTP	Electronic World Trade Platform
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FOCAC	Forum on China–Africa Cooperation
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GATT	Global Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product

IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
IoT	Internet of Things
IPE	International Political Economy
MCFTA	Mauritius–China Free Trade Agreement
MNC	Multi-national Corporation
MOFCOM	Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China
NGO	Non–Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ODIFs	Overseas Development Investment Funds
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PSC	Private Security Company
POE	Private Owned Enterprise
PRC	People's Republic of China
SACU	South African Customs Union
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programmes
SASAC	State–owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council
SGR	Standard Gauge Railway
SLOCs	Sea Lines of Communication
SOE	State Owned Enterprise
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States

## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Orientation

As Africa strives to emancipate itself from the burdens of poverty, hunger, and gross underdevelopment, it has found itself entering the proverbial dragon's den. China, often referred to as a dragon, has positioned itself as a key partner in Africa's economic development through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). However, this partnership presents both opportunities and risks similarly to how entering the dragon's den presents both the prospect of riches and the threat of fire. The BRI – as introduced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 – has been a notable driver of Sino-African relations (Bouey, Dossani & Zhu, 2020: 1). The BRI refers to a strategy initiated by China that seeks to connect Asia with Europe and Africa via land and maritime networks to increase trade, improve regional integration, and stimulate economic growth (Arduino & Caine, 2019: 3). The 'Belt' part of the initiative refers to developing a Silk Road Economic Belt. This land-based route stretches through Central Asia, and links Europe with Western China. The 'Road' refers to a sea-based route that links Africa and Southeast Asia with China's eastern ports (Dollar, 2019: 1).

However, the BRI is not merely an infrastructure initiative. The BRI is a product of China's 'going-out' strategy. A few decades ago, China had poor infrastructure, low income levels, and a largely agrarian economy. Under Deng Xiaoping's leadership (1978–1989), China started to pull away from full government intervention in the economy, and embraced certain open-market principles. Consequently, the need arose for greater participation in the global economy (Morrison, 2019: 193–194). The BRI should thus be viewed as an important piece of China's economic and political strategy. According to President Xi Jinping (2014), the BRI strives to promote connectivity beyond linear connections between different places. He describes the BRI as a three-way amalgamation of institutions, infrastructure development, and people-to-people exchanges, that promotes the advancement of capital flows, trade links, infrastructure connectivity, policy communication, and understanding. The BRI also directly supports China's national security strategy to such an extent that it was included in the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) constitution in 2017 (Berger & Russel, 2020: 7). The importance of the BRI as a tool to address security concerns is

also reflected in the BRI's inclusion in the United Nations' (UN) Resolution 2274 in 2016 under the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UN, 2016).

The BRI has become a substantial initiative, with its investments and financing stabilising at \$59.5 billion by the end of 2021 (Nedopil, 2022a: 3). The core finance for BRI projects is extended through the banking sector, whilst these banks are controlled by leaders of the CCP. However, this does not imply that Beijing has total control over economic actors (Carmody & Wainwright, 2022: 2) but rather that the BRI's implementation is characterised by "directed improvisation" (Ang, 2016: 71) or "hybrid governance" (Coe & McGregor, 2021: 12). Hameiri and Jones (2020) argue that although Beijing provides overall guidance, the BRI operates loosely, guiding the system towards general objectives instead of detailed outcomes. A study conducted by Eguegu and Fu (2021: 5) found that the implementation of the BRI is guided by different divisions of the Chinese government, such as the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Commerce as well as State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and select Private Owned Enterprises (POEs). These entities jointly mobilise resources and capital to advance development and facilitate investment in BRI regions.

For the purpose of this study, the BRI will be viewed not only as an infrastructure initiative but also as an umbrella term for Chinese investment in the African continent. It is pivotal to note that the BRI does not have a reliable list of participating countries or an official map (Barbesgaard, Olinga-Shannon & Verset, 2019: 6).

## **1.2 Significance of Study**

This research is of significance given that its findings could assist private decision-makers and government officials in determining whether or not the opportunities associated with the BRI outweigh the risks of engaging with the initiative in their specific case. Furthermore, the research intends to highlight macroeconomic and geopolitical trends associated with the BRI in Africa. Against this background, the findings of this study are of significance given that it would provide important information that could be conducive to more informed decision-making, particularly on the following three counts:

Firstly, given the diversity and scope of the BRI, it is crucial to understand what the initiative entails in an African context. This includes examining the finance structures of loans and transparency regulations, as well as examining changing trends within the BRI. The BRI is ever-evolving. For example, recent trends indicate a movement away from large-scale infrastructure investments that are often not profitable (e.g. coal) towards smaller projects that show quick results (e.g. solar and wind energy) (Nedopil, 2022a: 3). Not only does this help to mitigate the risks associated with large-scale infrastructure development, as is often associated with the BRI, but it also indicates the presence of more sustainable solutions. This is significant, given that large-scale infrastructure projects have historically been a prominent characteristic of the BRI (Nyabiage, 2022).

Secondly, the BRI could play a pivotal role in Africa's economic development. By 2021, 34% of African households were living below the international poverty line (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2021a: 3). At the time, 490 million people in Africa were living in extreme poverty, an estimated 37 million more than what was projected before the COVID-19 pandemic (UNCTAD, 2021b). The prevalence of the BRI in Africa means that it will inevitably influence how the economy on the continent develops. Low-income countries tend to have small foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows, low trade, and marginal participation in global value chains, since their economies are poorly integrated into global and regional markets (World Bank, 2019: 4). The emphasis placed by the BRI on increased government cooperation, better trade routes, and improvement of local infrastructure could help solve this dilemma (Ruta, 2018: 3). However, the lack of transparency in the BRI could increase corrupt practices and create future fiscal insecurity (Chen, 2022). The BRI could have an adverse or a positive impact on African economic development. If the opportunities associated with the initiative are embraced effectively, it could assist in improving socio-economic conditions on the continent. However, fragile African economies could face increased socio-economic hardships if the risks associated with the initiative are not mitigated. Consequently, it is important to research the initiative in order to better understand how it could potentially impact the continent.

Lastly, it is important to examine the strategic intentions behind the initiative to understand its long-term impact on the continent. Given the power imbalance between

China and African countries, the risks and opportunities of this vast initiative should be examined and understood to promote informed participation decisions. China has already demonstrated an increased interest in framing its financial contribution to Africa as development finance instead of development assistance. This reduced emphasis on aid has highlighted the commercial aspects of Chinese financing (Sun, 2019: 105). The BRI is intended to further Chinese interest in Africa, despite Beijing's promotion of an altruistic narrative of South–South cooperation. The initiative is propelled by strategic alliances, diplomatic openings, access to resources, and access to new markets (Achberger & Falola, 2013: 435). Consequently, these strategic interests have to be studied and understood to ensure that they do not have an adverse effect on African domestic priorities.

### **1.3 Problem Statement and Research Question**

Given the size and scope of the BRI, this initiative could substantially impact Africa's economy. Therefore, it is important to understand what the initiative's potential is but also what risks it will pose. The BRI can provide Africa with numerous opportunities. Firstly, Africa has a significant infrastructure gap. This challenge will be of increasing importance, given the renewed interest of the continent in strengthening regional trade (Herman, 2022). Consequently, the BRI could be employed to provide Africa with much-needed trade infrastructure, such as roads and railways (Adeniran *et al.*, 2021: 7). Secondly, the BRI could assist with digital development in Africa. The Digital Silk Road (DSR), launched in 2015, is a crucial part of the BRI, and can provide critical resources to the growing African population, improving both standard of living and local economies. The DSR refers to the technology dimension of the BRI, and encompasses all things technology-related, such as smart cities, the development of the digital service sector, internet finance, and the acceleration of technological progress, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and big data (Arcesati, 2021). Lastly, the BRI could assist with industrialisation in Africa. Africa is considered the least industrialised region globally (Hai, 2020). The BRI could be used as a powerful tool to enhance the continent's industrialisation efforts by fostering greater inclusion of African economies in international value chains and improving the continent's manufacturing capabilities and human capital (Lall & Lebrand, 2019)

However, the BRI also poses numerous risks. Firstly, as promoted by the BRI, China's strategic economic and geopolitical intentions could create risks for Africa. Consequently, Africa could be at risk of being used to promote Chinese objectives at the cost of African economic growth. Secondly, the impact of the Chinese economic slowdown on the economy of Africa should be considered. China's ongoing real estate downturn, coupled with President Xi Jinping's renewed interest in improving domestic living standards, could change FDI patterns in China (Hsu, 2022). As promoted by the BRI, the close economic ties between China and Africa could pose significant risks for the African economy. Lastly, African countries risk being exposed to excessive debt burdens due to unfavourable loan agreements and a lack of transparency. According to Stein and Uddhammar (2021: 18), Chinese lenders often utilise collateral arrangements, such as debt-for-equity swaps and lender-controlled revenue accounts, in conjunction with acceleration, stabilisation, and cancellation clauses in contracts to allow creditors to influence debtors' foreign and domestic policies.

The problem statement is delineated conceptually, geographically and temporally.

Conceptual demarcation: The research is limited to selected risks and opportunities associated with the BRI as analysed through the lens of International Political Economy (IPE).

Geographic demarcation: The analysis will focus on the risks and opportunities the BRI generates in Africa. The African Union (AU) (2023) recognises 55 African states divided into five geographic regions as defined by the Organisation of African Unity in 1976. However, according to the UN's (2022) official statistics, there are 54 sovereign African states. Given that this is more widely accepted, the analysis will be confined to the 54 African states included in the UN's definition. BRI case studies outside of Africa, such as the case of Sri Lanka (see Risberg, 2019), will be consulted if these cases directly affect the research problem.

Temporal demarcation: The research concentrates primarily on Sino–African developments after the establishment of the BRI in 2013. However, historical ties and pre-2013 developments are also considered if they are relevant to the research problem.

Given the above, the current study will attempt to answer the central research question:

*What are the opportunities and risks associated with the BRI?*

This question generates two subsidiary questions:

- To what extent can the BRI strengthen international development and create more opportunities for African countries?
- What are prominent risks for African countries, since the BRI would not be without risk for those involved in BRI projects?

#### **1.4 Aim and Objectives of Study**

Against this background, the study will aim to analyse the BRI to determine the risks and opportunities it generates for Africa.

Firstly, this study will attempt to understand what the BRI entails in an African context. The Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) 8 committed to increasing its commitment of \$43.4 billion in Chinese investment to Africa to \$60 billion by 2035 (Xi, 2021). Given the size and scope of the BRI, it is thus crucial to understand how Chinese investment takes place in an African context. Increased competition for developmental finance through the European Union’s (EU) Global Gateway strategy and the United States’ (US) Build Back Better World (B3W) could have a significant influence on how the BRI is implemented (Nedopil, 2022a: 3). Although it falls outside of the scope of this study to analyse these emerging initiatives, it remains important to take note of these developments. The increased presence of alternatives to the BRI necessitates deeper understanding of the initiative given that African countries will likely be faced with increased options in coming years. The current study will therefore focus on understanding how the BRI operates in an African context amidst contemporary developments.

Secondly, the objective of the study will be to understand the current economic and political realities in Africa and to identify the subsequent risks and opportunities associated with the BRI. Africa's share of global trade amounted to 2.8% in 2019, and intraregional trade represented 14.4% of the continent’s total trade (UNCTAD, 2021b: 4). Within the context of the continent’s low levels of international and interregional

trade, initiatives such as the AU's African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) have been established. The AfCFTA is a landmark trade agreement that was signed in March 2018, and commits African countries to remove trade tariffs on 90% of goods, address numerous non-tariff barriers, and progressively liberalise trade in services (Songwe, 2019: 97). According to Fu (2022), trade infrastructure is needed if the AfCFTA is to be a success. Fu adds that infrastructure development – such as railways and roads to link rural and urban areas – also plays a crucial part in the AU's Agenda 2063 and Africa's post-COVID-19 recovery. According to the AU (2022), Agenda 2063 is the continent's strategic framework for sustainable and inclusive development and includes a robust strategy that describes how the African continent plans to achieve this vision by 2063. Within this context, the BRI could be harnessed to compliment the continent's development efforts, if the continent's current economic and political realities is taken into account.

Lastly, this study will explore the strategic goals and intentions of China's foreign policy to understand the motivations and driving factors of the BRI. China's rise as a military and economic power has been driven primarily by its political and nationalistic determination to play an influential and assertive role in shaping the international system (Jain, 2019: 157). The BRI, therefore, forms a large part of Chinese foreign policy and is intrinsically linked to these strategic ambitions. In order to understand the opportunities and risks associated with the BRI for Africa, the study has to take into account more nuanced aspects of Beijing's foreign policy. This includes going beyond the narratives promoted in popular discourse, such as that of debt-trap diplomacy, in order to assess larger patterns present in Sino–African engagement and how these developments align with Beijing's larger strategic intentions with regards to the BRI.

## **1.5 Methodology**

This research is a descriptive study that will utilise states as units of analysis. Descriptive research refers to an investigation that attempts to secure the accurate analysis, description, and recording of phenomena through narrative description, classification, and relationship analysis (Vijayalakshmi & Sivapragasam, 2008: 7) and can be applied to interpret political symbols and phenomena (Lauer, 2021: 1). Consequently, this study will attempt to develop an accurate representation of the risks and opportunities the BRI could create for African countries –first by employing a

theoretical framework, and then by analysing the complex relationships between all the relevant state and non-state actors. The primary unit of analysis used in this research is African countries that participate in the BRI. Although the level of analysis will mainly be state-centric, other important continental, regional, and international role players and factors will also be considered. The study will keep in mind that Africa is not a homogenous entity, given the cultural, political, and economic differences between African states. However, the choice was made to analyse Africa as a continent based on –

- the increased presence of regional economic integration on the continent (Songwe, 2019: 97);
- the fact that the vast majority of African countries have signed memorandums of understanding (MoU) with regard to the BRI (Green Finance and Development Centre, 2022); and
- the nature of the general themes of the study.

This research will be conducted as a qualitative study. Although this method will allow for an in-depth analysis of complex non-numerical data, it exposes the study to the risk of being subjective (McLeod, 2019: 2–3). Consequently, it is imperative to be aware of any personal bias when using this method. The study will comprise of an integrative literature review. An integrative review seeks to evaluate, analyse, and amalgamate existing literature concerning a research subject, aiming to facilitate the emergence of fresh theoretical frameworks and perspectives (Snyder, 2019: 335). A literature review using primary sources, such as official records, loan agreements and speeches, will be used in conjunction with secondary sources, such as scholarly articles, books, and journals. Given the dynamic nature of the research problem, reputable internet sources will also be consulted, particularly in the case of very recent developments and in cases where it is necessary to illustrate examples of popular narratives surrounding the BRI. It is important to note that rigorous evaluation and critical analysis of internet sources will be applied during the research process. The credibility, reliability, and validity of each source will be carefully assessed to ensure the inclusion of reputable and trustworthy information.

The literature reviewed will be collected by way of various sources and perspectives to assure that the findings are representative of the problem at hand and accurate. Given the political nature of the BRI, the possible biases contained in reports and studies will be considered. It is also important to note that the current study will be limited to identifying the themes or patterns in information gathered from text and ascribing it to specific research areas as determined by the bounds of the study. A further limitation is the availability of primary sources, given the extensive confidentiality clauses included in BRI contracts (see Risberg, 2019).

A deductive and a nomothetic approach will be used to accommodate the multiple dimensions of the problem statement. A deductive approach starts by establishing a theory or hypothesis, then proceeds to test the theoretical assumptions and validate them using empirical data (Bhattacharjee, 2012: 5). The current study can be considered deductive since it will utilise multiple theoretical frameworks from IPE to explain the cases at hand. A nomothetic approach attempts to identify a number of causal factors which generally affect a large class of cases or events (DeCarlo, 2018: 169). A nomothetic approach will be used to establish the risks and opportunities of the BRI, specifically in Africa. This will include establishing theoretical themes in the causal relationship between different non-state and state actors, such as better understanding the relationship between Chinese POEs, SOEs, and African governments as encouraged by the BRI.

It is of considerable importance to conduct any given study in an ethical manner. Research inherently embodies asymmetric power relations, as the researcher chooses all elements of the study. To mitigate this bias, it is important for the researcher to self-reflect critically (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018: 211). If this step is neglected, the research could be skewed. This research will be based on a literature review and will not involve questionnaires, interviews or any other form of direct human contact. This limits risks associated with individual harm. The study will utilise credible sources from different perspectives to ensure the research is fair and just. The research will also utilise open-access sources or obtain the needed permission to access sources in order to respect other authors' intellectual property rights. Furthermore, plagiarism, falsification, and fabrication will be avoided. All necessary ethical clearance will be obtained for this study. This will be done by submitting an

application to the University of the Free State's ethics committee and following the subsequent procedures.

## **1.6 Literature Review**

The literature and data sources to be consulted in this research can be categorised into six sections.

### **1.6.1 The BRI's role in African infrastructure development**

Some authors see the BRI as China's grand strategy to increase its global power (Andornino, 2017) with the potential to have a significant influence on global infrastructure development (Wiig & Silver, 2019) or, in some cases, world order (Wang, 2016). Authors such as Kirchherr *et al.* (2018) and Williams, Robinson and Bouzarovski (2020) describe the BRI as the most extensive infrastructure programme in human history. By drawing on the tenets of cooperation theory, Lisinge (2020) found that infrastructure development through the BRI can still assist Africa in reaching its connectivity aspirations despite China and Africa having different motivations. Similarly, Wang and Xu (2022) found that BRI infrastructure projects could address bottlenecks in supply chains. Reports from the African Development Bank (AfDB) (2022) and the African Union Commission (AUC) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2022), as well as various research articles and reports including Grieger (2019), Eguegu and Fu (2021), Coetzee (2021), Munemo (2021), Otele (2022), and Fu (2021) are of significance.

### **1.6.2 The BRI's role in African industrialisation and economic development**

Mungomba and Phiri (2019) propose that industrialisation is key to Africa's inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Calabrese (2022) agrees and proposes that the BRI can be instrumental in Africa's industrialisation. Authors suggest that the BRI can assist in Africa's industrialisation by having a positive impact on the continent's manufacturing industry (Osidipe, 2019), human capital development (Nakamba-Kabaso, 2019), and attracting FDI (Prakash, 2019). There are various sources relating to the BRI's role in African industrialisation and economic development that will be consulted, including works by Lall and Lebrand (2019), Adesina (2019), Hai (2020), and Marfo and Oke (2022).

### **1.6.3 The DSR's role in Africa's digital development**

As elaborated on by Van der Lugt (2021), literature regarding the DSR often represents divergent approaches. From a Chinese perspective, this branch of the BRI is seen as an attempt to lessen the gap between developed and underdeveloped states through effective capacity building (see Shen, 2018), whereas a Western perspective sees the DSR as providing unethical support to authoritarian leaders (see Morgus & Sherman, 2018). According to Songwe (2020) and Abou-Zeid (2021), digitalisation is one of the most powerful tools for achieving Africa's long-term developmental goals. Kurlantzick (2020), Arcesati (2021) and Tugendhat and Voo (2021) all reason that the DSR could significantly increase digital development in BRI countries. Agbebi (2022) highlights the significant role Chinese financing and Chinese companies play in providing telecommunication infrastructure in Africa, whereas Tianren (2021) sees the value of the DSR in terms of its potential to empower Africa to become part of the global digital economy. Research by authors such as Nyabiage (2021) and Adegoke (2021) as well as reports by the OECD (2020) and the FOCAC (2021) will also be consulted.

### **1.6.4 The BRI's role in the promotion of excessive debt burdens**

Chellaney (2017) and Chen (2018) raise concerns regarding the BRI's promotion of unsustainable debt levels. Hurley, Morris and Portelance (2019) reason that a prominent concern is that the magnitude of the BRI will result in states facing burdensome debt levels that will hinder their ability to make prudent public investments. These concerns have been exasperated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic brought about economic decline, decreased tax returns and exports, and an increased need for government stimulus. This has left numerous African countries unable to pay interest and principles on their sovereign debt (Brautigam, 2023). Nedopil Wang and Yue (2020) reason that current Chinese strategies for dealing with debt relief requests include write-offs, deferment, asset seizure, or term renegotiation. However, the authors raise concerns that these strategies merely postpone credit risks. Works by Singh (2021), Chen and Lui (2021), Butler, Jie and Vines (2022), and Malik, Parks and Wooley (2022) are of significance. Loan agreements such as that between the Government of the Republic of Ghana and

the Export–Import Bank of the Republic of China (Chexim) (2015) and between the Government of the Republic of Cameroon and Chexim (2016) will be examined.

#### **1.6.4 Security concerns associated with Beijing’s strategic intentions**

While some literature argues that the BRI lacks a clear strategy (see Brakman *et al.*, 2019; Sarsenbayev & Véron, 2020), other literature, such as Hillman and Sacks (2021), view Chinese strategic intentions as being primarily self-serving, and these authors consequently doubt the feasibility of mutual benefit from China–Africa relations. While authors such as Kurlantzick (2020), raise concerns that China might use the BRI to promote their own ideologies. In an official capacity, the goals of the BRI are stated as connectivity, trade, financial integration, and coordination (see Xi, 2014). However, various authors discuss many possible motivations behind the BRI. Authors such as Wang (2016), Huang (2020) and Songwe (2019) view these motivations as driven by economic intentions, whereas authors such as Jain (2019) and Tanchum (2021) reason that geopolitical intentions drive the BRI. The current study will draw from these authors collectively to establish the extent to which economic and geopolitical intentions fuel the BRI in Africa. The six drivers of contemporary Chinese foreign policy, as established by Gill (2022), and the geopsychological approach to China’s foreign policy, as developed by Jain (2019), will be of particular significance in this study. Research by Cooper, Gunnes and Heath (2016), Guluzade (2020), Feigenbaum (2022), Miller (2022), and Choudhary (2023) will be consulted in order to illustrate the security risks that accompany the BRI due to Beijing’s strategic intentions.

#### **1.6.6 Dependency concerns**

Literature, such as Taylor and Zajontz (2020), Borghi (2021), and Mitchell (2022) expresses concern for Africa’s increasing economic dependence on China. Diko (2022) reasons that the inability of Evergrande, one of China’s largest property development companies, to make its interest payment deadline to international investors in September 2021 indicates more significant problems in the Chinese economy. She remarks that turbulence in the Chinese economy would decrease expected FDI flows to African countries. Similarly, Baum and Thies (2020), argue that Beijing’s involvement in geopolitical conflict would result in a severe reduction of investments made through the BRI, making African dependence on China

problematic. Lastrapes (2018) and Bociaga (2023) identify the widening trade deficit between Africa and China as a prominent concern. Eguegu and Fu (2021) reason that this trade deficit could create an unequal power dynamic between African states and China. Various research articles and reports, including Stuart (2019), Hruby (2019), Were (2022), and Calabrese and Tang (2023), are of significance.

### **1.7 Limitations of study**

It is important to note that this research will be limited to exploring three types of risks and opportunities posed by the BRI in Africa. This can create some challenges with regards to making generalised conclusions pertaining to the BRI in Africa given that there is much more opportunities and risks associated with the initiative than what this research will attempt to explore. In order to advance conclusions that is accurate, the chosen opportunities and risks will be identified based on prominent themes in research and popular discourse as well as critical components of economic development in Africa.

### **1.8 Structure of Study**

The first chapter focuses on methodology and serves to introduce, identify, and define the research topic and problem. It delineates the scope of the study and outlines the research methodology employed. Additionally, the chapter includes a literature review summarising relevant sources to be utilised in the study.

The second chapter will comprise of a theoretical framework. Relevant IPE theories will be discussed in order to establish the foundation for further analysis. These theories include economic nationalism, economic liberalism, structuralism, and constructivism.

The third chapter will discuss the opportunities the BRI could create for African countries and will include three sections. The first section will examine the opportunity for infrastructure development that the BRI could afford African states. The second section will focus on how the BRI can assist in Africa's industrialisation and economic development. The third section will focus on how the DSR can equip Africa with the capacity to embrace the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and increase Africa's digital development.

The fourth chapter will reflect on the risks associated with the BRI and will include three sections. The first section will focus on unsustainable debt concerns associated with the BRI in Africa. The next section will focus on the security concerns that stem from Beijing's strategic intentions. Finally, risks associated with the Sino–African trade deficit and dependency concerns will be discussed.

The last chapter will review the salient aspects of the research, and will advance a conclusion in accordance with the research question. Following this, the chapter will report on the extent to which the BRI could provide African countries with added opportunities while elaborating on the main risks the BRI poses for African countries.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

As Africa strives to emancipate itself from the burdens of poverty, hunger, and gross underdevelopment, it has found itself entering the dragon's den. However, the promises of great riches come with the risk of getting burned by the dragon's fire. This metaphor represents the glistening opportunities and significant risks associated with Africa's involvement with China's BRI. The BRI is not merely an infrastructure initiative and represents China's 'going-out' strategy making it an integral piece of China's economic and political strategy. The size and scope of the initiative have made it an influential tool through which China can shape the global political economy. Consequently, this study is an effort to understand how this manifests in Africa in terms of creating new opportunities for development and increasing certain risks.

## CHAPTER 2: Theoretical Orientation

### 2.1 Introduction

In his ground-breaking work, *The twenty years' crisis 1919–1939*, Carr (1951: 117) asserts, “the science of economics presupposes a given political order and cannot be profitably studied in isolation from politics”.

The aim of this chapter is to present a theoretical framework capable of supporting the discussion that will follow in later chapters. This chapter does not aim to evaluate the BRI. It merely explains the theoretical tools that will be employed in the analysis. IPE provides a framework capable of exploring the complexity of the BRI and how it behaves on the African continent. This understanding of the current study of IPE was built on Balaam and Dillman’s (2016) understanding of the three main IPE perspectives, namely economic nationalism, economic liberalism, and structuralism. However, the study also uses constructivism to analyse the more nuanced elements of Sino–African relations given that constructivism provides valuable insights into the driving factors behind the decision-making of states (see Guzzini & Leander, 2006). Given that IPE is multi-disciplinary by nature, and utilises tools of analysis from its antecedent disciplines in order to describe and explain the dynamic relationships between states, societies and markets across history and geographic locations (Balaam & Dillman, 2016: 7), it can be deemed suitable to include constructivism in the analysis.

The first section in this chapter will discuss the mercantilist and economic nationalist perspectives. This section will aim to shed light on these theories in order to better understand state’s realist approach to foreign policy and its consequent protectionist policies. This will be followed by a section on economic liberalism that will shed light on classical, neo-classical and Keynesian thought. This section will provide insight into the composition of the global capitalist economy. Afterwards, a section will be dedicated to structuralism. This section will pay particular attention to Marxist thought and dependency theory to explore the contemporary North–South divide. Afterwards, the research will draw from constructivist thought in order to better understand the more nuanced aspects of the research question. Lastly, a conclusion will be provided.

## 2.2 Economic Nationalism

Economic nationalism builds on classical mercantilist thought (Nakano, 2004: 211). The emergence of modern nation-states in Europe during the sixteenth century is closely intertwined with classical mercantilism (Cunningham, 1907). The dominant economic theory of the time asserted that there was a finite supply of global wealth, making it pertinent to national interest to accumulate as much wealth as possible (Reinert & Reinert, 2011: 7). To achieve this, states focused on maximising their exports and minimising their imports in order to maintain a positive balance of trade. States consequently turned to imperialist policies, such as colonisation to maintain a favourable balance of trade (Herlitz, 1964: 105). Balance of trade can be seen as the difference between the value of imports and the value of exports of a country. Consequently, a positive balance of trade refers to a scenario in which exports exceed imports (Appleyard & Field, 2017: 17). Colonised territories served as suppliers of raw materials and a market for exports. Manufacturing was discouraged in colonies, and commerce between states and their colonies was monopolised by the mother country (Abugu & Onyishi, 2016: 9).

The term 'mercantilism' was coined by Adam Smith (1776) when he dismissively referred to the various policies and theories on how states should intervene in markets to increase power and wealth as mercantilists. According to Heckscher (1935), there are at least four key elements pertaining to mercantilism:

- it is seen as the economic element of converting disparate regions into nation states;
- it embodies a distinct conceptualisation of the nature of wealth that focuses on the critical nature of inflows;
- it is characterised by a body of policy that is designed to facilitate production in spite of high levels of competition by decreasing the costs of input; and
- it reasons that a state should pursue the accumulation of wealth in order to secure its power.

There are overlaps between mercantilist and realist thought. However, according to Balaam and Dillman (2016: 57), the distinction between realism and mercantilism is that the latter usually focuses on economic threats to the state while the former concerns itself with a wider variety of physical threats. Magnusson (1994: 18) reasons

that mercantilism primarily focuses on nation states while embracing a realist view of international relations by assuming that humans – and by extension states – are selfish entities in an anarchic global system. Therefore, the global political economy is shaped by national interest, and the pursuit of power is skewed in favour of the most powerful states. Gilpin (1975: 158) introduces a divergence between malevolent and benign mercantilist policy. The former refers to a state that intentionally embraces expansionary policy in order to increase its economic and political influence and/or territorial base to the detriment of other states beyond what can be considered sensible to protect themselves. The latter is predominantly protectionist in nature, and only aims to protect the economy of the state against untoward political or economic forces. It is therefore important not to force mercantilist theory into a good-or-bad dichotomy, but rather to embrace it as a lens through which to interpret the actions of states.

Protectionist policies garnered considerable traction amongst countries that sought to industrialise and develop their economies. In a reprint of his book, Hamilton (1913: 3) details how he reported to the US Congress in 1791 that an economy created on manufacturing instead of agriculture would protect the state from being dependent on competitor states for essential supplies. He reasoned that manufacturing using machines would allow for the full employment of the population, which would consequently increase the self-sufficiency of a country and, by extension, create wealth and security. List (1856: 76) expanded on Hamilton's argument by emphasising the importance of the human capital of a state. List argued that a state should only engage in trade once it is capable of meeting its own demand with domestically produced and/or manufactured supply. Trade is therefore viewed as a zero-sum game meaning that the absolute gains of one country will inevitably lead to an absolute loss for another (Magnusson, 1994: 118). External dependence is minimised as a way of protecting domestic economies from turbulent global markets. Mercantilist theory reasons that maintaining a current account surplus and exporting excess capital are crucial parts of fostering a healthy national economy. In a contemporary setting, this is often done by artificially lowering currency prices to encourage exports (Appleyard & Field: 2017: 16).

'Economic nationalism' became the successor term for mercantilism in the twentieth century (Nakano, 2004: 211). By the 1970s, mercantilist policies were seen as ineffective and unethical due to the effects it had on society in an increasingly interconnected global economy. Drezner (2017) reasons that classical mercantilism's ideas have lost credibility. Drezner argues that equating specie with wealth is a logical flaw in economics, and that emphasising production neglects the significant role domestic consumption plays in driving modern economic growth and power. Consequently, states started to turn to neo-mercantilist and/or economic nationalist policies to control the business cycle, generate economic growth, and reduce unemployment (Balaam & Dillman, 2016: 65). However, economic nationalism is often still viewed in a negative light. Johnson and Marlin-Bennett (2021) reason that economic nationalists, similar to mercantilists, expect the contest for wealth to mirror the contest for power amongst states. In addition, Baughn and Yaprak (1996: 760) describe economic nationalism as the practice of favouring one's own nation in economic matters, often through discriminatory policies.

Poast (2022: 2–3) reasons that economic nationalism as a theoretical framework retains its value as a prism through which analysts can interpret the motivations and actions of states in an increasingly complex global economy. Authors such as Gregory (1931) and Schrecker (1934) regarded economic nationalism as an economically inefficient but unavoidable characteristic of the international sphere. Realism asserts that the pursuit of national interest should be prioritised above higher ideals, such as the sanctity of international law, the commitment to open trade, and democratic virtues (see Poast, 2022: 2). Consequently, the realist view of states as selfish and power-maximising entities (see Machiavelli, 1531) is contrasted by scholars' normative beliefs of what the international community should be (see Wolf, 2005; Knight, 1998). Consequently, economic nationalism has been associated with a wide array of protectionist practices by authors such as Baughn and Yaprak (1996) and Dicken (2007). Examples of these protectionist practices include quotas, tariffs, countervailing duties, regulatory standards with the intent of barring foreign products from domestic markets (Baughn & Yaprak, 1996: 760), legal regulation of markets, subsidies for firms, and reorganisation of industries amongst other industrial policies (Nakano, 2004: 211).

A trend has emerged in which states with an economic nationalist approach to foreign engagement adopt liberal policy reforms. Helleiner (2002: 307–308) argues that economic nationalism is realist first before it is economic, meaning that states formulate economic policies based on national interest. States could consequently apply liberal and protectionist policies depending on their desired economic goals. D’Costa (2009) observed a similar trend, and argues that regulatory measures and protectionist policies are decreasing in efficiency due to increased globalisation and the deterioration of national borders causing previously inward-looking economic models to be challenged by contemporary forms of outward-looking competitive strategies in the international economy. Economic nationalism should thus be viewed as a dynamic concept (He & Zhang, 2014: 6), which aims, at its core, to promote the sovereignty and economic development of a state (Gilpin, 1975). D’Costa (2009: 622) offers a definition of economic nationalism that moves away from protecting domestic capital from foreign capital towards utilising local resources in order to extract maximum benefit from the global economy. Nationalist goals, including the promotion of autonomy and national unity, can thus be pursued through various economic policies that often include liberal economic policies, such as those related to free trade and pursuing FDI by multi-national corporations (MNCs) (He & Zhang, 2014: 6).

Numerous developing economies have moved away from protectionist policies towards state intervention based on nationalistic grounds to utilise the available opportunities in the global economy strategically (D’Costa, 2009: 622). Market reforms by Communist China and the state’s subsequent ‘going-out’ strategy is an example of this. According to Li (2022: 1–2), China entered a reform and opening-up phase under President Deng Xiaoping, which led to an ideological shift in Beijing’s foreign policy towards being more pragmatic and economy-orientated. The BRI is an example of this. According to Carmody and Wainwright (2022: 2), the BRI is driven by capital’s drive for expanded accumulation. However, the BRI is of particular interest since it deviates from normal capitalist projects in the sense that it is regulated and coordinated by Beijing and implemented by a diverse array of stakeholders such as SOEs, POEs and provincial governments (Wong, 2018: 737). Li (2022: 2) reasons that the 1980s and 1990s saw a rapid increase in non-ideological relations between China and Western countries based on technological assistance, expanding trade, economic cooperation, and investment. This showed that China was prepared to foster

nationalistic sentiment at home, whilst embracing opportunities in the global economy. Similarly, Eden *et al.* (2000: 253) noted that, despite being nationalistic at its core, the CCP embraced the gradual relaxation of state ownership control, market-leaning reforms, and development of private property rights in order to increase China's competitiveness in the global economy. Economic nationalist policies are thus becoming increasingly nuanced, especially as developing states attempt to integrate into the global economy of an increasingly globalised world.

Economic nationalist policies can result in the forced nationalisation of property, counter-trade restrictions, dumping of exported products at prices below domestic prices, and government subsidising of domestic firms to increase their international competitiveness (Baughn & Yaprak, 1996: 760). Furthermore, non-observance of conventional patent rights, discrimination in favour of domestic workers (localisation and indigenisation of personnel) and ignoring procedures as set out by international law and agreements, such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), have all been cited as examples of economic nationalism (Chow & Schoenbaum, 2019: 115). The US–China trade war illustrates the interplay of different nationalist policies. In 2018, the Trump administration imposed 25% duties on \$34 billion worth of imports from China, resulting in a trade war. These trade barriers aimed to protect the US domestic manufacturing industry (due to the dumping of lower-cost Chinese goods in US markets) and national security interests associated with non-compliance by China with patent rights, and alleged Chinese efforts to acquire US technology through forced technology transfers. This decision was countered by retaliatory tariffs imposed by Beijing on US goods (Aslam, 2022: 1).

Economic nationalist characteristics are often found in socialist or communist regimes, such as that of Cuba (Feinberg, 2018), China (Guluzade, 2020), and North Korea (Bajpai & Kelly, 2021). These states tend to have a centrally planned command economy that regulates trade by exercising control over foreign reserves and the balance of payments. Control over strategic resources is seen as a top priority, especially for rapidly industrialising nations. This has resulted in policies and programmes that aim to invest in resource-rich countries as a way of securing national interest (Balaam & Dillman, 2016: 72). Authors such as Jakobson (2009) and Sun (2019), list increased Chinese investment in the African continent as an example of

this. Economic nationalism can also take an offensive form that, instead of protecting domestic capital, strives to promote national capital abroad (D'Costa, 2009: 622).

It should be noted that a form of economic nationalism has developed amongst theorists in the Global South as a way of delinking relations of dependency from the North. Prashad (2008: 192–193) highlights this in a case study of Tanzania after independence. He reasons that a largely agrarian economy could not be competitive in an industrialised world since the international terms of trade are biased against agricultural commodities. Given that Tanzania still requires industrialised products, the state needs to grow its industrial sector to produce capital goods and to refine and process raw materials. This level of economic reform requires significant capital investment and political will. According to Prashad (2008), most national liberation regimes recognised the potential perils of commercial loans and foreign aid, and did not want to be rendered dependent on the Global North once again. This led to the nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy, such as energy, finance, raw material extraction, and capital goods. These policies put financial decisions in the hands of the state instead of transnational corporations. According to Magnusson (1994: 120), protectionist policies in developing economies forms a critical part of generating income, but also of protecting local industry.

### **2.3 Economic Liberalism**

Economic liberalism reasons that the state must play a limited, if not constricted, role in the economy. This school of thought builds on the *laissez-faire* approach to governmental interference. A *Laissez-faire* approach promotes the minimum interference of government in the economic affairs of society and individuals (Stahl, 2019: 474). Adam Smith (1776), whom is often regarded as the father of modern capitalist theory (Pack, 1991), opposed the mercantilist policies of the eighteenth century and believed that governmental intervention in the economy should be limited. He reasoned that it was in the best interest of the nation-state to employ its power to create wealth, which would then produce more power and national security. According to Scott (2007: 1) capitalism refers to an economic system in which the pricing mechanism, known as the invisible hand, harmonises demand and supply in markets in a way that is in society's best interest and where private actors are allowed to own and control the use of property according to their own interests. Proponents of

capitalism thus reason that the role of the state should thus be restricted to securing private property rights and establishing public legal frameworks (Abugu & Onyishi, 2016: 8). At the time, the right to property was seen as natural. Citizens, therefore, had to be considered individuals who held rights and had private wills (Locke, 1884). According to the invisible hand theory, as explained by Smith (1790: 165), the free market will ultimately regulate itself through a system of competition amongst firms. Smith thus believed that the capitalist economy is self-coordinating, self-regulating, and self-motivating, given that the allocation of resources is determined by consumers. Self-interest drives entrepreneurs to develop businesses and workers to produce the services and goods that correlate with consumers' needs. The market thus reflects preferences of consumers by coordinating economic activity. The presence of competition amongst different actors ensures that this pursuit of self-interest ultimately serves consumer, and by extension social, interests (Howard & Kumar, 2002: 130).

Although economic liberals believe that humans are selfish actors, they also believe that cooperation is possible in order to secure mutual gains (Johnson & Marlin-Bennett, 2021). Economic liberalism takes an atomistic approach in which individual autonomy and freedom of choice are pertinent (Abugu & Onyishi, 2016: 8). Given that individuals are viewed as rational beings with free will, it is assumed that they would choose to cooperate with one another given that this is the most beneficial choice. As opposed to mercantilism and economic nationalism, economic liberalism views the competitive human nature in a constructive manner that is guided by reason and not emotions. The basis for the contemporary justification of free trade is the principle of comparative advantage (Jones, 1961: 163). In his book, *On the principles of political economy and taxation*, David Ricardo (2001) built on Adam Smith's argument for international trade to develop the concept of comparative advantage further. The principle of comparative advantage reasons that international trade occurs between two states when the ratios of the comparative cost of producing goods differ, and each country specialises in producing that commodity which it can produce at a lower comparative cost (Ukwandu, 2015: 20). This principle suggests that international trade could benefit a state even if such state has the ability to produce all goods and services in greater quantities than can be produced abroad (Boudreaux, 2004: 373). Consequently, Ricardo (2001) embraced the notion of mutual dependence between states, and believed that this

positive-sum dynamic bound together different nations with a thread of common interest (Ukwandu, 2015: 19).

For the purpose of this study, it is also important to take note of the distinction between comparative advantage and competitive advantage. The concept of competitive advantage, as developed by Porter (1985), is closely related to comparative advantage but is broader in scope. Competitive advantage can also be applied to individual firms or industries within a country, not just at the national level (see Gupta, 2015). According to Porter (1985) competitive advantage encompasses the ability of a firm or industry to outperform its competitors in terms of production efficiency, quality, innovation, marketing, or other factors that provide a unique edge in the marketplace.

As the nature of state–market–societal interaction evolved, so did the view of economic liberalism on governmental interference in the economy. John Stuart Mill played a pivotal part in this evolution with his publication of *The Principles of Political Economy With Some of Their Applications to Societal Philosophy* (2004). In his original arguments, Mill (2004: 210–214) observed the inequality of outcome inherent in the free market, and advocated that the state should take action to correct certain market failures. Although he opposed excessive governmental interference, he believed that the state should play a select role in guiding the economy. John Maynard Keynes (1936) saw government intervention in the markets as pivotal to improving the economy of the state and the overall welfare of society. Keynesian economics, contrary to classical economic liberalist theory, reasons that free markets will not always find equilibrium at full employment (Johnson & Marlin-Bennett, 2021). Keynes thus refuted Say's law (see Say, 2001) by establishing that supply does not create its own demand. Consequently, demand management by the government is needed (Hall & Smith, 2002: 246). Howard and Kumar (2002: 130) explain how Keynes extended his theory to the international economy. Keynes rejected the notion that coordination was possible only through market exchange in national economies, and argued that supranational institutions formed a pivotal part of ensuring orderly conduct amongst states society. Kant (1983: 125) reasoned that an international federation of republicans would be natural trading partners, and the positive effects of commerce would neutralise hostilities. He believed that financial power was the most reliable power in forcing states to pursue peace.

Proponents of institutionalism (such as DiMaggio & Powell, 1991) reason that institutions can be used to create a more peaceful international environment since liberal markets with well-functioning institutions would result in peaceful outcomes that would be conducive to the forming of commercial ties that would, in turn, encourage further cooperation (Caporaso, 1998: 3). This is evident in contemporary political economy. With the continuous rise of China, Sino–African relations have become increasingly comprehensive and institutionalised. The establishment of the FOCAC in 2000 and the BRI in 2013 is evidence of this (Li, 2022: 2). International Monetary Fund (IMF)-imposed structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), especially in many debt-ridden states, have coerced these states to adopt neo-liberal policies that are market-friendly (D’Costa, 2009: 620). Morse (1970: 379) reasons that interdependence amongst states, as created by increased institutionalism, has caused ‘low policies’ (such as economic transactions and welfare) to become increasingly important. He explains that the new identification of a successful state is no longer limited to the classic goals of security and power but now includes economic growth and the welfare of citizens.

However, neoclassical economic liberals reject the Keynesian emphasis on coordination through the correlation of the global economy. These theorists see government intervention in the market as damaging to the economic freedom of society (Johnson & Marlin-Bennett, 2021). Friedman and Schwartz (1987: 311) regard government policies that aim to manipulate markets for political outcomes as unavoidable errors. The dominance of *laissez-faire* economic views translated to the ascendancy of the Washington Consensus (see Stahl, 2019). The Washington Consensus refers to a set of policies that gained support among policymakers in response to the debt crisis and macroeconomic turbulence of the early to mid-1980s (Williamson, 1993). This included ten economic policy prescriptions promoted by Washington that was considered to constitute the ‘standard’ reform package for struggling developing countries. These prescriptions included monetary and fiscal policies that aimed to reduce fiscal deficits and inflation and policies that promoted free-market principles such as privatisation, and trade liberalisation (Babb & Kentikelenis, 2021: 522). The Washington Consensus altered how governments and international financial institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank, made policies regarding foreign aid between the 1980s and 1990s. Economic efficiency was

regarded as the highest objective, and it was assumed that the mechanisms of the economy could be understood sufficiently to identify efficient policies (Saad-Filho, 2010: 3). Supporters of the Washington Consensus were not concerned with ensuring the equitable distribution of resources, but rather believed that this would be a natural by-product of increasing efficiency in the global economy. The policies promoted by the Washington Consensus centred on market-orientated domestic reforms, openness to investment and trade, and fiscal discipline (Williamson, 1993: 1329–1330). On the African continent, this resulted in the prescription of market-based reforms by international financial institutions under SAPs. SAPs were often prerequisites for financial assistance (Archibong, Coulibaly & Okonjo-Iweala, 2021). However, the popularity of neoclassical economic liberal policies, as promoted by the Washington Consensus, waned by the early 2000s due to the inability of the Consensus to facilitate positive economic growth in developing countries (Johnson & Marlin-Bennett, 2021). As predicted by Strange (2015: 139–140), a lack of appropriate governmental regulation results in domestic economies being left exposed to unfair dealings and negative externalities that result when self-interested actors are left unregulated.

Economic liberal policy is still very prominent in developing states. According to Ikenberry (2011: 58), China and other emerging economies have no intention to change the tenets of the liberal international order, but rather wish to increase their power within this system. An example of this is China's succession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 (Dams & Van der Putten, 2015: 13). According to Barbesgaard *et al.* (2019: 7), Beijing has no intention to undermine international organisations but rather attempts to utilise these organisations to increase the legitimacy of the BRI. Barbesgaard *et al.* list the example that the Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) has worked with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) to present the BRI as a pivotal element in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Similarly, African states have also embraced institutionalism. An example of this is the establishment of the AU, a continental body comprising of 55 member states on the African continent (AU, 2022).

## 2.4 Structuralism

The guiding principle of structuralism lies in the notion that every system should be viewed as an organised set of inter-related elements to be studied atomistically, rendering the relations that constitute the structure as more pivotal than their individual elements (Jayme, Missio & Oreiro, 2015: 249). According to Johnson and Marlin-Bennett (2021), structuralism offers a valuable assessment of the structure of the global political economy by analysing capitalism and the subsequent production of inequities. According to Balaam and Dillman (2016: 882–883), structuralism assumes that the international economy is dynamic, but does not have a unifying set of policy recommendations or a single method of analysis. Instead, Balaam and Dillman (2016) reason that structuralism is a tool to advance scientific inquiry into the tenets of capitalism from a moral standpoint. While realism and liberalism can both be described as rationalist theories with a preoccupation with a material reality, structuralist theory rejects this narrow view of the distribution of power (Jackson & Sørensen, 2013: 209). Structuralism examines how the dominant economic structures of society affect class relations and interests (Bresser-Pereira & Oreiro, 2012: 1), and aims to empower the oppressed class by raising issues regarding human freedom and the application of reason in forming international institutions (Stegmann, 2004: 35).

Marxist thought has heavily influenced structuralism (Friedman, 1974: 445). Marxist analysis combines activism with a philosophical investigation of the political economy (Grosfoguel, 2011: 229). Marx saw history as a dynamic and evolving creature, fundamentally determined by technological and economic forces. He believed that, through a process of historical materialism, these forces could be analysed and explained objectively like any other natural law (Stegmann, 2004: 35). For Marx (1859: 3–4), historical materialism stated that all living and inanimate objects are dynamic. The rate of this change is determined by the laws of dialectics. By building on Hegel's dialectical approach, Marx identified the contradictions inherent in capitalism and its ability to inflict change and eventually lead to the revolutionary transformation of society (Johnson & Marlin-Bennett, 2021). Marxist thought deviated from liberal thought by reasoning that the sphere of production, instead of the sphere of exchange, holds central significance in shaping political and economic dynamics. Given that Marxism views market mechanisms as relatively fixed, this theory concludes that the politics of production determines the nature of the social order. (Abugu & Onyishi,

2016: 10). Marx (1887: 237) reasoned that it was through the pursuit of private property that the division of labour emerged, subsequently giving rise to distinct social classes that were defined by their economic disparities. He determined that society was divided into the capital-owning bourgeoisie and the working-class proletariat. He reasoned that the bourgeoisie would spread globally in its pursuit of exploiting the world market for personal gain. The division of labour in industrialising societies implied that workers were predominantly forced to sell their labour as a commodity. By doing this, the workers forfeit their power of production to the capitalist. The capitalist mode of production thus alienates workers from their labour (Engels & Marx, 1969: 16). Marx further reasoned that the alienation of labour resulted in the accumulation of surplus value. Marx believed that the distribution of assets was unjust given that a large number of resources and land were historically confiscated by a small number of people through coercion and violence (Grosfoguel, 2011: 229).

Lenin (1982) expanded Marxian thought by predicting that capitalism would spread globally, resulting in a contradiction to inter-imperialist conflict. As capitalism evolved, the accumulation of surplus value increased drastically, which resulted in the concentration of ownership through the rise of monopolies (Palma, 2014: 33). Lenin (1982: 62–63) argues that capital became the preferred export commodity as opposed to goods, which resulted in the superabundance of capital in developed countries, which increases exports exponentially causing capitalism to spread rapidly. Lenin saw imperialism as a natural consequence of this. As finance capital shifted to expropriate the raw materials of colonies, uneven development increased (Amin, 1976: 94). Lenin believed that inter-imperialist rivalry would eventually be caused by the contradiction between capitalism and monopoly and would result in the decay of monopoly capitalism (Patnaik, 2014: 29). It is important to note that, although the majority of structuralists dispute that the falling rates of profits would result in the disintegration of the capitalist mode of production, Leninist arguments regarding imperialism remain popular in states such as China, Cuba, Vietnam and Venezuela (Balaam & Dillman, 2016: 94).

Structuralism conceptualises the international system as constituting of asymmetric core–periphery relations (Ghosh, 2019). Dependency theory built on this by rooting underdevelopment in the unequal relationships within the world system (Kay, 1998: 4).

Dependency theorists study the relationships between the core and the periphery while drawing attention to the constraints the former places on the latter (Agbebi & Virtanen, 2017: 433). The core composes of higher-income, industrialised, and developed countries whereas the periphery refers to lower-income states that mainly export agricultural-based goods and have economies that are externally dependent (Borghi, 2021: 30). Dependency theorists reason that the structure of the global political economy fundamentally enslaves underdeveloped states in the Global South by increasing their dependence on capitalist core countries in the Global North (Haq, 1976: 3). Dependency theory builds on Marxian thought but reasons that, instead of spreading the capitalist mode of production, capitalism has morphed into a new system of social order. Instead of facilitating the growth of capitalism in developing countries, imperialist and capitalist action was causing underdevelopment (Palma, 2014: 5). The core–periphery dichotomy reflects the international division of labour in the early twentieth century. Core states produce manufactured goods and then export these goods to states in the periphery, whilst importing raw materials and primary commodities from periphery states. This leaves periphery states dependent upon international commodity prices and turbulent financial cycles given by the dynamics present in core economies. This prohibits periphery states from having an autonomous domestic force of demand (Borghi, 2021: 30).

Frank (1989) reasons that core countries had never been under-developed, but instead un-developed. He attributes contemporary underdevelopment to both the past and present economic relations between current developed metropolitan countries and current under-developed satellite countries. Similarly, Amin (1976: 200) asserts that there are distortions in the development of periphery states due to unequal international specialisation. He attributes the distortion of export activities not to the inadequacy of the periphery states, but rather to the superior productivity of core states. This forces periphery states to become a complementary supplier of products for which they possess a natural advantage (such as minerals and agricultural produce). According to Amin, this distortion has caused the wages in periphery states to be lower than those in core states for the same productivity. Exchange will thus become unequal while industries in periphery states develop skewed. Furthermore, Suarez-Krabble (2009: 8) reasons that European theories of trade specialisation, such as the theory of comparative advantage, reinforce exploitative dynamics by requiring

developing countries to produce and export raw materials continuously. According to Suarez-Krabble, this dynamic is only beneficial for the North, and not feasible in developing states.

Prebisch (1968) identifies the emergence of declining terms of trade and eventual dependency between North and South. Prebisch (1950) proposes that a central structural economic characteristic of underdeveloped economies is the decline of their terms of trade over time because of differing income elasticities of demand for exports and imports. He reasons that peripheral states tend to produce and export goods with low income elasticity of demand, such as primary commodities, to core states. However, peripheral states import manufactured goods, which have a high income elasticity of demand, from core states. The opposite relationship holds true for core states. Consequently, the demand for primary goods grows slower than the demand for manufactured goods as income increases due to different levels of income elasticity of demand, causing manufactured goods to be more expensive. Productivity and technological differences between core and periphery states are thus continually reinforced by a world system where manufactured goods flow from the core to the periphery and low-cost commodity goods and raw materials flow from the periphery to the core. To break this cycle of dependency, Prebisch (1968) suggests that developing countries should accelerate industrialisation by adopting import substitution. However, he maintains that this is only possible if the South develops the ability to add value to natural resources, moving these states higher up in global value chains. British colonial industrial development in Africa was intended to reinforce structures of dependency. For example, in Ghana, fruits were harvested and exported to be processed in Britain and subsequently re-exported at higher prices to Ghana. The inability of most African states to become involved in adding value to the natural resources found in their countries during colonial rule, significantly contributed to the underdevelopment and poverty of post-colonial Africa (Ukwandu, 2015: 26).

Developing states have embraced numerous policy reforms to counter these exploitative structures (Friedman, 1974). In order to increase the capacity of states to manufacture value-added goods and consequently move up the value chain, there has been an increased emphasis on digitisation and industrialisation on the African continent (AUC/OECD, 2022). Recent trends of structural reforms have also been

echoed by developing countries actively decreasing their dependence on the West. One of the most noteworthy examples of this is China. Authors such as Jakobson (2009) and Sun (2019), note that Beijing has employed mechanisms such as the BRI to secure natural resources independent of Western distribution channels in order to secure their economic rise. However, it is important to note that developments in the Asian region, such as the rapid development of South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, and Taiwan, suggest that North–South economic engagement could lead to positive socio-economic developments (Agbebi & Virtanen, 2017: 436).

Modern world systems theory, as developed by Immanuel Wallerstein in the 1970s, reasons that the world system is capitalist in nature and largely determines the global social and political order as well as the interactions between states and other international actors. Wallerstein asserted that the global economy is the sole determinant of the international system (Kay, 1998: 4). European colonial expansion and domination created an international division of labour between non-Europeans and Europeans (Wallerstein, 1979). This phenomenon persists in the current post-colonial phase of the capitalist world system. For Wallerstein (2004: 23), the modern system exhibited a single division of labour in which states were mutually dependent on economic exchange. This exchange implied the sale of goods and services for profit, essentially making the system capitalist in nature. From these observations, Wallerstein (2004) reasoned that the modern world system was divided into three functional socio-economic units: the periphery, the semi-periphery, and the core. The units mentioned above corresponded to the pre-determined and set roles which states play in the international economy. Wallerstein (1974) asserts that the peripheral states are dominated by the core states in order for core states to extract cheap raw materials from peripheral states through unequal exchange. Core states interact with the periphery and semi-periphery through the capitalist world system, exploiting these regions and fundamentally altering them. The semi-periphery primarily acts as a political entity that diffuses opposition of the periphery to the core region. Thus, these states are both exploited and exploiter (Brewer, 1980: 198–199).

Modern concerns of neo-imperialism have been raised by structuralists (Ghosh, 2019). Brewer (1980: 21) reasons that the territorial divisions of the world amongst the biggest capital powers, as predicted by Lenin (1982), can no longer be understood in its original sense given the decolonisation of Africa and Asia in the mid-twentieth century.

Neo-imperialism refers to a subtler version of imperialism. Structuralists claim that the US and other industrialised states have been practising neo-imperialism since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. Neo-imperialism, as opposed to classical imperialism, does not require states to occupy other countries in order to control or exploit them (see Lienau, 2021: 332). According to Grosfoguel (2007: 219), the disintegration of colonial administrations did not amount to the decolonisation of the world. The majority of periphery countries are still subjected to European and Euro– American domination and exploitation, leaving the international division of labour and accumulation of capital on a global scale still in place. These trends have been witnessed in the contemporary political economy of states such as Greece (see Chang, 2012) and Argentina (see Daniel, 2018).

## **2.5 Constructivism**

Constructivism focuses on the norms, discourses, and ideas present in shaping outcomes. It rejects the realist notion that simply observing economic and military forces is sufficient to explain how states interact (Copeland, 2006: 1). Constructivists reason that institutions – such as international organisations, the state, and the market – are constructed in a social context that provides meaning, patterns of behaviour, and purpose (Abdelal, 2009: 58). Consequently, global politics are formed by intersubjectively shared ideas, norms, and values held by actors such as states (Klotz & Lynch, 1998: 4). Ideational structures have both regulative and constitutive effects on actors, while ideational structures and actors co-determine and co-constitute each other (Adler, 1997: 338–340). According to Jackson and Sørensen (2013: 341), constructivism includes the assumption that international relations are comprised of ideas and thoughts as opposed to material power. Consequently, the central ideological elements of the theory rest on common intersubjective creeds between entities. These common creeds express individuals' interests and identities and ascertain the means by which these relationships are created and expressed.

Alexander Wendt provided a constructivist analyses of structural realism (Copeland, 2006: 1). Wendt (1999; 2006) challenges the core neorealist premise that anarchy forces states into perpetual security competitions. Wendt attributes how peaceful a system is to the shared culture established through discursive social practices as opposed to anarchy and power. Because each actor's interests and identity are

products of the others' diplomatic gestures, the international structure is malleable (Guzzini & Leander, 2006: 74). According to Wendt (2006), there is no such thing as the logic of anarchy. He views the interactions of states as dependent on the kind of international political culture under which they live. Wendt (2006: 178) identifies three such cultures: Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian. As a result, each culture establishes the role or social identity that states should assume making them 'rivals', 'enemies', or 'friends' (Suganami, 2006: 57). To illustrate this, Wendt (2006: 178) uses an example of the United Kingdom and North Korea announcing intentions to build additional nuclear weapons simultaneously. The reaction by the US and other world powers will vary noticeably depending on the state. For example, given that the United Kingdom is seen as a 'friend' by the US, the US is less likely to have a negative reaction to this announcement as opposed to the case of North Korea. This is because strained diplomatic relations and previous threats by North Korea to employ nuclear weapons in conflict have caused the US to view this state as an 'enemy'. MacDonald (2015) extends this reasoning to China's economic and political rise in recent decades. He consequently deduces that China's peaceful rise is dependent on the intersubjective perceptions with which it is viewed.

Constructivism aims to comprehend the establishment of norms in international relations. Human societies construct appropriate norms from the narratives they accept and propagate (Abdelal, 2009: 59). These narratives extend to ideas of power and influence, generating shared knowledge amongst people. The more power a state accumulates, the higher its capability becomes to shape global narratives to align with its own norms and values (Jamison, 2021). Consequently, more dominant states in the international political system could influence how the state is viewed by its citizens, how states view other states, and how states desire to be viewed by other states (Guzzini & Leander, 2006: 80). An example of this is Beijing's use of discourse power – a strategy that aims to increase China's international standing by promoting pro-China narratives and criticising geopolitical rivals to create a world that is more amenable to Beijing's expressions of power and expansion (Kargar, Pérez & Thibaut, 2022: 1). Beijing places significant emphasis on its cooperation with the Global South as a form of South–South solidarity, especially in diplomatic and scholarly discourse. Research by Godehart and Kohlenberg (2021: 1936) found that Chinese discourse increasingly defines the 'South' based on states' responses to or role within Beijing's

political initiatives and regional dialogue platforms. This extends the geographic scope of the South to Central and Eastern Europe. This illustrates the subjective nature of discourse and how it can be used by states to promote a narrative that best aligns with its own strategic objectives.

Constructivists view knowledge structures as intersubjective (Klotz & Lynch, 1998: 5) and capable of redefining the interests and identities of actors through continual interaction (Hasenclever *et al.* 1997: 158). A core aspect of constructivist thought is that states strive to cultivate a favoured identity that establishes an idealised version of itself domestically and internationally. Considerable tension arises when there is a mismatch between a state's internal vision of itself and how the international community views it (Jamison, 2021). Constructivism thus considers how ideational structures shape actors' definition of self, such as their goals and the roles they believe they should play in the international system (Copeland, 2006: 2). Geopsychology, as promoted by Jain (2019), is a useful tool in understanding states' concept of self. According to Jain (2019: 158–160), geopsychology reflects the collective influence of nationalisms, religions, perceptions, biases, ethnicities, and historical experiences of both ruling leaders and authoritarian regimes, as well as the general populace, within a particular region or country. Jain acknowledges that states seek to augment their power, but argues that it is the psychological orientations of states that determine the scope and methods employed in their quest for power. Jain assigns particular importance to investigating how states outside of a Western context choose to build their identities and construct their psychologies. Like Wendt (1999), Jain asserts that the geopsychology of each state is heavily influenced by regional and national peculiarities.

Although it goes beyond the scope of this study to develop a geopsychological profile of China, consulting work, such as that done by Jain (2019), can be extremely valuable when attempting to understand the strategic intentions of China when assessing the BRI in Africa. Jain (2019) identifies a distinctive set of characteristics in Chinese foreign policy. According to Jain (2019: 157), China's rise as a military and economic power is driven by its political ambition and nationalistic determination to play an influential and assertive role in shaping the international system. He reasons that China's launching of the BRI, establishing new institutions such as the Asian

Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and creating strategic alliances such as BRICS (consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), are all examples of this. Jain (2019: 161) also asserts that China's geopsychology has been formed by the experience of national humiliation, strategic culture, cultural pride, nationalism, and the anti-hegemony discourse.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to discuss international political economy as a relevant theoretical framework that can be employed to understand the risks and opportunities associated with the BRI on the African continent. The three major IPE theories of economic nationalism, economic liberalism, and structuralism were discussed. This was followed by a brief discussion on constructivism, and how it can be employed to comprehend the problem at hand.

Each theoretical perspective offers unique insights into the case study and should not be viewed as opposing forces, but rather as different lenses through which to view a complex problem. Economic nationalism, and its predecessor mercantilism, is a useful tool in understanding China's protectionist policies on a domestic front but also assists in shedding light on the more realist aspects of its foreign policy. Similarly, it is useful in understanding nationalist trends on the African continent. In order to remain competitive, China has had to adopt certain market-based reforms to increase its competitiveness. Similarly, liberal treatises, such as the Washington Consensus and the rise of institutionalism, have fundamentally altered Africa's political economic landscape. Structuralism provides valuable insights into the neo-colonial reality on the African continent but also sheds light on problematic and exploitative patterns present in the global economy, which ultimately reinforces the core-periphery dichotomy, albeit in a new way. Lastly, a constructivist approach can provide insights into the social constructs that fuel the behaviour of states. Constructivism can also be particularly useful in understanding the motivations behind China's current foreign policy.



## CHAPTER 3: Opportunities Associated with the BRI In Africa

### 3.1 Introduction

Given the size, scope, and emphasis placed on the BRI, it is likely to have a formative role in shaping the contemporary global economy, especially in developing countries, if the Chinese economy continues to expand. The BRI has significantly expanded since its launch in 2013 (Wang, 2016: 1). In the first six years since the initiative was launched, 30 international institutions and 136 countries signed BRI cooperation documents and received \$90 billion in Chinese FDI (Barbesgaard *et al.*, 2019: 3). According to Cai (2017: 4), the BRI is a strategy developed to create new trade routes between China and the international community. Chinese leaders describe the BRI as a national strategy with economic, military, and political elements (Nantulya, 2019).

Given the increased emphasis placed on Sino–African relations, as well as the vulnerable state of development within which the African continent currently finds itself, it is important to understand how the BRI will manifest itself in an African context. This chapter will attempt to identify opportunities associated with the BRI that correspond with the developmental needs in Africa, keeping in mind the challenges the continent is currently facing. The opportunities identified are on a macro scale and align with the larger development goals of the continent; however, this does not imply that the initiative cannot offer more specific opportunities at the state level, neither does it imply that the opportunities comprise a one-size-fits-all solution to the nuanced challenges faced by different states. However, this chapter is intended to provide an overview of the opportunities the BRI could afford Africa. It is also important to note that these opportunities depend on functioning government capacity and effective planning by African governments. Although it falls outside the scope of this chapter, it is important to note that subdivisions of the BRI, such as the Health Silk Road (see Habibi & Zhu, 2021) and the Green Belt and Road (see Bennett & Liu, 2022), can also present opportunities for African countries.

This chapter will focus on three prominent opportunities that the BRI could afford Africa. In the first section, opportunities for infrastructure development will be discussed. This section will expand on the importance of infrastructure development in Africa's economic development. The BRI, as an opportunity to further infrastructure

development in Africa, will then be discussed in the light of new developments on the continent, such as the demographic evolution of the continent and the required productive transformation, challenges with regard to project completion, and the lack of sufficient funding. This will be followed by a discussion regarding the shift within the BRI from mega projects to smaller, more sustainable projects. Lastly, this section will investigate how the BRI and the AfCFTA can be used collectively to achieve developmental goals in Africa.

The second section will focus on how the BRI can assist in industrialisation and economic development in Africa. The importance of industrialisation in the continent's development will be discussed. The discussion will then focus on how the BRI could be used in the African context to move productive capabilities up the value chain, stimulate the manufacturing sector, improve human capital, increase FDI, and foster greater inclusion in global and regional value chains. Lastly, this section will reflect on how the BRI can be utilised alongside the AfCFTA in the African quest for industrialisation.

The following section will focus on how the DSR can equip Africa with the capacity to embrace the 4IR and increased international technological developments. Firstly, a brief background on the DSR and the 4IR will be provided. Then the discussion will focus on how the DSR can be used to develop digital infrastructure, provide the skills needed to counteract employment challenges caused by the 4IR, assist in digital transformation in Africa, improve connectivity on the continent, and assist in developing the African digital economy.

Lastly, a conclusion will summarise the key findings presented in the chapter.

### **3.2 Infrastructure Development**

Infrastructure, in addition to other general production factors, such as labour and capital, is an indication of economic development. According to Nasution *et al.* (2021: 105), the provision of infrastructure can be seen as the main service of a country, allowing the realisation of social and economic activities such as public health services, transportation, educational services, and buildings for community activities. There is a distinction between soft and hard infrastructure. Soft infrastructure refers to the services required to maintain the social, health, and economic needs of a

population, whereas hard infrastructure refers to the tangible, physical assembly of structures, such as bridges, roads, railways, and tunnels (Kingombe, 2014). This section will focus on the latter, i.e. hard infrastructure. Infrastructure development is often associated with the ability to absorb labour, encourage productive activities, and increase domestic consumption. Hirschman (1958) reasons that infrastructure development forms part of social overhead capital, which is an important factor in driving the economy of a country. According to the AfDB (2022), infrastructure development is a critical enabler for sustainable economic growth and productivity on the African continent, given that it plays a substantial part in poverty reduction, human development, and attaining SDGs. The report also found that investment in infrastructure is responsible for more than half of Africa's recent improvement in economic growth and could potentially contribute more. However, it is important to note that in Africa, infrastructure development is impaired by a myriad of obstacles, including the political nature of all large projects, institutional capacity constraints of governments, structure and coordination of government ministries and agencies, varying regulatory and technical standards, and the requirements of individual development partners (OECD/ACET, 2020: 25).

The BRI can create numerous opportunities to further infrastructure development in Africa. According to Ghiselli and Morgan (2023), China has become the most important infrastructure builder in Africa, and the footprint of Chinese construction companies can be seen across the continent. They reason that the launch of Beijing's 'going-out' policy in the 2000s and the BRI in 2013 has caused a marked rise in the quantity of roads, bridges, railways, power stations and other infrastructure built by Chinese stakeholders in Africa with the number of overseas contracts signed by Chinese companies doubling from just under 6 000 in 2004 to almost 12 000 in 2019 (Government of the People's Republic of China [PRC], 2020). The BRI leverages China's strengths in infrastructure development and industrial capacity to facilitate the entry of Chinese companies into global markets. As of 2021, the BRI framework has garnered the partnership of 145 countries and 32 international organisations (Kini, Moses & Zhu, 2022). It should be noted that establishing the exact footprint of the BRI on the African continent in terms of infrastructure development can be complex given the often opaque nature of the initiative (Hillman, 2018).

The BRI creates an opportunity for Africa to develop infrastructure that can actively contribute towards economic development. Infrastructure plays a pivotal part in Africa's growth and development. However, certain types of infrastructure can be considered more conducive to these growth processes than others. Ibragimova, Ivanov and Wang (2021: 1), distinguishes four different types of economic infrastructure, namely transport infrastructure, power generation, and information communications technology (ICT), and agricultural infrastructure. They reason that investment in social infrastructure should be accompanied by investment in economic infrastructure in order to increase societal welfare as well as economic development. However, a significant challenge is that multilateral investment in Africa is mostly geared towards humanitarian aid and social priorities, and private investment on the continent is hampered by elevated investment risk (Adeniran *et al.*, 2021: 7). According to Ibragimova *et al.* (2021: 2), external actors' motivation to secure raw materials has resulted in aid programmes that support the development of social infrastructure in Africa; however, improving economic infrastructure often falls outside the scope of these programmes. The Chinese emphasis on mutually beneficial cooperation presents an opportunity to address this concern. According to Wang (2016), Beijing's focus on a mutually beneficial business relationship with Africa, rather than focusing primarily on aid, could create numerous opportunities to develop economic infrastructure. Although the BRI is focused on capacity building and is involved with the development of social infrastructure, the initiative is primarily geared towards hard economic infrastructure (Chen, 2018: 3). According to Burundian President Evariste Ndayishimiye (2022), the Ruzibazi hydropower dam that was completed in 2022, constructed with Chinese financial and technical assistance, testifies to China's commitment to assist Burundi in boosting production in different economic sectors because energy is a critical component in the economic development of the country.

The BRI could provide finance for large-scale and, in some cases, cross-country infrastructure investment projects (Coetzee, 2021: 2). Continued investment by China in reliable trade-related infrastructure in Africa will stimulate a robust supply reaction from Africa's private sector given that improved infrastructure is likely to foster an environment that is more conducive to business expansion. This could result in increased financial support for trans-border infrastructure projects that connects

African states and close gaps in regional infrastructure networks (Munemo, 2021). Examples of this are major railway projects in Gabon, Mauritania and Nigeria, and hydropower schemes in Ethiopia, Sudan and Ghana (Risberg, 2019: 44). Bluhm *et al.* (2018: 1) found that Chinese transportation projects in particular and Chinese development projects in general, reduced economic inequality in low- to medium-income regions. Their results also found that positive economic spillovers followed from investments in connective infrastructure by Chinese companies. According to the World Bank (2019: 6), complementary policy reforms could maximise gains from transport projects. If countries reduce regional trade barriers while embracing the development of intra-regional transport corridors, they could see a significant improvement in their economies.

Investment in African infrastructure is of significance given the demographic evolution of the continent and the necessary productive transformation it implies. Poor infrastructure contributes to challenges associated with productivity (Berndt & Hansson, 1992), growth, trade and poverty reduction (Fay, 2001). Consequently, additional resources are required to address these challenges to regional integration and economic growth (Ibragimova *et al.*, 2021: 2). Regional integration refers to the establishment of an organisational agreement between states in a specific region, which aims to facilitate and coordinate the free flow of goods and services (Herman, 2022). A report by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) (2022) found that sub-Saharan Africa's population is expected to contribute more than half of the global population increase anticipated by 2050 with expected population growth in Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Nigeria, Egypt, and Tanzania contributing significantly to this increase. The report also indicated that the population in the region is expected to double between 2022 and 2050.

A prominent challenge Africa is thus facing is to prioritise and facilitate the acceleration and expansion of high-quality infrastructure development in order to accommodate this influx in inhabitants (Otele, 2022: 55). Africa is rapidly developing new economic landscapes, as well as local and regional value chains whilst outgrowing its post-colonial economic geography. The urban population on the continent is projected to increase significantly by 2050 with two-thirds of the urban transition taking place in

smaller intermediary towns and cities, alongside new types of rural agglomerations (OECD/ACET, 2020: 11). These developments necessitate the development of adequate infrastructure. According to UN DESA (2022: 1), recent demographic trends also indicate future challenges to achieving SDGs, given that countries that experience rapid population growth must provide health care, schooling and other basic services to an increasing number of children and ensure quality education and employment opportunities to more youth. According to Chang *et al.* (2022), China has aided in constructing more than 45 sports venues, 130 medical facilities, and more than 170 schools, and assisted in creating upwards of 4.5 million jobs for Africans and training more than 160 000 professionals across different fields. A recent example of such a project is the completion of phase one of the African Union Centre for Disease Control and Prevention located in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa. According to the Chairperson of the AUC, Moussa Faki Mahamat (2023), this project signified greater Sino–African cooperation in African capacity building. The project forms part of the BRI and is the first of its kind on the continent. It aims to enhance disease prevention and monitoring competence in Africa, which will help the continent respond faster to emergencies and fortify its public health systems and capacity.

The BRI can be used to achieve greater project completion by providing access to the expertise of Chinese firms. African infrastructure projects often take several decades to go from idea to operation (Adeniran *et al.* 2021: 7). Slow project development processes are unable to contend with the complexities and interconnections inherent in integrated regional corridor development. Consequently, the current rate of infrastructure development does not meet the demographic challenges on the continent or the SDGs as enshrined in Agenda 2063 (OECD, 2020: 11). However, the knowledge structures implicit in the BRI can be employed to improve project development outcomes. According to Angolan President Joao Lourenco (2023), several landmark projects supported by China, including roads, airports, hydropower stations, and ports, are being carried out smoothly in Angola, and the BRI is playing an indispensable role in the post-war reconstruction and social and economic development of the country. According to a report by the Infrastructure Consortium for Africa (ICA) (2019), African governments have increasingly engaged Chinese infrastructure finance and construction firms. This can be attributed to these firms' remarkable speed and competitiveness, along with their proficiency in handling

upstream processes related to power generation, telecoms infrastructure, and transportation services. Although the Chinese infrastructure development model has shortcomings in areas such as transparency, ownership, and governance (Buddell, 2021), it has assisted in providing a framework for project completion. For example, the Hong Kong-based China Overseas Infrastructure and Investment Corporation (COIDIC) subsidiary of the China Africa Development Fund was incorporated in 2016 to take projects from the concept stage to feasibility studies, to financial closure and commercial operation (see COIDIC, 2022).

The BRI could assist in providing infrastructure funding in African states. Africa does not have adequate infrastructure funding to develop at the rate needed to achieve its developmental goals. It is estimated that bridging Africa's infrastructure gap would require between \$130 billion and \$170 billion of financing per year (Adeniran *et al.* 2021: 7). The public sector is currently the main source of infrastructure financing in Africa (Lakmeharan *et al.*, 2020). This is problematic, given that governments do not have the resources and capacity to develop infrastructure at the rate needed with the resources at their disposal. The BRI is diversifying the way it provides infrastructure funding. Infrastructure investment under the BRI has established China as the world's biggest source of cumulative bilateral official development finance. Nevertheless, in recent years, Chinese outward finance has diversified towards other channels and overseas development finance from Chinese policy banks has declined (Carmody & Wainwright, 2022: 3). One emerging area of Chinese overseas economic engagement is special investment funds, or overseas development investment funds (ODIFs), based on their development-oriented focus and mandates on the provision of equity (Gromley, Moses & Springer, 2022: 1). Chinese ODIFs have allocated substantial portions of their maximum capacity to equity financing for development initiatives. Within the framework of the BRI, this financial commitment has facilitated the advancement of trade and the rectification of infrastructure constraints in host nations (Kini *et al.*, 2022). The diverse funding structure accompanying the BRI thus provides increased opportunities for African countries to customise funding opportunities for infrastructure projects. The increased presence of different funding opportunities within the BRI will also increase competition amongst internal stakeholders, providing African countries with more competitive offers.

The BRI can be used to fund smaller and more sustainable investments. The BRI has been known to fund mega projects. Mega projects are complex, large-scale ventures that cost in excess of \$1 billion each and involve multiple private and public stakeholders (Hu, Mwangi & Zhu, 2022: 2). However, a recent shift towards smaller and more sustainable projects has been noted. An example of this is the construction of a mini- hydropower plant and its accompanying power lines in Kenge, a small town in the DRC (Nyabiage, 2022). According to Nedopil (2022b: 3), there has been a systematic decrease in average deal size for BRI construction projects dropping from \$558 million in 2021 to \$325 million in 2022. For China, such small contracts are part of its slow shift from mega infrastructure projects to smaller but profitable ventures under the BRI in 2022. As termed by President Xi Jinping, the BRI's increased emphasis on 'small and beautiful' projects decreases risk for all stakeholders while increasing debt sustainability for host countries (Ye, 2022). This change illustrates the resilience and adaptability of the BRI. If similar trends remain prevalent in the initiative, it will continue to increase opportunities for sustainable infrastructure development in Africa.

The BRI could compliment the AfCFTA in achieving Africa's SDG. The AfCFTA will create a single market for services and goods across Africa, spanning an estimated GDP of \$3.4 trillion (Takefman, 2023). The Agreement aims to reduce tariffs and regulatory measures – such as technical obstacles to trade and sanitary standards – between member states (Thomas, 2022). A report by the AUC and the OECD (2022: 19), highlights that Africa's regional production of semi-processed and processed goods represents a meagre 2.7% of the continent's engagement in global value chains. However, the successful implementation of the AfCFTA could develop regional production networks which could, consequently, create opportunities to accelerate productive transformation. The BRI and the AfCFTA share related perspectives on the facilitation of trade, regional integration, reduced tariffs on goods and services, building industrial areas to encourage specialisation, the flow of labourers between regions, and competitive market advantage (Herman, 2022). The AfCFTA aims to encourage regional trade integration in Africa, which is intended to accelerate sustainable growth whilst reducing poverty (AU, 2022). The FOCAC 7 action plan made the first reference to the AfCFTA in 2018 (Eguegu & Fu, 2021: 3), and in December 2020, Beijing and the AU signed a plan to increase cooperation between the BRI and Agenda 2063

(Government of the PRC, 2020). According to Labuschagne and Marais (2019), the BRI's goals complement Agenda 2063 and the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa, which are all geared towards developing regional integration within the continent. Munemo (2021) reasons that the development of an African trading bloc could yield considerable economic gains for both China and Africa given that China is the continent's largest trading partner. This incentive is likely to propel investment further by way of the BRI.

This is of importance, given that AfCFTA has the potential to foster new cross-border linkages to global value chains and within the continent (Eguegu & Fu, 2021: 2). AfCFTA is, however, dependent on the successful development of infrastructure, such as road and railway networks that connect trade and production centres across the continent. The BRI could play an important role in facilitating this (Bavier, 2021). Calabrese (2022) reasons that Chinese support in terms of African infrastructure remains vital for the realisation of the AfCFTA. According to Chang, Cheng and Ping (2022), China has assisted African countries in building 13 000 km of railways, 100 000 km of highways, about 1 000 bridges, and nearly 100 ports between 2000 and 2020. Beijing has also articulated its intentions to develop ports on the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean (Nyabiage, 2022). An inland, naval, and hinterland connection could boost the export capacity and logistical efficiency of African countries, making the products of these countries available at higher turnover rates and lower shipping costs (Labuschagne & Marais, 2019). The Chinese infrastructure development effort in Africa has been heavily focussed on railway development (Maggi, Marson & Scacchi, 2021: 1). The Kenyan Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) is an important example of Sino–Africa infrastructure cooperation and is the largest infrastructure investment made in Kenya in the past century. The 480-km railway connects the coastal commercial port of Mombasa to Nairobi. The SGR represents Kenya's inaugural contemporary railway construction since gaining independence, embracing Chinese norms, technology, and construction equipment (Wang & Wissenbach, 2019). This project has had numerous socio-economic benefits. By reducing passenger travel time between Mombasa and Nairobi by five hours, the SGR has enhanced transportation accessibility. The SGR has also been linked to Kenyan economic growth (Hu *et al.*, 2022: 7). The SGR forms part of a larger trend. China presents an extensive infrastructure initiative for the Horn of Africa, which includes the

expansion of the region's primary rail networks. As per the Chinese foreign minister, Wang Yi, the existing Mombasa-Nairobi Railway in Kenya is planned to be prolonged to reach Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan, and ultimately the DRC (Nyabiage, 2022).

The BRI can thus be used to support the development of African regional trade networks. Infrastructure development fosters productivity and innovation while lowering trade costs (Edinger & Labuschagne, 2019: 3). Weak intraregional trade is a prominent developmental issue for Africa. It is estimated that intraregional trade accounts for 17% of African exports compared to 69% in the case of Europe and 59% in the case of Asia (Ghandi, 2019). African exporters face the burden of trade infrastructure deficits due to elevated transportation costs, high input costs, and expensive delays in reaching global and regional markets. These handicaps are particularly prominent in the 15 landlocked states on the continent. The Central African Republic's President Faustin-Archange Touadera (2018), said in an interview that the Central African Republic is "a continental country that does not have an outlet to the sea, and this hampers its development"; however, with the BRI, his country is able to "turn this handicap into an advantage, because the Central African Republic is at the heart of Africa". Chinese-backed infrastructure projects on the continent have been on an upward trajectory in recent years and are actively working to alleviate this limitation (Munemo, 2021).

Integrated regional economic corridors will boost African countries' international competitiveness and real incomes by linking countries together and creating more cost-effective logistics networks. However, the lack of reliable infrastructure poses a significant obstacle to the advancement of regional value chains. There is a pressing need for innovative infrastructure business models that can establish efficient connections between rural and urban areas, integrate regional corridors seamlessly, and facilitate the growth of dynamic value chains. Such models should be accompanied by infrastructure services that promote human development and contribute to poverty reduction (OECD/ACET, 2020: 11). According to Eguegu and Fu (2021: 3), Chinese-backed infrastructure projects, such as the Lamu Port–South Sudan–Ethiopia Transport Corridor, Nigeria's Lekki Port, and Kenya's SGR, have assisted in improving African trade facilities while lowering trade costs significantly. For example, since the inception of the SGR in 2014, Chinese investment in Kenya

has increased significantly, as the railway has generated new investment opportunities in manufacturing and construction (Otele, 2022: 57).

### **3.3 Industrialisation and Economic Development**

Industrialisation is a pivotal part of African economic development. Mungomba and Phiri (2019: 2) point out that industrialisation is a key component in inclusive and sustainable economic growth in Africa. Industrialisation can be seen as the rapid transformation of manufacturing vis-à-vis other sectors, and acts as the mainstay of structural transformation and its consequent development and economic growth (Abreha *et al.*, 2021: 3). Structural change is the driving force behind large-scale job creation, productivity growth, and sustained economic growth (Kiely, 1998: 2). According to the AfDB (2021: 8), the COVID-19 pandemic led to Africa experiencing its most severe economic downturn in over five decades in 2020, as the collective GDP of African states' declined by 2.1%. Although growth is estimated to reach 3.2% in 2023, African economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic was significantly affected by a range of internal and external shocks, such as rapidly rising inflation rates, a lower demand for major export markets, adverse weather conditions, and increased borrowing costs (Economist Intelligence Unit [EIU], 2022). Consequently, it is pivotal to understand how the opportunity to develop industry on the continent can be used to foster economic development. According to Adesina (2019: 1), industry is inexplicably linked to development given that the development of industries boost economic activity along value chains, enhances the skills and capabilities of the workforce, increases productivity by introducing new equipment, and diffuses these improvements into the greater economy. Industry also generates formal employment, which in turn correlates with higher social stability.

The BRI could be used to move productive African capabilities up the value chain. Africa has had an unconventional growth path. Traditionally, developed economies moved from agriculture to manufacturing and from there to service delivery. African economies, however, have not capitalised on manufacturing (Nakamba-Kabaso, 2019). Adesina (2019: 1) reasons that, although Africa hosts some of the world's fastest-growing economies, this growth is non-inclusive and unsustainable given that it is primarily fuelled by the export of raw materials with minimal value-added processing. A common measure of industrialisation, manufacturing value added

(MVA) – as share of GDP – indicates that weak productive capacities characterise Africa. According to the World Bank (2021), sub-Saharan Africa had an average MVA share of GDP of 11.9% in 2020. This has skewed African exports towards low value-added products, by extension limiting the effective participation of the continent in global trade and intra-regional trade (Mungomba & Phiri, 2019: 2).

The BRI can be used to stimulate the African manufacturing sector. A strong manufacturing sector is a critical component of economic growth. Industrial development in Africa will increase job openings and consequently contribute to poverty alleviation (Osidipe, 2019: 59). However, most African countries lack production capacity. Current imports into Africa of machinery, manufactured goods, and equipment cannot be produced domestically (Munemo, 2021). The emphasis the BRI places on cooperation in manufacturing equipment and building production capacity can be used to develop production capacity in Africa (Habibi & Zhu, 2021: 1). According to Calabrese (2022), China has played a key role in economic transformation in Africa. The author reasons that, excluding mature producers such as South Africa, which has seen competition from Chinese manufacturers, other African states have benefitted from being able to purchase affordable Chinese machinery, investment by Chinese manufacturing firms, and the skills and technology transfers facilitated through contact with Chinese firms. Boso, Marfo and Oke (2022) reason that cheap African labour and abundant raw materials and resources create significant production potential and, although production will initially be focused on low-value-added products, such as textiles, the continent has the potential to move up the value chain gradually as its competencies increase, if it has access to the needed investment to facilitate its productive transformation.

The BRI presents an opportunity to develop African human capital. The quality of human capital limits productive capacity. Consequently, the development of human capital through the acquisition of relevant knowledge, skills, and training is necessary for African economies to be competitive in the international market (Nakamba-Kabaso, 2019). The cooperation between China and Africa in the skilled labour and education capacity-building fields align with the larger goal of the BRI to facilitate people-to-people connections (Berger & Russel, 2020), with Xi Jinping (2015) identifying a shortage of skilled labour as one of the three bottlenecks of development in Africa.

The four main educational programmes associated with the BRI, namely the Silk Road Two-Way Student Exchange Enhancement Programme, the Silk Road Co-Operation in Running Educational Institutions and Programmes Enhancement Programme, the Silk Road Teacher Training Enhancement Programme, and the Silk Road Joint Education and Training Enhancement Programme all present invaluable avenues for the development of human capital in Africa (Osidiye, 2019: 57). From a constructivist perspective, this social interaction is important for realising China's shared vision for humanity, given that social interaction is seen as contributing to shared interests and identity (Herman, 2022). Beijing has contributed to Africa's capacity building through several projects, such as the Great Wall Programme and the Africa Tech Challenge (Chinese Scholarship Council, 2022). Similarly, the Luban Workshops (China Daily, 2021) have empowered more than 3 200 students to receive a university education, while offering training sessions for more than 11 000 people. Instances of Chinese investment in primary and secondary education, such as the rehabilitation and expansion of four rural schools in Namibia (Mingzhe, 2022), further assist in the development of African human capital.

The BRI presents an opportunity for the development of the technical and vocational skills needed by Africa's population to propel industrialisation. Osidiye (2019: 53) asserts that Africa's demographic composition holds the potential to serve as a significant catalyst for comparative advantage in the continent's pursuit of development. However, this potential remains largely untapped and underutilised. Consequently, the author reasons that vocational and technical education and training are pivotal to achieving regional and national development goals. Beijing has launched programmes to address this gap. An example of this is the Future Africa programme, launched in 2021, which aims to foster China–Africa cooperation on vocational education in fields such as construction, agricultural technology, electronics, electrical engineering, mechanics, and information technology (Askary & Huang, 2022). African countries have been embracing the Chinese vocational education model as a way of developing local technical capacity. For example, Benin's head of state, Patrice Talon (2023), has asserted that China's experience in the development of vocational training models has presented an invaluable opportunity for Benin to learn and expand practical cooperation to accelerate the country's development and rejuvenation.

Skills transfer between China and Africa occurs in different ways, such as knowledge transfer, knowledge sharing, and technical assistance. Many BRI projects are done using a combination of local and Chinese manpower in conjunction with Chinese technology. This leads to the inevitable transfer of certain skills and knowledge to Africans (Adeniran *et al.*, 2021: 18). However, this is often inadequate in the light of high unemployment levels and deficient educational opportunities on the continent. Consequently, recent BRI projects have often been accompanied by skills development programmes (Askary & Huang, 2022). For example, Chinese investment in the Nigerian railway system included the construction of railway technology training centres as a way of developing domestic skill levels. More recently, Beijing has offered scholarships for Nigerian students to study railway engineering in China. Upon graduation, these students are expected to work with the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation, an SOE, to take co-responsibility for Beijing's megaproject in Nigeria, the Lagos–Kano SGR (Olander, 2020).

The BRI provides opportunities for much needed FDI. Increased investment in Africa is required for industrialisation and moving up in the value chain. Africa requires a renewed focus away from official development assistance towards creating conditions to attract FDI (Prakash, 2019: 3). Chinese firms could contribute to African industrialisation through investment. The World Investment Report for 2022 indicates that states with the highest FDI stock in Africa are the United Kingdom, France, Netherlands, the US, and China. The majority of these countries focus their FDI in the manufacturing sector (UNCTAD, 2022: 7–10). According to Calabrese (2022), American, French, and Chinese investments in manufacturing are comparable in terms of trends and volumes. The author reasons that these investments translate into companies from these countries supporting the skill improvement of workers, building up the sector, and contributing to the development of African manufacturing firms through their linkages. Although ethical concerns have been raised regarding the business dealings of Chinese firms, numerous authors reason that there are more similarities than differences between Chinese and other foreign firms, in terms of corporate social responsibility (see Pegg, 2012), labour regimes (see Oya & Schaefer, 2019), and investment outcomes (see Lee, 2018). Strategic investments and cooperation through the BRI in projects such as the China–Egypt Suez Canal Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone located near Suez have assisted in the

development of Africa's industrial and manufacturing capacity. According to the PRC's National Development and Reform Commission (2021), this project is one of the biggest concentrations of Chinese investments in Egypt and comprises four industrial estates and six ports, which have attracted many businesses producing machinery, high-voltage equipment, building materials, and petroleum equipment. The Commission reports that the positive economic spill-overs of this project include attracting 102 new enterprises to the zone, drawing more than \$1.2 billion in FDI and creating 30 000 new jobs.

The BRI presents an opportunity for Africa to be connected to global value chains in Europe and Asia through infrastructure development and incorporation into larger BRI networks. According to Prakash (2019: 3), industrialisation and deeper integration into global value chains help accumulate physical and human capital and contribute towards prosperity in a region. Industrialisation integrates the formal and informal economy and generates demand for mining, agriculture, raw materials, energy, and information technologies while increasing the supply of materials for construction, consumer markets and other sectors. Africa has very weak integration into global and regional value chains (Boso *et al.*, 2022). The Chinese dual circulation model of development seeks to secure production bases and strategic supply chains in Africa through the BRI, consequently creating the political will to contribute towards supply chain development in Africa (EIU, 2022). The BRI envisions the establishment of strong supply chain networks through a mix of 'soft' and 'hard' projects, such as the renovation of major transport corridors and constructing new transport infrastructure while encouraging institutional, policy, and governance reforms that are conducive to trade (Lall & Lebrand, 2019: 3). The development of political, social, and financial institutions is a pre-condition to development (Rostow, 1960), whilst these preconditions should be accompanied by correct physical and social infrastructure and management skills (Khan, 2012). Eguegu and Fu (2021: 7) found that it is likely that resourcefulness and strategic planning by China – e.g. identifying trade and investment gaps and making concessional finance available – have driven Africa's performance under the BRI, as opposed to proactiveness from the continent's side. Increased proactiveness by African states is thus needed to capitalise on the opportunity for supply chain inclusion.

The BRI can be utilised alongside the AfCFTA in Africa's quest for industrialisation. In agreement with the tenets of economic liberalism, free trade is seen to promote economic growth, reduce poverty, and create competition in the market, which presents consumers with more choices between products (Herman, 2022). It would be beneficial for Beijing to support the development of African trade networks and industrialisation goals as promoted by AfCFTA; thus, creating the political will for increased cooperation from the side of Beijing. The lack of diversification in African economies will limit possible benefits from regional trade integration under the AfCFTA. As the largest supplier of imports into Africa, China stands to benefit from this in the short-term. However, Beijing stands to benefit significantly more from the successful implementation of the AfCFTA in the medium to long-term. If African economies successfully diversify production and export structures, the participation of African firms in regional and global value chains will increase as they become increasingly competitive (Munemo, 2021). Assuming that it is in China's best interest to protect its economic and strategic relationship with Africa, it is very likely that China will continue to enable African firms to expand in the Chinese market. For example, the China–Africa Economic and Trade Expo 2021, held in Changsha, attracted nearly 40 African countries and 900 Chinese enterprises. During the 4-day event, deals worth \$22.9 billion (i.e. 135 cooperative projects) were signed online or on-site (Zhao, 2022). This created increased opportunities for African markets to expand, which consequently enables economic development.

### **3.4 Digital Development**

The DSR was announced as the third component of the BRI in March 2015. The plans for the DSR include the construction of transcontinental submarine optical cables, cross-border optical cables, and spatial and satellite information passageways, and it is aimed at expanding information exchanges and cooperation (Van der Lugt, 2021: 315). According to Shen (2018: 2684), Beijing has aimed to promote technological integration into the BRI by leveraging next-generation network technologies. These technologies encompass various advancements, including nanotechnology, artificial intelligence (AI), big data, quantum computing, cloud computing, and smart cities. The smart city concept refers to a computational urban planning model that aims to optimise operational efficacy and promote economic activity by utilising ICT (Jili, 2022). The DSR benefits from the infrastructural projects of the BRI. Support for the

deployment of digital infrastructure will consequently follow major infrastructural projects of building railways, roads, and pipelines (Kurbalija & Teleanu, 2022: 152).

The DSR has been linked to projects where Chinese companies have extensive operations, regardless of whether the country is officially part of the BRI or the DSR network (Agbebi, 2022: 1). This essentially entails that all African countries could be exposed to the DSR. Tugendhat and Voo (2021: 22) found that the largest financing for Chinese technology-related projects in Africa predates the launch of the DSR. This makes it challenging to gauge the exact scope of the DSR and consequently assess its impact on African countries (Agbebi, 2022: 1). For the purpose of this study, the DSR is viewed as a rebranding of China's ongoing engagement in the African digital technology sector, albeit in a more strategic manner than before. It is important to note that Beijing has assigned Chinese POEs and SOEs a central position in the BRI and the DSR (Shen, 2018). Chinese firms such as ZTE and Huawei are the most active in Africa, but other key players include Dahua, CETC, Hikvision, Meiya Pico, China Mobile, China Telecom, and Uniview (Feldstein, 2020). According to Hove, Musodza and Saki (2022: 5), the DSR supports the expansion of Chinese companies abroad by providing these companies with preferential lines of credit from state-owned banks and other incentives. Consequently, this study acknowledged the activities of these private entities, given that they are positioned as a central part of the DSR and receive governmental backing (Agbebi, 2022: 2–3).

The DSR can be used to develop infrastructure that could assist in closing Africa's digital divide. Africa has a significant communications gap in mobile network coverage, smartphone use, and internet access and an intense demand to fill that gap (EIU, 2022). In 2019, it was estimated that 300 million African people live more than 50 kilometres away from a cable or fibre broadband, with the cost of closing the digital divide being estimated at \$100 billion a year (OECD, 2020: 12). The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated Africa's digital innovation in various sectors, which has increased the demand for digital infrastructure and services in Africa (EIU, 2022). The DSR could play an important role in providing funding and expertise to facilitate the development of the necessary technological infrastructure. The shift of the BRI towards high-tech communication infrastructure furthermore enables African countries to participate effectively in the international economy (Habibi & Zhu 2021: 1). This presents an opportunity for full digital value-chain activity and brings digital firms, such

as Alibaba, Tencent and Huawei, to Africa (Bee *et al.*, 2020: 3). The Boston University Global Development Policy Centre (2022) estimates that in Africa, the ICT sector alone received \$569 million worth of funding from Chinese lenders in the period 2000–2020. Beijing has pledged to assist Africa in constructing digital and telecom infrastructure across pivotal states, such as Zambia, Nigeria, Angola, Zimbabwe, and Ethiopia. Examples of this include 2Africa – a 37,000-km-long and 180 TBPS sub-sea cable connecting Europe and the Middle East with 16 African countries – and the development of 4G infrastructure through private enterprises, such as Huawei (Chaudhury, 2021).

The 4IR will profoundly affect the composition of the global economy. It is, therefore, important to ensure that Africa embraces the challenges and opportunities associated with this development. The 4IR refers to the current era of advanced analytics, connectivity, automation, and advanced manufacturing technology that has been transforming the global economy since the mid-2010s, and holds considerable potential for the optimisation of production and operations (McKinsey & Company, 2022). The 4IR is characterised by the fusion of the physical, biological, and digital worlds, as well as increased utilisation of new technologies such as cloud computing, AI, advanced wireless technologies, 3D printing and the Internet of Things (IoT) (Ndung'u & Signé, 2020: 61). According to Smith (2019), the 4IR has the potential to accelerate socio-economic development in Africa exponentially. They reason that cutting-edge technologies like AI and the IoT present a fresh perspective on innovation, economic expansion, development, and overall human welfare. These technologies have the potential to address various societal and business obstacles by facilitating more effective governance, enabling improved healthcare and essential services, and empowering businesses to operate as intelligent enterprises.

The DSR could assist Africa in developing the skills needed to counteract employment challenges brought about by the 4IR. Upskilling and reskilling workers are increasingly vital as disruptive technologies transform job requirements (McKinsey & Company, 2022). According to Prakash (2019: 1), the digital economy will affect the geographical patterns of employment, economic growth, and industries. The 4IR has had a significant influence on the traditional approach to gradual industrialisation and employment, particularly in developing regions, such as Africa. The large and youthful

African population makes the region suitable for investments in labour-intensive industries. However, these industries are vulnerable in terms of jobs being replaced by robotics, automation, and AI. Consequently, achieving industrialisation necessitates a multidisciplinary approach, along with integration into regional and global value chains. Sustainable industrialisation also requires a focus on skill development and training to adapt to digital-age technologies (Ndung'u & Signé, 2020: 65). The DSR could act as a vehicle to facilitate the transfer of the required skills. According to the FOCAC Dakar Action Plan, China intends to work with Africa to host the China–Africa innovation cooperation and development forum, improve the China–Africa technology transfer and innovation cooperation network, and support the development of China–Africa partner institutes, joint laboratories, and scientific and technological innovation cooperation bases (FOCAC, 2021). This manifests in a practical sense through initiatives, such as the Digital Belt and Road Program (DBAR) Science Plan, a science diplomacy initiative that seeks to share knowledge, expertise, data and technologies to demonstrate the significance of Earth Observation Science and Technology and Big Earth Data applications for large-scale sustainable development projects (Hernandez, 2019: 3).

The DSR could assist with digital transformation in Africa. The AU and several African states have adopted digital transformation strategies to pursue universal digital access, open new markets, encourage private-sector investment, and drive socioeconomic development (EIU, 2022). Digital transformation has positive effects for both the private and public spheres, with opportunities in renewable energy, public health, education, housing, agriculture and industry (OECD, 2020: 11). The DSR encompasses an array of products and services, such as cloud computing data centres, telecom network cables, surveillance, digital partnerships with universities, manufacturing facilities, research and development (R&D) laboratories, and training. According to Feldstein (2020: 2), Chinese digital involvement across these various sectors takes place in at least 47 of 54 countries in Africa. It is challenging to determine the exact value of DSR-related investments in Africa since a significant proportion of investments are made through private entities; however, it is estimated that, by 2019, investments through the DSR had totalled \$8.3 billion in Angola, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (Prasso, 2019). Feldstein (2020: 2), reasons that this estimation likely undercounts the magnitude of Chinese technological investment in

Africa significantly since it excludes numerous undocumented projects in countries such as Kenya, South Africa, Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon, and Ghana. This investment and access to technology-related knowledge structures could be critical in assisting in Africa's digital transformation.

The DSR can be employed to improve connectivity on the continent. Digital connectivity is a potential route to increase the integration of landlocked developing states into the global economy (Hernandez, 2019: 17). Digital innovations are optimising customs, finance, and logistics, as well as creating new prospects for small and informal producers. However, the development of regional internet infrastructure is needed to capitalise on these developments. African intra-regional internet bandwidth as a share of total bandwidth reached 16% in 2020. This bandwidth is comparably low as opposed to 56% in Asia and 75% in Europe (AUC/OECD, 2022: 20). Since 2019, internet penetration in Africa has been at an average of 39.6%, which is significantly lower than the global average of 63%. However, there is considerable disparity among countries, with Kenya having a high penetration rate of 90% while Burundi lags behind at 5%. Additionally, the monthly expense of a fixed broadband connection in Africa is relatively high compared to the global average while the median download speed for mobile broadband in Africa is 2.7 megabits per second (Mbits/s), which is roughly half of the global median of 5.2 Mbits/s (Ghanem, 2020: 67). The DSR can be employed to improve this. For example, Chinese investment has played a critical role in digitisation in Ethiopia. The Chinese telecom vendors ZTE and Huawei have dominated the telecom infrastructure market in Ethiopia since 2008, Chinese investment has also enabled the launch of the first Ethiopian remote sensing satellite, and agreements between Beijing and Addis Ababa have resulted in the development of a communication satellite and a new digital trade platform (Van der Lugt, 2021: 322).

The DSR can also be employed to improve connectivity by improving African satellite technology. Due to a Chinese initiative dedicated to delivering satellite TV to 10,000 villages in Africa, the StarTimes brand has spread across the continent to numerous rural regions. The BeiDou-3 Navigation Satellite System (BDS-3), completed in 2020, made China the third country to have a satellite navigation system with global coverage. The BDS-3 has been deployed in the context of BRI projects with a

consequent BeiDou applications research centre established in Tunisia, and training programmes launched in Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco (Kurbalija & Teleanu, 2022: 152). Africa has shown a tendency to adopt technology and innovation rapidly to provide practical solutions for the challenges facing its industries and governments, and to remove barriers, improve efficiencies, and explore new services or products. Digital transformation strategies have been encouraged by advances in ICT products and services, increased mobile internet access, telecommunications networks, and a strong demand from rapidly growing urban populations (EIU, 2022).

The DSR presents the opportunity to connect African countries – especially landlocked states – to the global economy through more inclusive international trade due to the development of the continent’s digital economy (Shen, 2018: 2693). The digital economy includes sectors such as e-commerce, financial technology, health technology, and media and entertainment (Kurbalija & Teleanu, 2022: 107). Digitalisation benefits manufacturing operations, transport and logistics services, agricultural supply chains, formal and informal retailing, recreation and entertainment, financial services, government services, and health and education provision (EIU, 2022). The digital economy in Africa was valued at \$30 billion (1.1% of GDP) in 2012, and by 2020, estimates indicated a contribution of \$115 billion (4.5%). According to a study by Google and the International Finance Corporation (2020: 8), Africa’s digital economy could contribute \$180 billion (5.2%) to the continent’s GDP by 2025, and \$712 billion (8.5%) by 2050. However, these predictions rely on improved internet connectivity and access, an increase in skilled workers, and improvements in regulatory frameworks. The DSR could assist in bridging this gap with China pledging to support the development of African digital infrastructure, undertake digital economy assistance projects in Africa, and continue to host the China–Africa Digital Cooperation Forum and the China–Africa BDS Cooperation Forum (FOCAC, 2021). According to Tunisian President Kais Saied (2021), Tunisia and China have had a ‘fruitful’ relationship in recent years while praising Chinese companies for contributing to the Tunisian digital economy.

The DSR could be utilised to assist in developing Africa’s e-commerce. Africa has significant untapped global demand for its current outputs, primarily agricultural and increasingly industrial. With Africa having a young and increasingly smartphone-

empowered population, digital entrepreneurship has the potential to flourish (Yu, 2021). The ability to sell directly to customers online without the need to set up physical shops, create a local website, or invest in marketing, has transformative potential for local businesses and entrepreneurs (Zhao, 2022). This presents the possibility of creating incremental markets, jobs, training, and skills development, which in turn increase opportunities for FDI and demand-induced economic growth (Yu, 2021). According to the FOCAC Dakar Action Plan, Beijing aims to hold online shopping festivals featuring African products, expand Silk Road e-commerce cooperation, and market African stores and products on e-commerce platforms (FOCAC, 2021). Consequently, African products are expanding into the Chinese market. An example of this is an annual online shopping festival, supported by MOFCOM, promoting African goods, that was held with the participation of more than 1 million e-shops and 300 e-commerce platforms (Zhao, 2022).

Increased China–Africa cooperation has resulted in the inclusion of African countries in e-commerce platforms. According to the FOCAC Dakar Action Plan, Africa and China will conduct capacity-building cooperation, share experiences on the use of e-commerce for poverty reduction, enhance policy communication and information sharing in the digital economy, elevate the digital capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and share digital economy dividends (FOCAC, 2021). An example is Rwanda’s inclusion into the Electronic World Trade Platform partnership (eWTP) in 2018. This platform enables Rwandan businesses to sell directly to Chinese consumers via Tmall Global, one of the Alibaba Group’s cross-border online shopping platforms (eWTP, 2022). This partnership has accelerated the growth of African SMEs by supporting sales of local industries through e-commerce platforms effectively increasing market exposure. For example, Rwanda saw a 40% boost in its coffee exports in the first two years after joining eWTP. Similar success has been documented with the establishment of the Kilimall e-commerce platform in Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria (Zhao, 2022).

### **3.5 Conclusion**

The BRI can be a powerful tool Africa could harness to accelerate its economic development. These opportunities, however, need to be embraced strategically to promote both local interests and the continent's interests as an emerging economic

block. Infrastructure development is a pivotal concern with regard to African development. Closing the infrastructure gap is one of the building blocks of emancipating Africa from numerous socio-economic concerns. Africa's growing population and changing demographic composition necessitate the development of infrastructure in order to stimulate employment through industrial development. It is, therefore, beneficial that the BRI presents an opportunity to develop infrastructure that could contribute to the productive transformation of the continent. Major railway projects in Gabon, Mauritania, and Nigeria, and hydropower schemes in Ethiopia, Sudan, and Ghana are examples of such projects. The expertise and experience of Chinese construction companies can be advantageous in Africa's infrastructure development, given the low levels of project completion currently present in projects. Recent developments within the BRI, such as a shift from mega projects towards smaller projects, indicate a more sustainable approach to infrastructure development in Africa in the context of rising debt concerns. This approach will also be beneficial for higher levels of project completion. These opportunities for infrastructure development can be magnified if they are aligned with the goals of the AfCFTA.

The BRI can potentially assist in Africa's industrialisation and economic development. Developing industrial capacity, especially in terms of manufacturing capability, forms a pivotal part of Africa's transition away from poverty. The BRI could assist African countries in moving up global value chains. This could be facilitated by embracing opportunities offered by the BRI, such as tapping into Chinese knowledge structures and fostering greater industrial capacity through increased cooperation with China. Similarly, the BRI's focus on skills development initiatives as well as educational exchanges and skills transfers could be utilised to improve African human capital. This will not only create the required skills locally to enhance sustainable industrialisation on the continent, but will also attract higher levels of FDI. FDI can also be enhanced as a result of Beijing's incentives towards Chinese companies to expand to BRI countries. Collectively, these developments have the potential to foster greater inclusion in global and regional value chains. This can be especially effective if combined with the greater goals of the AfCFTA in the African quest for industrialisation. Beijing's willingness to develop the BRI alongside AfCFTA therefore provides a significant opportunity for mutually beneficial cooperation.

The rapid technological developments associated with the 4IR have been transforming the global economy in recent years. If these developments are not monitored carefully and accounted for, Africa could be excluded further from global economic structures. Consequently, the DSR's emphasis on developing pivotal digital infrastructure on the African continent presents a significant opportunity for the continent to adapt well to the changing international environment and capitalise on opportunities associated with technological developments. Another critical component of embracing the 4IR is upskilling and reskilling Africa's workforce. The DSR has the potential to assist in this by way of facilitating skills development programmes. The DSR can be used to improve Africa's connectivity by providing the necessary expertise to assist in digital development on the continent. This digital transformation together with initiatives by the DSR to improve Africa's digital economy, such as building e-commerce capacity on the continent, will provide local industry with considerable opportunities to expand.

## **CHAPTER 4: Risks Associated with the BRI In Africa**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In order to understand the BRI and the way it functions in an African context, it is pertinent to understand China's strategic objectives and motivations that act as the key drivers of the initiative. The BRI has the potential to reorganise the economic geography of Africa, Asia, and Europe. This would re-route numerous networks of exchange and production and generate BRI risks that are unevenly distributed. The risks associated with the BRI are thus structured by inequalities of wealth, power, and opportunity (Carmody & Wainwright, 2022: 2). Although there are numerous risks associated with the expansion of the BRI, including environmental concerns (see Hughes, 2019) and human rights and labour malpractice concerns (see Jerabek, 2022), this chapter will aim to elaborate on the risks associated with the BRI in three key areas that emerged as pertinent concerns during a review of the available literature on the topic.

The first section will focus on unsustainable debt concerns. Firstly, a brief overview of Africa's current debt sustainability concerns is provided. Afterwards, the prominent narrative of debt-trap diplomacy is evaluated critically. This discussion will touch on China's recent involvement in the G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) and other debt-restructuring efforts. This will be followed by an overview of China's role as a significant African creditor. Within this context, several risks associated with BRI loans are discussed, such as risks associated with opaqueness and extensive confidentiality clauses present in agreements. Following this, the risks associated with the inclusion of debt-for-equity swaps and lender-controlled revenue accounts in contracts are presented. Uganda's Entebbe International Airport Upgrading and Expansion Project is discussed as a case study. This is followed by an overview of the risks caused by resource-for-infrastructure swaps in some BRI agreements and an analysis of the Angola case. The risks associated with the exclusion of collective restructuring in BRI contracts will then be discussed. Lastly, this section will consider the risks inherent in BRI-related lending given the nature of the initiative.

The following section focuses on the risks implicit in Beijing's strategic intentions. Firstly, Gill's (2022) six drivers of contemporary Chinese foreign policy will be

discussed. Afterwards, Beijing's propensity to employ hard power to reach its objectives will be explored. This is followed by a discussion linking increased Sino–African military cooperation with the BRI. Chinese strategic economic interests could also result in increased militarisation on the continent. The case of the Port of Bata in Equatorial Guinea is explored to illustrate the usage of political and economic leverage to achieve strategic objectives. Afterwards, the risks associated with the expansion of Chinese private security companies (PSCs) in Africa, due to the expansion of the BRI, will be discussed. Lastly, Beijing's policy of non-interference in terms of the provision of weapons and advanced surveillance technology will be touched on.

In the next section, risks associated with the Sino–African trade deficit and dependency concerns will be explored. Firstly, a brief overview of the emergence of China as a major African trade and investment partner will be provided. Afterwards, the structuralist core-periphery dichotomy will be employed to explain Sino–African trade patterns. This is followed by a discussion pertaining to the risks that result from Chinese interests in primary commodities in Africa. The prevailing trade deficit between China and Africa, as reinforced by increased economic ties facilitated by the BRI, will then be analysed and possible risks will be identified. This will be followed by an overview of the risks posed by trade liberalisation policies, as employed to enhance cooperation amongst BRI countries. The Mauritius–China Free Trade Agreement (MCFTA) is discussed as a case study in this regard. Lastly, the risks for domestic firms associated with increased Chinese competition together with unfair trade practices are then elaborated on.

Lastly, a conclusion will summarise the key findings presented in the chapter.

## **4.2 Unsustainable Debt Concerns**

Africa is faced with significant debt sustainability concerns, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. The African debt-to-GDP ratio in the public sector is expected to remain above 60% in 2023, with some African countries exceeding this level. Countries such as Tunisia, Ghana, Egypt, Zimbabwe, the Republic of the Congo, Zambia, and Mozambique face significant debt burdens relative to their GDP. Likewise, countries such as Algeria, Kenya, Angola, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Gabon, and South Africa are exposed to high and rising debt-servicing costs – despite having seemingly manageable levels of public debt (EIU, 2022). According to Carmody and Wainwright

(2022: 11), there has been a decrease in BRI lending to Africa. The authors reason that this restructuring is due to the contradictions in transnational capital accumulation, the combined geopolitical–economic nature of the project, and complex conjunctural events. Chinese loans are major factors in Zambia, the Republic of the Congo, Djibouti (Brautigam, 2019) and Angola (Carmody & Wainwright, 2022: 11). Chinese creditors hold 31% of Zambia’s external debt, with 18 separate Chinese creditors having provided loans to Lusaka. Chexim holds \$3.5 billion, with Chinese bondholders holding \$3.2 billion of Zambian debt (Brautigam, 2023). According to Hurley *et al.* (2019: 140), a prominent concern is that the size of the BRI will result in states facing burdensome debt levels that will hinder their ability to make prudent public investments. Another prominent concern is that these debt levels will create an unfavourable degree of dependency on Beijing as a creditor, which could exacerbate bilateral and internal tensions in some BRI countries.

The BRI is often associated with promoting debt-trap diplomacy in developing countries (Singh, 2021). Debt-trap diplomacy occurs when a creditor nation or establishment extends loans to a borrowing nation to expand the lender’s political influence. This includes providing loans or funding with too challenging terms, making payback near impossible, and forcing debtor countries to accept economic or political concessions (Chellaney, 2017). Chinese debt-trap diplomacy was coined by a think tank in India in 2017. This narrative spread through Western governments, media and intelligence circles, and by 2018, in 0.52 seconds it generated nearly 2 million search results on Google (Brautigam, 2019: 1). The debt-for-equity swap of Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka is typically cited as an example of this. In 2017, China excused Sri Lanka’s \$8 billion debt in exchange for a 99-year lease on this strategic port in the country (Risberg, 2019: 43). However, claims that the BRI is used for debt-trap diplomacy have been disputed (Singh, 2021).

Competition between China and the US has fuelled a narrative that portrays China as an unforgiving creditor, particularly in post-pandemic debt restructuring talks. During a press conference in Bengaluru, US Secretary of the Treasury, Janet Yellen, made specific reference to China when calling for all bilateral official creditors “to participate in meaningful debt treatments for developing countries and emerging markets in distress”. At the same time, she cited the need for debt treatment in Zambia – and

specific and credible financing assurances for Sri Lanka – as examples (see US Department of Treasury, 2023). With the US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Julie Chung, referring to China as being a “spoiler” in reference to the island country’s debt struggles in an interview on BBC’s Newsnight (see BBC News, 2023). However, research indicates that China has played a responsible role in earlier G20 initiatives. China had granted \$13.1 billion or 63% of the total in suspensions despite only holding 30% of all debt service claims (Brautigam, 2023). In April 2020, China, along with the G20, launched the DSSI as a response to the high levels of debt and economic challenges that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. This initiative allowed low-income countries to apply for a temporary suspension of principal payments and interest on their official bilateral external debt if they were not in arrears with the World Bank or the IMF. Chexim participated in this effort to restructure the debt in its dual role as China’s official export credit agency and foreign aid provider (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2023). Additionally, President Xi Jinping urged China’s other banks to voluntarily participate as commercial creditors in the G20’s initiative, aiming to support debt reduction and suspension measures for developing states (State Council Information Office of the PRC, 2022).

According to the China Africa Research Initiative’s (2023) Global Debt Relief Dashboard, Beijing claims that Chexim and China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) suspended more than \$1.3 billion in debt service in 23 countries, including 16 African countries, under the G20 DSSI. Zambia and Kenya publicly disclosed information on their G20 debt service suspensions from Chinese lenders, which totalled at \$110 million (Zambia) and \$378 million (Kenya) respectively. As established by Helleiner (2002), given that economic nationalism is realist first before it is economic, states formulate economic policies based on national interest. States could consequently apply liberal and protectionist policies depending on their desired economic goals. This could explain why Beijing was willing to cooperate with regards to some of the DSSI’s requirements, but not all. Brautigam (2023) reasons that what may appear to US officials as an uncooperative China, may instead reflect sincere reluctance from Beijing. China has a fragmented authoritarian system, stakeholders with competing interests and byzantine bureaucratic politics. Beijing’s reluctance could thus be attributed to bureaucratic conflicts, internal debates, understandable resistance to Paris Club norms, and vigorous pushback from quasi-

independent Chinese banks. Paris Club norms refer to the norms promoted by the Paris Club, an informal group of creditor nations with the objective of identifying viable resolutions to the payment challenges encountered by debtor nations. The six principles of the Paris Club are solidarity, information sharing, consensus, case-by-case approach, conditionality, and comparability of treatment (see Club de Paris, 2023). It ultimately remains the choice of debtor countries to enter into agreements, which they deem beneficial, regardless of Western norms (Huang & Niu, 2021). However, in order for debt renegotiation programmes to be effective, China needs to increase transparency of its lending (Nedopil Wang & Yue, 2020: 2).

China is a considerable lender to Africa. Since China's 'going-out' policy was launched in 1999, Chinese capital has poured overseas through avenues such as private investment, trade, and official finance in the form of non-concessional and concessional lending. Consequently, China has become one of the largest sources of bilateral lending to developing states (Chen & Lui, 2021: 5). It is important to realise that the BRI generates substantial risk pertaining to debt levels in African countries given the relatively small size of economies and the high impact of BRI financing (Carmody & Wainwright, 2022: 4). According to Butler *et al.* (2022: 16), Chinese lending is not the overriding cause of African debt distress. Debt distress in Africa is intensified by numerous historical factors, as well as contemporary challenges, such as weaker currencies against the US dollar, higher interest rates, and softer capital inflows compared to previous years (EIU, 2022). However, Chinese state-owned lenders act as profit-maximising entities, which could result in loan agreements that place additional strain on weak economies. An analysis by Elston *et al.* (2022: 5) found that Beijing is an astute negotiator with a willingness to impose invasive conditions upon sovereign borrowers to preserve its own balance sheet.

Chinese creditors are not legally required to disclose loan documentation unless stipulated by local law. Consequently, it is not possible for this study to include a thorough examination of all BRI loan agreements (see Chen & Lui, 2021: 5). According to Carmody and Wainwright (2022: 4), Chexim is thought to be the largest foreign lender to Africa. Given the confidentiality of loans, calculations of overall debt however vary significantly. A study conducted by Elston *et al.* (2021: 2) estimated that, at the time of their research, 42 countries had levels of public debt exposure to China that

surpassed 10% of their GDP, and there were approximately \$385 billion in underreported debts. The study also found that nearly 70% of Beijing's overseas lending is directed at private sector institutions, state-owned banks, state-owned companies, joint ventures, and special purpose vehicles. As opposed to sovereign debt, these debts often do not appear on government balance sheets. This blurs the lines between private and public debt, and introduces substantial public financial management challenges for host governments (Mungomba & Phiri, 2019: 3).

As a state-capitalist project (see Carmody & Wainwright, 2022: 2), the BRI could result in predatory lending practices. According to Lu (2019: 8), the commercial drivers behind Chinese aid and infrastructure projects, could have an adverse effect on recipient country's debt levels. Similarly, Otele (2022: 57) reasons that a significant proportion of Chinese commercial loans have raised concerns regarding the potential impact of fluctuating interest rates and long repayment periods on debt servicing. Although Beijing could theoretically instruct an SOE to undertake a specific project, there is little evidence of this occurring. Instead, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council (SASAC) (2023) is primarily tasked with protecting and maximising the value of state assets, such as SOEs. The performance of SOEs is mainly evaluated against economic targets, and SOEs are allowed to function relatively autonomously within the framework created by the SASAC. Consequently, SOEs are profit-seeking entities that utilise the BRI to secure future revenue streams, expand their market share, and climb the value-added ladder (Elston *et al.*, 2021: 1). Likewise, the China Development Bank (CDB) and Chexim are profit-oriented (Hameiri & Jones, 2020). These banks also act as major creditors in many African economies. For example, by 2021, \$13.6 billion of Angola's recognised debt to China was owed to the CDB with \$4 billion owed to Chexim (Butler *et al.*, 2022: 9). Given the high debt–GDP percentages that these loans represent, the actions of these lenders could have significant implications.

Surplus capacity and irrational investment at the domestic level are often replicated on an international level, resulting in the creation of unproductive or wasteful projects. According to Hameiri and Jones (2020: 10), China's loose system of governance and the inexperience of SOEs in global markets, have resulted in inadequately planned overseas projects. For example, Zambia accommodates the second-largest number

of Chinese construction firms that have been awarded contracts for Chinese loan-financed projects. Additionally, Zambia has established credit agreements with a minimum of 18 Chinese creditors. The large number of stakeholders implies that there is little or no top-down coordination or strategic oversight of these debts (Butler *et al.*, 2022: 15). By the same token, Carmody and Wainwright (2022: 5) point out that the state-coordinated policy in China results in a value realisation crisis. This builds on the work of Sherman (1983), who reasons that states encourage overseas loans to alleviate overaccumulation as a result of the deepening of overseas markets given that, under capitalism, debt provides a means to displace crisis tendencies spatially or temporally. However, these crises can only be resolved if economic relations are transformed sufficiently to the extent that loan repayments do not undermine future accumulation. According to Hurley *et al.* (2019: 143), the sustainability of BRI financing is reliant on the productivity of the BRI projects. When revenue generation and economic growth and revenue are not sufficient to service government debt, countries can enter into a downward spiral, which results in debt restructuring. This could lead to government expenditure on social services declining rapidly, which has a significant effect on local populations.

BRI loans are often opaque, and include extensive confidentiality clauses. This lack of transparency poses significant risks for African countries (Risberg, 2019: 44). In their sample, Gelpern *et al.* (2021: 5) found that all post-2014 contracts with SOEs contained comprehensive confidentiality clauses. The majority of these clauses prohibited the debtor country from disclosing any of the contractual terms or associated details, unless stipulated by legislation. Hillman (2018) agrees and reasons that Chinese companies gain a competitive edge in risky markets by limiting transparency. Broad borrower confidentiality undertakings result in a lack of transparency. This makes it difficult for all stakeholders, including other creditors to detect preferential payments, determine the accurate financial status of the sovereign borrower and design crisis response policies accordingly. Consequently, a prominent concern is that extensive confidentiality clauses and lack of transparency obstruct the ability of residents of debtor and creditor countries to hold their governments accountable for undisclosed debts (Stein & Uddhammar 2021: 19). The lack of transparency in infrastructure deals is an example of this. According to the Boston University Global Development Policy Center (2022), the majority of Chinese loan

provisions comprised of infrastructure development projects comprising between 48% and 95% of total annual loan provisions between 2000 and 2019. Grieger (2019: 3) found that large-scale infrastructure projects conducted under the BRI are often based on opaque state-to-state debt-financed turnkey package deals that require that contracts be allocated predominantly to Chinese firms without public tender.

The opacity of BRI loans and infrastructure contracts might encourage corruption and other illicit activities (Grieger, 2019: 3). The weak governance and institutional capacity in many African countries further increase the prevalence of corrupt activities during Chinese investment (Dreher *et al.*, 2018: 183). Legarda and Nouwens (2018: 4) reason that costly Chinese projects could facilitate opportunities for graft and rent-seeking behaviour by corrupt elites, particularly in states where transparency is lacking, and corruption is widespread. In conjunction with potentially low environmental and social standards, the misappropriation of funds could fuel tensions and lead to anti-Chinese sentiment and social instability. Similarly, Hillman (2018) reasons that substandard business practices and insufficient enforcement have created a global trail of trouble under the BRI. Several Chinese companies have been debarred from multilateral development banks, such as the World Bank, because of corruption and fraud, which cover everything from giving bribes to foreign officials to inflating costs. A study by Jayaram, Kassiri and Sun (2017: 64) among eight African countries found that 60–87% of Chinese firms admitted engaging in corrupt activity, such as paying bribes.

The inclusion of debt-for-equity swaps and lender-controlled revenue accounts in contracts could pose a risk to African countries. It is often a prerequisite in Chinese contracts that the sovereign borrower maintains a dedicated bank account, typically with a bank approved by the lender, which acts as collateral for debt repayment (Gelpern *et al.*, 2021: 5). According to Stein and Uddhammar (2021: 18), Chinese lenders often use collateral arrangements, such as debt-for-equity swaps and lender-controlled revenue accounts in conjunction with stabilisation, acceleration, and cancellation clauses, in contracts to give creditors an opportunity to influence debtors' foreign and domestic policies. Aside from Beijing's own strategic intentions, revenue accounts could present considerable difficulties for multilateral surveillance and policymaking, especially when combined with confidentiality clauses. When a dominant creditor controls a sizable portion of a state's revenue, conventional

indicators of debt sustainability are likely to overestimate the state's capacity to service debt and underestimate its vulnerability to debt distress (Gelpern *et al.*, 2021: 5). Dreher *et al.* (2022) identified similar clauses in numerous collateralised loan contracts between Chexim and the Government of Uganda including for the Isimba–Bujagali Interconnection Project, the Isimba Hydropower Project, the Karuma Hydropower Dam, Phase III of the National Transmission Backbone and the e-Government Infrastructure Project.

A valuable case study in this regard is the Entebbe International Airport Upgrading and Expansion Project. In 2015, the Chexim gave the Government of Uganda a \$200 million loan for the upgrade and expansion of the Entebbe International Airport. Contrary to media reports (see Mugerwa, 2021), the airport (an illiquid asset) was not a collateral source that the lender could seize in case of default. Instead, the contractual agreement mandated the borrower to provide a readily convertible form of collateral, specifically a cash deposit held in an escrow account, which the lender possesses the unilateral authority to seize in the event of default (Government of the Republic of Ghana & Chexim, 2015: 11–12). The contract also specifies that all revenues generated by Entebbe International Airport must be prioritised for loan repayment over a period of 20 years (Government of the Republic of Ghana & Chexim, 2015: 7). This is considered an extraordinary step since the airport is a public infrastructure asset that existed prior to the loan. Consequently, Beijing effectively laid a claim on a Ugandan Government revenue stream that would have existed even in the absence of the project (Parks *et al.*, 2022: 2). In a study of 142 sovereign debt contracts issued by 28 commercial, bilateral, and multilateral creditors outside China, Gelpern *et al.* (2021: 6) did not uncover any evidence of another foreign lender imposing comparable arrangements on a sovereign borrower.

The resource-for-infrastructure swaps in some BRI agreements create macroeconomic risks for debtor countries. Angola presents a valuable case study in this regard. Angolan debt exposure to China has increased dramatically since the end of the civil war in 2002. China provided significant assistance by kick-starting over 100 projects in telecommunications, energy, health, water, education, fisheries and public works – backed mostly by oil loans. After the collapse of oil prices in 2014, Angola's debt repayment became increasingly difficult, which led to the devaluation of the Angolan kwanza. Consequently, Angola's resource-for-infrastructure swap agreement

under the BRI caused the country to sell so much oil to China that it struggled to have excess oil to sell for cash on the open market (Carmody & Wainwright, 2022: 9). In 2021, Angola was the African country that held the most Chinese debt. In the same year, 72% of all Angola's oil exports went to China (Butler *et al.*, 2022: 9). Given that the Angolan economy was not sufficiently diversified, the country was unable to generate sufficient tangible currency (dollars) to circulate within its economy, which led to inflation. This had an adverse effect on citizens living on fixed incomes (Carmody & Wainwright, 2022: 9). A study conducted by the IMF (2022: 59) found that Angola's debt-to-GDP ratio decreased from over 130% in 2020 to 86.4% in 2021 and to 56.6% in 2022 largely due to currency and oil price fluctuations. The Angolan government reported that debt-servicing costs stood at \$12.9 billion in 2022, of which 38% was related to external debt (Republic of Angola, 2022: 25). This illustrates the significant effect that commodity price fluctuations could have on undiversified developing economies in resource-for-infrastructure agreements. Collateralised transactions themselves pose a risk. Structural problems and market failures in infrastructure investment – particularly in the transport and energy sectors – elevate the risk of contingent liabilities. If a government guarantees loans contracted by an SOE and then defaults on the loan, it will probably borrow more, thereby increasing its debt stock (AfDB 2021: 54). The IMF and World Bank (2020: 1) found that collateralised transactions are problematic for developing countries if these loans are not invested in assets capable of generating repayment.

The exclusion of collective restructuring, such as prohibiting Paris Club clauses, from BRI contracts creates increased risk for African countries. Gelpern *et al.* (2021: 6) found that close to 75% of the Chinese debt contracts examined included a clause that explicitly obligated the borrower to forgo the possibility of debt restructuring as outlined by the Paris Club of official bilateral creditors, as well as any similar debt treatment. This could have a negative effect on debt restructuring in a country. For example, the exclusion of Paris Club clauses present in the Kenyan SGR loan agreement contributed to Kenya's failure to obtain a further extension of its DSSI suspension from Chexim beyond the first half of 2021, despite its requests. Furthermore, the financing agreements also contain clauses mandating that any arbitration would take place in Beijing (Butler *et al.*, 2022: 10). For example, the Government Concessional Loan Agreement on Cameroon E-National Higher

Education Network Project between the Government of the Republic of Cameroon and Chexim (2016: 16) states:

[T]he arbitration shall be conducted in accordance with the CIETAC's arbitration rules in effect at the time of applying for arbitration. The arbitral award shall be final and binding upon both parties. The arbitration shall take place in Beijing.

This increases the likelihood of a favourable award to China in the event of a dispute. However, it is important to note that China is not a member of the OECD, and consequently, is not bound by the OECD creditor reporting system or the OECD export credit group. China is also not a member of the Paris Club. Therefore, China is not obligated to disclose its loan information in a similar fashion (Huang & Niu, 2021).

### **4.3 Security Concerns**

Beijing's strategic intentions, which underpin the BRI, could pose security risks for Africa in the long-term. According to Jain (2019: 157), China's rise as an economic and military power has primarily been driven by its political ambition and nationalistic determination to play an influential and assertive role in shaping the international system. These strategic intentions are often not directly referenced in policy documents and the discourse of the CCP, but remain prevalent determinants of Chinese foreign policy. Concerns have been raised that the BRI could be weaponised by Beijing to achieve supply chain and technological dominance. The expansion of the BRI will position China at the centre of numerous value chains given Chinese investment in transportation nodes of global significance including ports, rail systems, canals, and storage. This will afford Beijing greater capacity to affect the political trajectories of regional actors (Acosta, 2020: 3). This rhetoric is prevalent in Washington (Brautigam, 2019: 9). It remains important to analyse these underlying patterns when attempting to analyse how the BRI functions on the African continent and the potential risks it could pose. This section, therefore, presents a discussion of the risks that spring from Beijing's underlying strategic intentions.

Gill (2022) identified six drivers of contemporary Chinese foreign policy: legitimacy, sovereignty, wealth, power, leadership and ideas. In the second quarter of 2022, the Chinese economy grew by 0.4%. This is a considerable decrease from the 4.8% growth seen in the first three months of the year (Wang, 2022). This weakened

performance has an influence on the pursuit of wealth and – by extension – legitimacy. As the Chinese economic growth rate decreases, other sources of legitimacy (e.g. mandate to rule) will have to be intensified. Sustained decrease in economic growth could result in the CCP placing more emphasis on one of the other drivers. This could manifest as an ideological narrative of nationalism being promoted by leaders, but it also holds the potential to invoke the usage of military tools to increase power and – by extension – legitimacy. Similarly, the Chinese pursuit of legitimacy could result in tension with other countries (Gill, 2022). A White Paper released by the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council and the State Council Information Office of the PRC (2022) clearly outlines the importance on reunification with Taiwan in the CCP long-term strategy to increase its legitimacy and power. Chinese military exercises conducted in reaction to the visit of US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taipei in August 2022 (Hioe, 2022) is evidence of the CCP's willingness to utilise military force to achieve the above-mentioned objectives.

Beijing's propensity to employ hard power to reach its objectives should consequently be explored in the African context. Given China's rapid expansion abroad, the protection of Chinese citizens and economic interests overseas is a growing priority for Beijing (Cooper *et al.*, 2016: 32). It should be noted that China has maintained a relatively peaceful rise thus far, and a critical examination of the long-term Chinese strategy, economic needs and geopolitical interests indicates that war would most likely be an unfavourable outcome for Beijing (Tischler, 2021: 93). Nevertheless, it remains pertinent to examine the role that hard power, such as military intervention, plays in China's economic and political rise. A decrease in China's ability to assert dominance through the accumulation of wealth could increase its use of military force to achieve these objectives (Gill, 2022). Tischler (2021: 95) warns that slight threats to Chinese trade are increasingly dangerous as the Chinese economy's margin of profit continuously decreases. Given that Beijing's increased global investments, as promoted through the BRI, is an essential aspect of Chinese economic policy, Beijing is likely to intervene in conflicts that until recently were of little interest to it. The State Council Information Office of the PRC (2019: 15) emphasises the importance of overseas logistical facilities in addressing deficiencies in operations and support as a way of securing Chinese assets abroad. This includes developing military capacity in turbulent African regions.

The BRI does not have an official military component; however, the encouragement of closer state-to-state ties, as promoted by the initiative, could enable closer military-to-military ties (Feigenbaum, 2022). According to Tanchum (2021), the development and expansion of China's international connections through the BRI, specifically in terms of ports, energy pipelines, roads, and railways, could potentially have military implications. These infrastructure projects could serve as alternative routes in case of conflict or blockades. The Chinese military has voiced concerns about important supply lines being cut and encirclement by the US military, namely through the Malacca Dilemma (Acosta, 2020: 10). Beijing views the world through a lens of insecurity (Guluzade, 2020), and the so-called Malacca Dilemma refers to a significant geographic problem for the Chinese government. This dilemma stems from the possibility of a foreign Navy, such as India or the US, disrupting the lion's share of Chinese oil shipments through a blockade in the Straits of Malacca, between Indonesia and Malaysia, during wartime (Myers, 2021). Similarly, to Gill (2022), Choudhary (2023: 100) inexplicably links the legitimacy of the CCP and China's subsequent domestic stability to the country's economic growth. The author reasons that the Chinese economy's growing reliance on oil imports made it imperative for the CCP to take the necessary steps to secure its sea lines of communication. Chinese foreign policy towards the Indo-Pacific subsequently encompasses a range of initiatives to circumvent the Malacca Straits and to diversify China's access to Middle Eastern Oil (Myers, 2021). An example of this is the introduction of "Far Seas Protection" to the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) naval doctrine, which details the PLAN's plan to transform into a blue water force with the capability of defending China's sea lines of communication outside the confines of the Western Pacific (Rice & Robb, 2021: 3). To support fleets operating far afield under this approach, China has established a military base in Djibouti. According to Chandler *et al.* (2021: 142), Beijing's decision to establish a military base in Djibouti in 2017 was driven by three key elements:

- increasing tensions between China and the US made it risky for Beijing to rely on its chief competitor to protect its interests;
- China's ambitions to establish itself as a great power motivated Beijing to establish its own high-profile military presence; and
- China had strategic incentives to establish a military presence in Africa.

Authors such as Myers (2021) and Ashraf (2017) have expressed concerns that investments made under the BRI could facilitate increased Chinese logistical and military access in the region. Often referred to as the 'String of Pearls' strategy, this rumoured strategy claims that Beijing aims to build a chain of military and commercial naval bases along the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) that would be used by the PLAN to protect Chinese trade routes and assert dominance in the IOR (Brewster, 2017: 277). Ashraf (2017: 166) views this development as a defensive strategy to increase preparedness. He reasons that the 'String of Pearls' is aimed at securing the Maritime Silk Road along the IOR. Beijing has used the BRI to make similar geostrategic investments along the African coast. Positioned alongside the IOR, the East African Community (EAC) lies in direct vicinity of the Maritime Silk Road. The EAC is a regional intergovernmental organisation of seven partner states, including Burundi, the DRC, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda, and Tanzania (EAC, 2022). According to Mboya (2023: 1), access to inter-regional highways, seaports, power stations, and railway lines in the EAC expands China's strategic, economic, and political influence. The author highlights the significant investments made through the BRI in Kenya's port of Mombasa and Lamu Port.

Beijing is aware that its military modernisation and growth could impede its soft power and consequently prefers to promote a peaceful rhetoric that aligns with the tenets of mainstream liberal dialogue, where peaceful development, and not military expansionism, is the overarching theme (Cooper *et al.*, 2016: 6). The China–Africa Cooperation Vision 2035 (see Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2021) articulates themes of sustainable development, peace, green energy, cooperation, and other win-win results. However, the document does not mention future plans for military basing and expansion on the continent. This use of a peaceful rhetoric to conceal strategic intentions is also evident in the name change of the China–Africa Defense and Security Forum to the China–Africa Peace and Security Forum in 2019 (Miller, 2022). Although an increased Chinese military presence on the continent could provide increased security in countries plagued by jihadist terrorism, intrastate armed conflicts, and maritime piracy, it is unlikely that Beijing will act outside of its national interest with regard to these concerns (Grieger, 2019: 9).

Beijing's skilful interweaving of hard and soft power has created a symbiosis between the proliferation of China's security expansion across Africa and the expansion of

Chinese commercial enterprises across the continent (Myers, 2021). It is useful to analyse Beijing's possible military base in Equatorial Guinea as a case study when discussing the interplay between Chinese strategic economic and geopolitical intentions and the BRI. Phillips (2021) raises concerns that China might be opening a second military base on the African continent in Equatorial Guinea based on US intelligence. The consolidation of Chinese military power on the West African coast has the potential to shift global power dynamics (Tanchum, 2021). Some authors (such as Van Standen, 2022) have dismissed these claims as mere speculation aimed at strengthening claims by the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) for funding by Washington. Others argue that the existing literature on Chinese foreign policy is heavily influenced by the policy interests of Western states, resulting in a debate that centres on the idea of a Chinese threat (see Hirono & Suzuki, 2014: 443). However, this development aligns with FOCAC's Action Plan 2022–2024, which calls for the strengthening of the China–Africa peace and security plan through the development of peace and security infrastructure on the African continent (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2021).

The case of Equatorial Guinea is valuable in illustrating Beijing's skill at strengthening economic and political ties to achieve strategic objectives by way of the BRI. The BRI has allowed Beijing to develop close economic ties with Equatorial Guinea. Equatorial Guinea's debt to China is estimated at 49.7% of its GDP mainly due to loans for infrastructure development (Elston *et al.*, 2021: 33). The BRI thus plays a critical role in consolidating the relationship between China and Equatorial Guinea. Constructed in 2014 by the Chinese SOE First Harbor Engineering Company, the Port of Bata received initial funding from Beijing. Significant upgrades to the port were later made by the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) (Bermudez *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, in 2015, President Xi Jinping pledged \$2 billion in infrastructure funding to Equatorial Guinea's Horizon 2020 initiative that aimed to develop infrastructure, such as water systems and transportation networks (Tiezzi, 2015). This has created sufficient influence for China if they wish to establish a military base in Equatorial Guinea, while indicating that Beijing may have used infrastructure investment through the BRI to consolidate future strategic objectives. Equatorial Guinea is of significant strategic and geopolitical importance to China's expansion (Elston *et al.*, 2021: 35). A military base in Equatorial Guinea could grant the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) access

to the Atlantic Ocean (Miller, 2022). The Port of Bata is also of strategic geopolitical interest to China. The port is one of the country's two largest ports and is located on the central mainland coastline. It consists of a navy and civilian boat basin and a commercial port (Bermudez *et al.*, 2021). According to Tanchum (2021), the expansion of Chinese military presence in Africa, coupled with its pursuit of vast commercial infrastructure projects, may indicate strategic intentions that coincide with the implementation of BRI projects. This case is useful because it illustrates Beijing's ability to employ the BRI in a calculated manner. A second Chinese overseas military base in Bata does not pose a significant risk to Africa in the short-term as a singular occurrence; it merely illustrates Beijing's willingness to use economic ties to achieve strategic geopolitical intentions. This tendency, however, poses a risk for African countries in the long run given China's deepening ties on the continent, and the increasing dependency of the continent on China (further discussed in section 4.4).

All African countries are entitled to partake in discussions regarding the future militarisation of their regions. This is especially critical given that militarisation could have long-term consequences (Miller, 2022). According to authors, such as Luckham (1994), militarisation macro trends threaten the growth and consolidation of democracy and economic development. The case study of Equatorial Guinea should not be viewed as a singular occurrence, but should rather serve as an example of how Beijing could employ inroads made into Africa through the BRI as a way of achieving its own strategic objectives. Kenya is another example in this regard. During Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to Kenya in January 2022, peace and security topics were discussed in recognition of Kenya's position on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (Kitimo, 2022). According to Otele (2022: 59), this seat can be of significant strategic importance to Beijing since it may be used to promote Chinese interests through the Kenyan vote. The author goes on to list Kenya's shift from outright opposition to a strategic balancing act with regard to the Russia–Ukraine conflict, as another example of Chinese soft power in Kenya.

Due to the expansion of the BRI, the expansion of Chinese PSCs in Africa could pose risks. Chinese PSCs are intricate and semi-governmental entities that operate on the international stage. These entities lack regulatory oversight due to the absence of a clear delineation of responsibilities within existing legal frameworks, both domestically

and internationally, pertaining to governing and monitoring and their activities. (Legarda & Nouwens, 2018: 4). Some authors (such as Fabbri, 2022) reason that the expansion of Chinese PSCs in Africa is reflective of Beijing's intentions to avoid being seen as another colonial power and to maintain a discreet military presence. It is, however, more likely that Chinese PSCs have started to expand globally due to the saturation of the domestic market, Beijing's preference for utilising Chinese companies to protect its foreign assets, and the BRI. BRI projects have become a prime market for these companies, as Chinese investment expands into countries with turbulent and conflict-prone environments (Nantulya, 2021). Chinese domestic law does not apply to the activities of Chinese PSCs outside China. Furthermore, due to the absence of adequate international regulations for PSCs, these companies are solely bound by the laws of the host countries in which they operate, provided that such laws exist (Sukhankin, 2023). These PSCs thus operate in a legal grey zone. The lack of regulation, for instance, means that Chinese PSCs are not obligated under Chinese law to acquire a licence for his overseas operations. However, domestic laws of host countries may require PSCs to obtain a license to operate. A consequent risk is that unqualified and inexperienced may set up units abroad that are unable to provide the services they advertise (Legarda & Nouwens, 2018: 8). Chinese PSCs' level of preparedness and sophistication remains lower than that of their Western counterparts due to the lack of necessary skills and experience on the part of PSC operators (Sukhankin, 2023). The presence of PSCs abroad, regardless of their country of origin, could have an adverse impact on the interests and stability of the host country. However, these concerns are more prominent in the case of Chinese PSCs given the blurred lines between private and public entities. Irrespective of their private status, Chinese PSCs often operate with Beijing's implicit support and encouragement and are often staffed by former PLA officers with close, if indirect, ties to the Chinese authorities (Fabbri, 2022).

Chinese expansion under the BRI has been linked to an influx of Chinese weapons in Africa, and exasperating tensions in conflict prone regions (Tischler, 2021: 93). According to Encarnacion (2021), China's weapon trade with Africa suggests a demand and supply relationship. Lubold (2022) noted an upward trend in Chinese arms deals with African states with nearly 70% of countries on the African continent possessing Chinese armoured military vehicles. China's policy of non-interference

could become extremely problematic in this context. According to Grieger (2019: 9), Chinese small arms and light weapons have been identified in conflict areas such as the DRC, Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan. China utilises its non-interference policy to justify selling arms to regimes irrespective of their political nature (Grieger, 2019: 9). A study conducted by Pauron (2018) found that the establishment of a Chinese military base in Djibouti enabled Sudan and South Sudan to circumvent international arms restrictions and acquire sophisticated Chinese weapons, such as Red Arrow-8 anti-tank missiles, WS-1 302mm Multiple Rocket Launchers, and large quantities of Chinese Type-54 12.7mm ammunition in 2018. These weapons and military equipment destined for Sudan were shipped into the Port of Djibouti and China's military logistics base and distributed from there.

Beijing has exhibited a pattern of prioritising the pursuit of Chinese national interest above upholding international norms of ethical conduct. A recent example of this is the China–Russia strategic partnership during the 2022 Russian–Ukrainian conflict. President Xi chose to utilise a strategy termed the 'Beijing straddle' by Feigenbaum (2022). Feigenbaum (2022) describes this strategy as providing diplomatic support for Russia and broad commitments to Beijing–Moscow *entente* as a way of counterbalancing the favoured global institutions and policy preferences of the transatlantic West and Japan. Conversely, Beijing also continued de facto compliance with Western sanctions to protect their own trade alliances and economic interests, whilst promoting diplomatic rhetoric on peace and stability to placate partners in the Global South and Central Asia that are ill at ease about the Russian–Ukrainian conflict. This approach to foreign policy often results in Beijing embracing a policy of non-interference when confronted with the actions of corrupted and authoritarian regimes (Maggi *et al.*, 2021: 3).

Beijing's policy of non-interference can have an adverse effect on the security of African citizens that reside in states run by oppressive governments. China intends to play a prevalent role in the development of technological infrastructure and the role of ICT in security issues in Africa (see FOCAC, 2021). Chinese companies have been involved in the export of surveillance technologies to states such as Ethiopia, South Africa, Egypt, Rwanda (Morgus & Sherman, 2018), Kenya, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Feldstein, 2020). Beijing has faced accusations of supplying technology to

authoritarian governments and engaging in extensive training programs for foreign officials (Van der Lugt, 2021: 316). Feldstein (2020: 1) reasons that the increased flow of Chinese digital tools with advanced surveillance capabilities via the DSR to African governments with high internal coercive capacity reinforces patterns of political repression. Chinese surveillance technology in Zimbabwe can be viewed as a case study in this regard. According to Zimbabwe's President Emmerson Mnangagwa (2021), Beijing provides invaluable strategic support and technical expertise regarding the development of Zimbabwe's e-governance systems. However, research conducted by the Africa Defence Forum (2023) found that several human rights and civil society groups have concerns that these technologies could be used by Harare to track citizens' activities and suppress dissent. Given Harare's history of human rights violations (see Amnesty International, 2023) and Beijing's history of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states (see Feigenbaum, 2022), these concerns are not unfounded.

The expansion of Chinese telecommunications companies in Africa due to the DSR has raised concerns about the possibilities this expansion opens for illicit data collection and privacy violations (Omolaoye, 2022). According to Hove *et al.* (2022: 5), a significant concern is that Beijing may employ the data generated through the infrastructure it has supplied to enhance its own national interest by using these technologies for surveillance purposes. According to China's national intelligence law, Chinese citizens and corporations are legally responsible for providing access and support to the Chinese government in gathering intelligence (see Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 2017) even when operating abroad (see Dackö & Jonsson, 2019). Given that Chinese companies have expanded, built, and renovated numerous governmental buildings in Africa, Beijing could have the opportunity to gather intelligence directly from the highest levels of African governments (Merservey, 2020: 4). Although China has stated that it opposes "using information technology to carry out large-scale surveillance against other countries" (FOCAC, 2021:12), there have been incidences where China has been involved in questionable conduct. For example, in 2012, Beijing constructed and equipped the AU Headquarters Conference Centre in Addis Ababa after the AU had become a FOCAC member. However, the original Chinese IT equipment had to be removed in 2017 after experts noticed alleged data transfers to Shanghai from the Huawei-installed servers (Kadiri & Tilouine, 2018).

Such unethical conduct could have negative political and economic consequences for African states (Merservey, 2020) and can thus be seen as a potential risk.

#### **4.4 Dependency Concerns**

China's rise as a significant investment and trade partner in Africa is frequently perceived as a result of China's broader emergence as a major global economic player. By the end of 2010, China had concluded bilateral investment treaties with 31 African countries, and by 2012, China became Africa's largest trading partner, with Africa emerging as a significant investment destination and a key import source for China (Fu, Hou & Mohen, 2021: 870). The role of the BRI in enhancing Sino–African trade has been referred to as China's strategy to displace its overcapacity and debt burden (see Taylor & Zajontz, 2020: 291). Although this may not encapsulate the entirety of the role of the BRI in driving Sino–African trade, it does point to a legitimate concern. For example, trade between Kenya and China is heavily skewed. Between 2015 and 2019, the total trade between Kenya and China amounted to \$18.2 billion, of which Kenyan exports to China made up only 3% of this amount (Mitchell, 2022). Otele (2022: 55) reasons that the import of Chinese goods into Kenya rose due to the BRI, particularly since the construction of the SGR started in December 2014. The increasing trade deficit can be explained by the fact that the leading Chinese exports to Kenya are electrical equipment and machinery, predominantly equipment used in the construction sector, while leading Kenyan exports to China consist of minerals and agricultural products. This trade imbalance has prompted concern among policymakers about the need to review the Chinese–Kenyan trade policy.

The structuralist core–periphery dichotomy is valuable in understanding Sino–African trade patterns. China has been reshaping the old core–periphery dichotomy since it emerged as a global economic power in the 2000s. Borghi (2021: 30) proposes that the position of China as a middle-income country juxtaposed with its growing importance in the global economic world order sets China in a transitory position between the periphery and the core from the perspective of a structuralist framework. However, he also notes that China has been establishing trade patterns with similar or lower-income countries that resemble the patterns that core economies had established with the periphery in the past. Chinese exports have been concentrating increasingly on manufactured goods, whereas imports have been concentrated

primarily on commodities. These movements reinforce a trade specialisation pattern between China and Africa that is reminiscent of the old structuralist core–periphery dichotomy. Similarly, Carmody and Wainwright (2022: 6) add that infrastructural investment as a result of the BRI may reinforce colonial-style trade relations, such as the export of raw materials and the import of higher-value manufactures if it is not economically sustainable and accompanied by relevant policy adjustments. Given such imbalances, financing the import bill implies additional debt and increases economic dependency. It should be noted that this structure of dependency is not necessarily replicated in terms of all developing economies, as China maintains a regional development structure in Asia that is dependent on the trade of different manufactured goods among countries of the region (Borghini, 2021: 31).

Chinese interests have heavily influenced Sino–African trade flows in Africa’s primary commodities. In turn, this has been driven by Africa’s overdependence on exporting natural resources. Between 1990 and 2014, African countries failed to diversify their economies – unlike most fast-growing economies – as they relied on rents from their extractive industries (Songwe, 2019: 99). Consequently, the continent has been vulnerable to economic downturns and turbulent commodity prices. Chinese imports from Africa are primarily minerals and other raw commodities, while Chinese exports to Africa are diversified across different sectors and comprise of both services and goods (Mitchell, 2022). This has resulted in geographically uneven Sino–African trade patterns, since Chinese trade tends to favour resource-rich African states. For example, in 2021, China exported \$148 billion worth of goods to Africa while importing only \$106 billion worth of goods from Africa. Of the imported goods, \$75 billion came from five resource-rich nations – South Africa, Angola, the Republic of the Congo, the DRC, and Zambia (Baviera & Miri, 2022).

Taylor and Zajontz (2020: 291) raise the concern that the BRI’s investment pattern towards resource-rich economies, combined with an increased economic exchange between China and Africa, reproduces asymmetrical economic relations reminiscent of North–South relations. They reason that the BRI merely facilitates the diversification of dependency and does not provide an escape route from Africa’s historically exploitative relationships with the North. Equatorial Guinea is an example of an African economy that might be at risk of over-dependency. Chinese markets are central to the

Equatoguinean economy, given that it is largely dependent on oil exports and that China is the largest importer of Equatoguinean oil (US Energy Information Administration, 2022). Mitchell (2022) states that the main trade patterns of exporting commodities and importing cheap consumer goods will likely prevail over the medium-term. This is problematic given that excessive reliance on the export of primary commodities with limited value addition has the potential to hinder Africa's structural transformation (AfDB, 2023: 3). Export diversification plays a critical role in the ability of an economy to absorb shocks and recover quickly. Dependence on a limited range of exports amplifies the effect of external shocks on Africa. Consequently, economic diversification is an important part of building shock absorption capacity in Africa (AfDB, 2021: 34). It is thus problematic if trade relations encourage the disproportionate concentration of economic activity in the primary sector.

Within the context of volatile commodity prices, a rise in export volumes does not necessarily translate into increased profits. For example, the decline of commodity prices since 2014 adversely affected African commodity exporters, causing them to rely on significant government revenue from natural resources, leading to a growing budget deficit (Chen & Nord, 2017). For example, from 2011 to mid-2014, oil prices were relatively high, with Brent crude oil reaching over \$100 per barrel. However, prices plummeted in the second half of 2014 due to oversupply concerns and global economic factors, reaching lows below \$30 per barrel in early 2016 (see Baffes, Stocker & Vorisek, 2018). In Angola, this drop in oil prices led to a 20% reduction in GDP (Chen & Nord, 2017: 4). However, given the nature of Chinese imports into Africa, the import's value did not significantly diminish whereas the volatile commodity prices caused African exports to China to reduce significantly, increasing the trade deficit. In 2022, there was a slight improvement in trade balance due to higher commodity trade with the African current account deficit narrowing from 1.7% of the GDP in 2021 to 1.5% in 2022 (AfDB, 2023: 3). This has been witnessed in Angola. China has been the largest single importer of Angolan oil since 2006. In 2021, China was the recipient of 70.6% of Angola's crude oil exports amounting to \$14.2 billion. Angola's significant reliance on China as a trade partner implies that any fluctuations in demand for crude oil by China, disruptions in the Chinese economy, or any rupture in Sino–Angolan relations, could have a negative impact on Angola's economy (Republic of Angola, 2022: 27).

The prevailing trade deficit between China and Africa, as reinforced by increased economic ties facilitated by the BRI, could also pose certain risks. Although a trade deficit is not problematic in itself or necessarily indicates a weak economy, the African context is different. African countries often export primary goods, such as natural resources and agricultural products, and then re-import these goods after transformation into finished or intermediary products. Given the price disparity between value-added and non-value-added goods, Africa has an aggregate trade deficit with the rest of the world that is accompanied by deterioration in the continent's current account (Lastrapes, 2018). China aims to increase African imports to \$300 billion by 2025. In an effort to balance trade, China has enabled numerous African states to begin exporting some goods duty free, including over 8 800 commodities (Bociaga, 2023). However, Bavier and Miri (2022) found that Chinese bureaucratic hurdles and hesitance to enter into comprehensive trade deals were undermining Beijing's plan to boost African imports, according to African officials and business owners. Chinese exports into BRI countries are indicating an upward trend. In 2022, Chinese export markets expanded, and major products maintained sufficient competitive advantages with Chinese exports to countries along the BRI increasing by 20%. Exports to Africa increased by 14.8% (State Council Information Office of the PRC, 2023). Beijing's push to promote African imports in conjunction with rising commodity prices increased trade by 11% to \$282 billion in 2022. In the same year, Chinese exports to Africa amounted to \$164.49 billion while African imports to China reached \$117.51 billion (Bociaga, 2023). This is still a trade deficit of \$46.98 billion. This trend is replicated in state-state relations. For example, in 2021, Uganda's Chinese imports reached \$1 billion, while only exporting \$44 million, of which 80% of exports were primary commodities, such as coffee, tea and cotton (Bavier & Miri 2022). This trade imbalance could be indicative of an asymmetric power relationship in the long-term. According to Eguegu and Fu (2021: 3), the role of trade and trade-related issues as part of the BRI should be examined critically to ensure that Sino-African trade is sustainable and mutually beneficial. The authors point out that the stronger Chinese economic power provides Beijing with considerable bargaining power, which could have a negative effect on African countries because they transfer economic sovereignty at the cost of negotiating power. Consequently, China gains a greater competitive advantage while Africans pay more for goods and services (Herman, 2022).

Increased dependency on the Chinese economy could pose risks for African states. As China reaches its peak of industrial development, its demand for some primary commodities is likely to decrease. China's rebalanced growth model has had a significant influence on Africa. Consequently, a deceleration in China's domestic demand will affect imports from trading partners, but this differs among countries, creating losers and winners from China's rebalancing (Chen & Nord, 2017: 9). The effects of a deteriorating external environment associated with a global economic downturn, American–Chinese trade tensions, and the pandemic aggravated the Chinese economic slowdown. Given China's importance as an export market for African commodities, this slowing down could have far-reaching consequences for the region if African economies do not diversify their export baskets to China (Bociaga, 2023). According to an AfDB (2023: 1) forecast, China's reopening after three years of zero-COVID policy is listed as one of the key components of Africa's projected economic growth in 2023. Although this does not directly illustrate Africa's dependency on China, it does show the considerable effect the Chinese economy has on Africa.

If China were to be involved in geo-political conflict, this would have an adverse effect on both Sino–African trade and Beijing's capacity to invest in Africa. For example, the conflict between Taiwan and China in the current global landscape would inevitably result in the need for China to mobilise its economy to accommodate said conflict. According to Baum and Thies (2020: 208), geopolitical conflict often causes countries to underperform in terms of both production and consumption. Economic contraction occurs due to a decrease in labour and total factor productivity, the lack of investment in new human and physical capital, and reduced gains from both external and domestic trade (see Glick & Taylor, 2010). Increased intertwinement between China and African economies consequently poses a risk in the event that China decides to engage in geopolitical conflict with Taiwan or any other entity. There will be a natural reduction in government expenditure brought about by the BRI in this scenario, which could result in a significant contraction in the scope of the initiative and a reduction of Chinese FDI in Africa (Yu, 2021). Similarly, given that the BRI aims to advance economic cooperation between China and different countries (see Xi, 2014), economic turbulence will inevitably blow over to the African continent. Although this is not an immediate risk, the scale and scope of the effect of such a conflict on the African economy necessitates taking it into consideration in the long-term.

Trade liberalisation policies, such as free trade agreements (FTAs), have been employed as a tool to enhance economic cooperation along the BRI. Examples of this include the China–ASEAN FTA, The China–Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) FTA, the China–Sri Lanka FTA and the China–Georgia FTA (Devonshire-Ellis, 2021). Sector-specific reciprocal FTAs that would reduce tariffs on specific product lines have been suggested as a solution to lessen the Sino–African trade deficit. This is based on the assumption that Sino–African FTAs, in sectors where African imports consist predominantly of immature local industries or in sectors where the Chinese demand for African imports is high, will decrease trade deficits (see Malavoloneke & Ying, 2020). However, such agreements risk compromising infant industry growth in sectors where Africa does not have a comparative advantage (Fu, 2018). When a nation reduces barriers to trade, national resources adjust through specialisation towards areas of comparative advantage relative to the trading partner (see Ricardo, 2001). In theory, African countries signing bilateral trade liberalisation deals with China will, therefore, inevitably specialise in their areas of comparative advantage. An analysis of African export patterns by Stuart (2019: 5) showed that Africa had a comparative advantage relative to the rest of the world in exporting primary goods but lags behind significantly in terms of manufactured goods. Consequently, if not managed effectively, such agreements run the risk of working against long-term economic development goals in Africa by reinforcing the continent’s reliance on the export of primary commodities.

The Mauritius–China Free Trade Agreement (MCFTA) is the first of its kind to come into effect between China and an African country. The MCFTA was signed in 2019, and came into effect in 2021. The MCFTA will allow Mauritian exporters immediate duty-free access to the Chinese market on 7 504 tariff lines and plans to phase out an additional 723 tariff lines over a 5–7-year period starting on 1 January 2021. Additionally, both states have accepted to eliminate restrictions in more than 100 service sectors, including health services, financial services, telecommunications, ICT, construction and professional services (see Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2019). According to Ancharaz and Nathoot (2022: 1), Mauritius is an unlikely partner for a FTA with China given its lack of resources, small domestic market, and remote location. The authors also reason that the benefits of the MCFTA will be limited and skewed in Beijing’s favour given that Mauritian exports to and investment in China

are virtually non-existent. Although the MCFTA will afford certain Mauritian products duty-free access, the chances of Mauritian exporters penetrating the Chinese market remain slim. The agreement may therefore contribute to the already-large trade deficit that Mauritius has with China (Fat, Guan & Zhang, 2021: 2). According to Johnston and Lanteigne (2021), China appears to prefer a small-scale experimental approach to their long-term regional trade policy in order to gain experience in understanding the market it intends to enter. The authors thus reason that the development of agreements, similar to the MCFTA, between Africa and China is to be expected in the coming years.

The entrance of Chinese firms into African markets has been seen to diminish existing local businesses. More than 10 000 Chinese companies operate throughout Africa, since 2005, with the value of Chinese business on the continent amounting to over \$2 trillion. Africa has also surpassed Asia as the largest market for overseas Chinese construction projects (Mitchell, 2022). Chinese firms have the ability to maintain a high level of competitiveness due to utilising low-cost labour, government subsidies, cheaper resources, and other cost-saving measures which can undercut the prices of African companies (Hruby, 2019: 1). In addition, Chinese firms are often seen to have a greater power to capture markets due to their higher capital investment capabilities. Consequently, African firms may find it challenging to compete both regionally and globally with Chinese firms. This could have an adverse impact on African industries given that it has led to market monopolies being created by Chinese firms which then pushes out local competitors (Were, 2022). Reports of African industries being adversely impacted by the presence of Chinese firms have surfaced in several African countries including Nigeria (see Oshodi, 2022), Zambia (see Rotberg, 2017), Ethiopia (see Kuo, 2017), Kenya (see Miriri, 2023), Uganda (see Wingo, 2019) and South Africa (see Visser, 2023).

The majority of BRI projects in Africa aim to create industry, infrastructure and connectivity across Africa, but these projects also serve the function of building capacity so that Chinese businesses can further infiltrate the African market (Lokanathan, 2020: 8). Chinese capital is strategically invested in opening up new sales markets for Chinese exports. For example, the influx in African construction projects as a result of the BRI has created a demand for China's cement, steel and

construction sectors to compensate for China's domestic surplus (Mitchell, 2022). Calabrese and Tang (2023: 48) found that Chinese firms' investments in African countries are on average predominantly market-seeking rather than export-oriented. The expected increase in African consumers is likely to reinforce this trend. Africa's expected population growth in the coming decades (see UN DESA, 2022) will translate to a considerable increase in potential consumers in the region, making the continent of increasing importance to China's economic expansion (Stein & Uddhammar, 2021: 33).

China's significant economic growth together with the increased Chinese presence in African markets intensifies competition and imposes additional pressure on manufacturing industries in Africa. Without adequate strategic resources and capabilities, local firms may be unable to remain competitive and exit the market (Fu *et al.*, 2022: 876). For example, Chinese manufacturing firms could displace domestic competitors that produce similar goods due to domestic exchange rate over-evaluations and low-cost competition from China. According to Feng and Pilling (2019) the import of cheap Chinese products as well as the establishment of Chinese factories in Africa could hurt local manufacturing capacity. Industrial projects further predominately employ skilled labour from China and a few African locals as low-end employment (Lokanathan 2020: 8). This minimises positive spill-over effects into domestic economies. Concerns have surfaced that the import of Chinese products, especially textiles, is contributing to the demise of Nigeria's local industries. This sentiment has resulted in protests amid reports linking the unemployment of thousands of Nigerians in the textile industry to the increase of Chinese textiles in local markets (Oshodi, 2022: 69). More recently, Kenyan traders protested the coming of China Square retail outlets, whose general merchandise prices are reported to be on average 45% lower than those prevailing in locally owned enterprises (Miriri, 2023).

Unfair trade practices could have an adverse effect on the African economy (Kuo, 2017). The 'dumping' of Chinese products in African markets is an example of this. Product dumping occurs when an exporter lowers the sales prices of their goods to gain an unfair advantage in markets abroad. Dumped goods often flood markets with product prices deemed unfair to the business world (Ephraim & Tshedza, 2021: 120). According to Baughn and Yaprak (1996: 760), dumping is often a result of economic

nationalism, and could have a significant effect on local markets. A recent example of this can be seen in South Africa. According to the International Trade Administration Commission of South Africa (2023), an investigation of the alleged dumping of Chinese pneumatic tyres was launched on 31 January 2022. This investigation was launched after the South African Tyre Manufacturers Conference (representing its members, Bridgestone, Continental, Goodyear and Sumitomo) had lodged a complaint claiming that the Chinese tyres in question were imported into the South African Customs Union (SACU) at significantly lower prices, threatening to cause injury to the SACU industry. This resulted in South Africa taking protectionist measures in the form of increased import duties to protect the local industry. However, concerns regarding unfair trade practices, such as dumping, will be intensified in countries that lack the South African institutional capacity to employ such measures. In the long-term, these practices can be particularly damaging to emerging industries in Africa (Visser, 2023).

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

Although the BRI presents significant opportunities for Africa, there are some prominent risks. Firstly, debt sustainability concerns comprise a prominent risk. The narrative of Chinese debt-trap diplomacy has had far-reaching effects in shaping the discourse regarding lending under the BRI with competition between the US and China fuelling this narrative. Although the narrative has been disproved, certain trends with regard to lending practices under the BRI are still concerning. Opaqueness and extensive confidentiality clauses complicate debt estimates, prohibit civil society from holding governments accountable for funds, and have the potential to foster corrupt practices and illicit activities. Debt-for-equity swap clauses and lender-controlled revenue accounts could cause significant challenges for multilateral surveillance and policymaking but could also pose risks to the revenue stream of a country, as seen in the case of Uganda. Similarly, loan repayment in resources, as seen in the case of Angola, could pose significant risks for countries, especially in light of turbulent commodity prices. Unfavourable terms for collective restructuring further pose debt-sustainability risks.

The strategic intentions underpinning the BRI could pose numerous risks for African countries. Beijing's willingness to use political and economic ties to achieve strategic

objectives, as illustrated in the case of Port of Bata in Equatorial Guinea, could become particularly significant as global power structures shift and American–Chinese competition intensifies. Even though this is a long-term risk, the outcome of such a development could be far-reaching. It, therefore, remains pertinent to keep this in mind as the BRI expands in Africa. However, the expansion of Chinese PSCs, weapons, and surveillance technology on the African continent pose more immediate risks. Beijing’s policy of non-interference remains an underlying factor in all of these risks. Given that the expansion of the BRI coincides with closer Sino–African ties, it is important to acknowledge the risks associated with increased cooperation – together with an actor that takes such a stance.

Although increased trade cooperation between China and Africa could hold potential benefits, it also poses substantial risks. One such risk is the replication of the core-periphery dichotomy often seen in relations between the South and North. The reinforcement of this pattern can be detrimental to the diversification of African economies and their sustainable development. China’s vested interest in primary commodities could have an adverse effect on the economy in Africa if it is not accompanied by a diversification of imports. This concern becomes particularly prominent in the context of a significant trade deficit between African countries and China. Africa’s increased dependency on China’s economy could be troublesome in the long-term, especially amidst growing American–Chinese tensions, which could result in a drastic decrease in Chinese trade and investment. These patterns of dependency are increased by trade liberalization policies. The MCFTA may be an indication of a larger trend of FTAs to be signed between African states and China. This is particularly daunting given the effect that unfair trade practices and increased competition from Chinese firms already have on domestic markets.

## CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

### 5.1 Summary of Contents

The purpose of this study was to establish theoretically and analyse practically the risks and opportunities associated with the BRI for Africa. To facilitate the analysis, the following research question was formulated: *What are the opportunities and risks associated with the BRI?*

It was expected that the answers to the research question would provide possible answers to the complex issues pertaining to the engagement of the BRI in Africa. The research thus holds significance on three counts. Firstly, it provided insight into the BRI in an African context. Given the dynamic nature of the BRI, this study provided insights into the contemporary stance of the initiative. Secondly, it elaborated on the role that the BRI could play in economic development in Africa. By keeping in mind Africa's current attempts to reach its designated SDG, such as Agenda 2063 and the subsequent AfCFTA, the study elaborated on risks and opportunities associated with the BRI that is reflective of African realities. Lastly, the study was of significance given that it shed light on the long-term effects engaging with the BRI could have on Africa. Given the magnitude of the BRI and the fragility of numerous African economies, this research provided findings that could be used to capitalise on opportunities and mitigate risks. The findings of this research could assist government officials and private decision-makers to determine whether or not the opportunities associated with the BRI outweigh the risks of engaging with the initiative. This could empower more informed decision-making, particularly from African stakeholders.

The research was premised on the problem statement that the size and scope of the BRI could have a substantial effect on the African economy, necessitating further analysis of this phenomenon. In order to accomplish this, the study was conceptually demarcated into three risks and three opportunities associated with the BRI in Africa as analysed through the lens of IPE. The study was furthermore geographically confined to the 54 African states, with singular examples from other BRI states being used. With regard to temporal demarcation, this research focused primarily on Sino–African developments after the establishment of the BRI in 2013. However, historical

ties and pre-2013 developments were also considered to better comprehend contemporary developments and trends.

The study was executed in a descriptive and analytical manner based on a literature study and an analysis of factual data sources. The primary unit of analysis was African countries that partake in the BRI. Although the level of analysis was predominantly state-centric, other relevant international, continental, and regional factors and role players were also considered. The research was qualitative by nature, which allowed for in-depth analysis of complex non-numerical data. A literature review comprising primary sources, such as official records, loan agreements, and speeches, was employed in conjunction with secondary sources, such as research reports, books, and journals. The literature reviewed was collected by way of various methodological approaches, sources, and perspectives to assure that the findings would be representative of the problem at hand and accurate. An eclectic approach was used to accommodate the multiple dimensions of the problem statement, namely a deductive and a nomothetic approach, as recommended by DeCarlo (2018) and Bhattacharjee (2012). All appropriate ethical concerns associated with the research were considered and the needed ethical clearance was obtained.

In view of the above, the study commenced by providing a theoretical orientation consisting of relevant IPE theories. The multi-disciplinary nature of IPE provides a substantial framework through which to analyse the relevant research question. The mercantilist and economic nationalist perspectives provided key insights into the research question. Mercantilism takes on a realist view of international relations in the sense that it views states as power-maximising entities (see Machiavelli, 1531; see also section 2.2). The research touched on the imperialist policies that resulted from mercantilist views on the maximisation of wealth accumulation resulting in the colonisation of territories. In a more contemporary setting, the protectionist policies associated with modern states were discussed. This was followed by an overview of economic nationalism. Thereafter realist theory as both an analytical school of thought and a policy position was discussed. The research elaborated on a contemporary trend in which states with an economic nationalist approach adopt liberal policy reforms. This focused on developing economies that have moved away from protectionist policies towards state intervention based on nationalistic grounds to

strategically exploit opportunities available in the global economy. The association of economic nationalist policies with the dumping of exported products at prices below domestic prices, the forced nationalisation of property, the implementation of counter-trade restrictions, and government subsidising of domestic firms to increase their international competitiveness was discussed. The research then drew attention to the prevalence of economic nationalist characteristics in socialist or communist regimes, exploring examples such as Cuba, China, and North Korea. Lastly, the research touched on contemporary forms of economic nationalism that have developed amongst states in the Global South as a way of decreasing their dependency on the North (see section 2.2).

As opposed to economic nationalist policies, economic liberalism reasons that it is in the best interest of the nation-state to employ its power to create wealth, which would then produce more power and national security. Although liberals, such as Johnson and Marlin-Bennett (2021), believe that humans are selfish actors, they also believe that cooperation is possible in order to secure mutual gains (see section 2.3). As the nature of state–market–societal interaction evolved, so did the view of economic liberalism on governmental interference in the economy. Keynesian economics views government intervention in the markets as pivotal to improving the economy of the state and the overall welfare of the society. The research also explored institutionalism. Proponents of institutionalism reason that institutions can be used to create a more peaceful international environment, since liberal markets with well-functioning institutions would result in peaceful outcomes that would be conducive to the forming of commercial ties that would, in turn, encourage further cooperation. However, neoclassical liberals, such as Friedman and Schwartz (1987) and Williamson (1993) reject the Keynesian emphasis on coordination through the correlation of the global economy. On the African continent, this resulted in market-based reforms prescribed by international financial institutions under SAPs (see section 2.3).

The research highlighted that the guiding principle of structuralism lies in the notion that every system should be viewed as an organised set of interrelated elements to be studied atomistically, rendering the relations that constitute the structure as more important than their individual elements (see section 2.4). The current study explored the Marxist influence on structuralist thought. Marxist analysis combines activism with

a philosophical investigation of the political economy (see Marx, 1887). Karl Marx's thoughts on the division of labour and historical materialism are highlighted. Lenin (1982) expanded on Marxian thought by predicting that capitalism would spread globally, resulting in a contradiction to inter-imperialist conflict. Structuralism conceptualises the international system as comprising asymmetric centre–periphery relations. Dependency theory builds on this by rooting underdevelopment in the unequal relationships within the world system resulting in the core–periphery dichotomy. Consequently, developing states have been embracing numerous policy reforms in order to counter these exploitative structures. Modern world systems theory proposes that the world system is capitalist in nature, and largely determines the global social and political order as well as the interactions between states and other international actors. Contemporary concerns about neo-imperialism have been raised by structuralists, such as Brewer (1980) and Grosfoguel (2007) (see section 2.4). Chinese economic expansion is often associated with this.

The current study also considered constructivism in order to delve deeper into strategic Chinese objectives. Constructivism focuses on the norms, ideas, and discourse present in shaping outcomes (see section 2.5). It rejects the realist notion that simply observing military and economic forces is sufficient to explain how states interact. Alexander Wendt (1999) challenged the core neorealist premise that anarchy forces states into perpetual security competitions, instead attributing whether a system is peaceful or not to the shared culture created through discursive social practices as opposed to anarchy and power. Because each actor's interests and identity are products of the other's diplomatic gestures, the international structure is malleable through process. Constructivism aims to understand the establishment of norms in international relations, and reasons that human societies construct appropriate norms from the narratives they accept and propagate. Constructivists view knowledge structures as intersubjective and capable of redefining the interests and identities of actors through continual interaction. The study also took into account the geopsychological profile of China as developed by Jain (2019) to understand the strategic intentions of China when assessing the BRI in Africa (see section 2.5).

The study then moved its focus to three categories of opportunities (in terms of infrastructure development, industrialisation, and digital development) and risks (in

terms of unsustainable debt concerns, security concerns, and dependency concerns). The analysis employed the theoretical tools from the different IPE theoretical frameworks to analyse the phenomenon at hand. The research elaborated on the following opportunities:

- The research found that the BRI provides opportunities to close Africa's infrastructure gap (see section 3.2). Infrastructure development is a pivotal concern with regard to development in Africa. Closing the infrastructure gap is one of the building blocks of emancipating Africa from numerous socio-economic concerns. The growing population in Africa and the changing demographic composition on the continent necessitate the development of infrastructure – not only in a socio-economic context, but also in order to stimulate employment through industrial development. It is therefore beneficial that the BRI presents an opportunity to develop infrastructure that could contribute to the productive transformation in Africa. Major railway projects in Gabon, Mauritania, and Nigeria, and hydropower schemes in Ethiopia, Sudan, and Ghana are all examples of such projects. The expertise and experience of Chinese construction companies could be advantageous in infrastructure development in Africa, given the current low levels of project completion on the continent. Recent developments within the BRI, such as a shift away from mega projects towards smaller projects, could result in a more sustainable approach to infrastructure development in Africa within the context of rising debt concerns. This approach will also be beneficial for higher levels of project completion. These opportunities for infrastructure development could be magnified if they are aligned with the goals of the AfCFTA.
- The research found that the BRI has the potential to assist in industrialisation and economic development in Africa (see section 3.3). The current study highlighted the importance of developing industrial capacity, especially in terms of manufacturing capability, which forms a pivotal part of Africa's economic development. The BRI could assist African countries in moving up global value chains by tapping into Chinese knowledge structures, fostering greater industrial capacity through increased cooperation with China, and embracing the BRI skills development initiatives to improve human capital in Africa. The

study also found that FDI could be enhanced through Beijing's incentives towards Chinese companies to expand to BRI countries. Collectively, these developments have the potential to foster enhanced inclusion in global and regional value chains. This can be especially effective if combined with the greater goals of the AfCFTA in the African quest for industrialisation.

- The DSR presents opportunities to improve Africa's digital development (see section 3.4). The emphasis of the DSR on developing digital infrastructure on the African continent presents a significant opportunity for the continent to adapt better to the changing international environment and capitalise on opportunities associated with technological developments. Two critical components of embracing the 4IR are upskilling and reskilling the African workforce. The DSR has the potential to assist in this by facilitating skills development programmes. The initiative can also be used to improve this by providing the necessary expertise to assist in digital development of the continent. This digital transformation, together with initiatives by the DSR to improve the African digital economy, such as building e-commerce capacity on the continent, would provide local industry with numerous opportunities to expand.

The study also explored numerous risks associated with the BRI:

- Debt sustainability concerns comprise a prominent risk. The study analysed the narrative of Chinese debt-trap-diplomacy critically (see section 4.2). The opaqueness and extensive confidentiality clauses in BRI contracts complicate debt estimates, prohibit civil society from holding governments accountable for funds, and have the potential to foster corrupt practices and illicit activities. Similarly, debt-for-equity swap clauses and lender-controlled revenue accounts could cause significant challenges for multilateral surveillance and policymaking but could also pose risks to the revenue stream of a country as seen in the case of Uganda (see section 4.2). Similarly, loan repayment in resources, as seen in the case of Angola (see section 4.2), could pose significant risks for countries, especially in light of turbulent commodity prices. Unfavourable terms for collective restructuring, further pose debt-sustainability risks.

- The strategic intentions underpinning the BRI could create numerous security concerns for African countries (see section 4.3). Beijing's willingness to leverage political and economic ties to achieve strategic objectives, as illustrated in the case of the Port of Bata in Equatorial Guinea, could become particularly significant as global power structures shift and American–Chinese competition intensifies. However, the expansion of Chinese PSCs, weapons, and surveillance technology on the African continent all pose more immediate security risks. Beijing's policy of non-interference remains an underlying factor in all of these risks. Given that expansion of the BRI coincides with closer Sino–African ties, it is important to acknowledge the risks associated with increased cooperation with an actor that takes such a stance.
- The study explored risks associated with the Sino–African trade deficit and dependency concerns (see section 4.4). A significant risk is the replication of the core–periphery dichotomy often seen in relations between the South and the North. The reinforcement of this pattern can be detrimental to the diversification of African economies and sustainable development of the continent. Chinese vested interests in primary commodities could have an adverse effect on the African economy if they are not accompanied by a diversification of imports. This concern becomes particularly prominent in the context of a significant trade deficit between African countries and China. The increased dependency of Africa on Chinese support could be troublesome in the long-term, especially amidst growing American–Chinese tensions, which could result in a drastic decrease in Chinese trade and investment if Beijing were to be involved in military conflict. These patterns of dependency are increased by trade liberalization policies. The MCFTA might be an indication of a larger trend of FTAs to be signed between African states and China. This is particularly daunting given the influence that unfair trade practices and increased competition from Chinese firms already have on domestic markets.

The fact that the study only focussed on three types of risks and opportunities poses some problems for the purpose of making generalised conclusions with regard to the BRI in Africa. These risks and opportunities had, however been chosen based on prominent themes in research and popular discourse as well as critical components of

economic development in Africa. It fell outside the scope of the current study to identify all risks and opportunities; however, those identified referred to various practical examples from various African countries with different economic, political, and social landscapes to make the findings more generalisable.

## **5.2 Conclusion and Main Findings**

In relation to the research question, two subsidiary questions were posed:

- To what extent can the BRI strengthen international development and create more opportunities for African countries?
- What are prominent risks for African countries, since the BRI would not be without risk for those involved in BRI projects?

The following conclusions were deduced in terms of the research question and the subsidiary questions.

To what extent can the BRI strengthen international development and create more opportunities for African countries?

The research found that the BRI is a multi-faceted and dynamic initiative with the potential to offer Africa several opportunities associated with infrastructure development, industrialisation, the DSR, and 4IR. The research found that many of the opportunities discussed also pose significant risks. Not all opportunities will be suitable for all African countries, and should be explored on a case-by-case basis. This current study therefore does not suggest that the BRI is the solution to all of Africa's economic woes; it merely elaborates on some key opportunities the initiative could afford the continent.

As African states are attempting to build an independent and diversified domestic economy, its infrastructure gap has become a significant stumbling block. In light of the AfCFTA, the development of trade infrastructure has become increasingly important. Consequently, the BRI could play an important role in facilitating this in Africa. An example of this is the construction of the Kenyan SGR. Complementary policy reforms could maximise gains from transport projects. If countries reduce regional trade barriers while embracing the development of intra-regional transport corridors, they could see a significant improvement in their economies.

The development of economic infrastructure in Africa is another priority. The focus of the BRI on developing a business relationship with Africa as opposed to merely providing aid could make it a valuable tool in enhancing the economic infrastructure on the continent. The development of Burundi's Ruzibazi Hydropower Dam is an example of this. This project aims to increase production in different economic sectors given that energy is a critical component in the economic development of Burundi. However, the BRI could also assist in developing social infrastructure. China has aided in constructing upwards of 130 medical facilities, 45 sports venues and more than 170 schools in Africa. The African Union Centre for Disease Control and Prevention located in Ethiopia is a recent example of such developments.

The BRI could be employed to assist in industrialisation in Africa. The BRI presents opportunities to move productive capabilities in Africa up the value chain. However, this is a double-edged sword. Although FDI has the potential to stimulate African industry via the BRI, it could also reinforce patterns of dependency. Consequently, in order to optimise gains, African economies need to focus on diversification and the development of local industries while guarding against possible risks associated with the BRI. The cooperation between China and Africa in the fields of skilled labour and education capacity building aligns with the larger goal of the initiative, namely the goal of facilitating people-to-people connections. The BRI presents an opportunity for the development of the technical and vocational skills needed by the African population to propel industrialisation. This presents an opportunity to develop African human capital, which could contribute to enhanced production capacity and, in time, increased economic prosperity. The BRI presents an opportunity for Africa to connect to global value chains in Europe and Asia through infrastructure development and incorporation into larger BRI networks. This is particularly important given the history of exclusion of the continent from global value chains. However, in order for this opportunity to benefit all parties, it remains important for African stakeholders to embrace BRI projects that align with greater economic and social development goals on the continent.

The research also indicated opportunities for cooperation between the AfCFTA and the BRI. By aligning with the principles of economic liberalism and promoting free trade, the AfCFTA can facilitate economic diversification, enhance regional integration, and create a competitive market that benefits African consumers. Beijing

has a significant incentive to support the development of African trade networks and industrialisation goals, as this will foster increased cooperation and strengthen the long-term economic and strategic relationship between China and Africa. As African economies diversify their production and export structures, African firms will become more competitive in regional and global value chains, providing significant expansion and economic development opportunities. The recent China-Africa Economic and Trade Expo demonstrated the potential for enhanced collaboration, with substantial deals signed and increased opportunities for African markets to expand. By leveraging the synergies between the BRI and the AfCFTA, Africa can accelerate its path toward sustainable development, while China can further solidify its economic ties and partnerships.

The DSR could create opportunities for African states to embrace enhanced technologies. The DSR could assist by improving connectivity on the continent through the construction of digital infrastructure such as transcontinental submarine optical cables, cross-border optical cables, and spatial and satellite information passageways while introducing new technologies, such as nanotechnology, AI, big data, quantum computing, cloud computing, and smart cities. These developments could be instrumental in improving the productive capacity in Africa and facilitating economic growth. Furthermore, the DSR includes opportunities to upskill and reskill workers, which is a critical component in managing the potentially devastating effect that the 4IR could have on employment. The research also found that the DSR creates opportunities for increased economic inclusivity – both within the continent and between Africa and the world. The development of a digital economy in Africa through the establishment of e-commerce platforms could be a valuable tool for economic expansion on the continent. This development would also provide opportunities for African entrepreneurs to have access to a greater market. However, given the digital divide on the continent, not all Africans will be able to embrace this opportunity. Consequently, the development of digital infrastructure to accommodate technological developments remains the first priority in this regard.

What are prominent risks for African countries, since the BRI would not be without risk for those involved in BRI projects?

The current study also found significant risks associated with the BRI. This includes risks associated with debt distress, Beijing's strategic intentions' implications for African security, and concerns about increasing African economic dependency on China. The significance of these risks varies across African states, and not all risks discussed are immediate concerns. However, given the centrality of the BRI in China's foreign policy and the upward trend in Sino–African relations, it remains important to take cognisance of these risks to mitigate them proactively.

The BRI poses the risk of promoting unsustainable debt levels in Africa. It should be noted that it ultimately remains the responsibility of African governments to decide which debt agreements to enter into. The BRI can, therefore, not be held liable for poor African decision-making. However, BRI loan agreements do pose certain risks and unfavourable clauses that should be considered. The opaqueness of these agreements could create a breeding ground for corrupt practices and illicit activities. Likewise, the inclusion of extensive confidentiality clauses prohibits civil society from holding governments accountable and complicates debt-level estimates. Debt-for-equity swap clauses could also be problematic given that they might disrupt previously established government revenue streams. Lender-controlled revenue accounts could pose significant challenges for multilateral surveillance and policymaking, especially when combined with confidentiality clauses. Another risk is created by the repayment of loans using resources. As seen in the case of Angola, this can be problematic. Such repayments create the risk of reinforcing patterns of dependency on commodity exports, and leave countries at the mercy of volatile commodity prices. These concerns become increasingly prominent given the unfavourable approach to collective restructuring. Although Beijing's apprehensive approach to Western arrangements, such as the Paris Club (see section 4.2), is understandable, it still poses risks for debt sustainability.

Expanding Chinese influence through the BRI raises complex geopolitical and security challenges. Beijing's rumoured 'String of Pearls' strategy, which aims to establish military and commercial naval bases along the IOR, has raised alarms about increased Chinese logistical and military access in the region. While some argue that these developments are defensive in nature, aimed at securing trade routes and enhancing preparedness, others express concerns about China's strategic intentions. However,

Beijing's skilful use of soft power rhetoric, emphasising peace and cooperation, masks its strategic intentions and potential military basing and expansion plans. The case of Equatorial Guinea highlights how the BRI has been employed to consolidate economic and political relationships that could serve future strategic objectives. Given the magnitude of the BRI in Africa, this could be indicative of significant risks pertaining to Chinese militarisation on the continent. If increasing competition between China and the US escalates to military conflict, this could have a significant effect on Africa. The Port of Bata is a valuable example of how Chinese-built infrastructure projects in African countries could be utilised in combat. Given the economic dependency of these countries on Beijing, they will have very little choice but to oblige, placing them in the middle of a very dangerous conflict. Beijing's willingness to use political and economic ties to achieve strategic objectives does not pose an immediate risk, but given the scope of such a risk, it should be considered when engaging with the BRI.

Given that the BRI brings about growth in Chinese interests on the continent, because of an increased number of Chinese nationals as well as Chinese investments, the number of PSCs in Africa is also mounting. Given that these companies function in a legal grey zone, this could create security and regulatory risks for African states. While Chinese PSCs may be expanding globally to protect China's foreign assets and participate in BRI projects, their lower level of preparedness and lack of necessary skills and experience pose risks to the stability and interests of host countries. Similarly, the increased presence of Chinese security measures due to the expansion of the BRI becomes increasingly risky in light of Beijing's policy of non-interference. The expansion of Chinese arms trade with African states and the policy of non-interference can exacerbate tensions in conflict-prone regions. The influx of Chinese weapons and military equipment in countries like Sudan and South Sudan raises questions about China's commitment to upholding international norms and ethical conduct. These developments can have an adverse effect on attempts to increase peaceful cooperation in the region. This can have an adverse effect on both human security and development on the continent.

The presence of Chinese weapons and advanced surveillance technology in Africa could create ethical governance and human rights risks in the hands of authoritarian governments. The export of surveillance technologies and the involvement of Chinese

telecommunications companies in Africa highlight the potential for increased monitoring and suppression of dissent. These developments could have negative consequences for the development of democratic practices on the continent. As highlighted in the case of the construction of the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, Chinese espionage poses not only a threat to individual privacy but also to national security. Through the DSR, Beijing gains access to critical infrastructure and sensitive information. This can be problematic when combined with Chinese laws such as the national intelligence law (see section 4.3). This can have detrimental effects on national economies and jeopardise technological advancements if African states do not pre-emptively mitigate these risks by putting national legislation in place that protects sensitive information.

The BRI has contributed to China's emergence as Africa's largest trading partner, with Africa becoming an important destination for Chinese investments and a significant source of imports for China. However, concerns about the trade imbalance and structural dependence have emerged as a result. The BRI is a driver of closer Sino–African economic relations, which could create substantial opportunities for economic development and mutually beneficial cooperation. However, if these opportunities are not embraced strategically, they could pose significant risks. The Sino–African trade deficit and patterns of dependency run the risk of replicating the core–periphery dichotomy. This pattern could be detrimental to African economies' diversification and sustainable development. China's vested interest in primary commodities could also have an adverse effect on the African economy if a diversification of imports does not accompany it. Although Beijing employs programmes to attempt to decrease the Sino–African trade deficit, these programmes have a long way to go in decreasing the asymmetric power relationship between the entities effectively. To address the trade deficit and promote more balanced trade relations, suggestions include sector-specific reciprocal FTAs and trade liberalisation policies. However, caution is needed to ensure that such agreements do not compromise the growth of African infant industries or reinforce Africa's specialisation in primary goods.

This dependency also puts African economies at risk of being adversely affected by any negative developments in the Chinese economy. In the context of growing American–Chinese tensions, this risk becomes increasingly prevalent. If Beijing were

to enter into a geopolitical conflict, there would be a drastic contraction in the BRI and other Chinese financial in-flows. Given the lack of resilience in many African economies, this could be devastating. Similarly, changes in China's domestic demand or economic slowdown could have far-reaching consequences for African economies that heavily rely on exporting commodities to China. Geopolitical conflicts involving China could disrupt Sino-African trade and Chinese investments in Africa. Increased economic cooperation, as encouraged by the BRI, also exposes African industries to unfair trade practices, such as dumping, as well as significant competition in the manufacturing sector. This could pose risks to the development of domestic industries.

In conclusion, the BRI presents a complex landscape of opportunities and risks for Africa. The BRI has the potential to boost economic development, enhance regional integration, and promote trade by connecting Africa with Asia and Europe through land and maritime networks. This initiative opens new avenues for infrastructure development, investment, and job creation in African countries. However, it is important to acknowledge the risks and challenges of such a partnership. The BRI raises concerns related to debt sustainability, transparency, security concerns, and the potential for unequal power dynamics between China and African nations. As Africa seeks to emancipate itself from poverty and underdevelopment, it must carefully navigate the dragon's den, weighing the potential rewards against the fire that may accompany them. African governments and stakeholders must engage in informed decision-making, ensuring that the benefits of the BRI are maximised while mitigating potential risks and safeguarding the long-term interests of their nations and citizens. By striking a delicate balance and implementing effective mechanisms, Africa can harness the opportunities presented by the BRI to foster sustainable and inclusive development on the continent. Based on this research, additional research can be conducted on how Africa can leverage institutions, such as the AU, to create a common policy framework with which to engage with bilateral investors, such as China. This could be influential in mitigating risks, while optimising gains from opportunities.

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