

## **Guarded Optimism, Caution and Sophistication: Indonesian Diplomats' Perceptions of the Belt and Road Initiative**

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### **Abstract**

This article investigates Indonesian diplomats' perceptions of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Personal interviews were conducted with Indonesian diplomats who have dealt either directly or indirectly with China-related issues. The image theory in international relations was then applied to analyse their perceptions of the initiative. The responses reflected a prevailing perception that China presents a moderate level of threat to Indonesia. This view was manifested primarily in concerns that Indonesia could be economically exploited by taking part in the initiative. However, the diplomats in this sample also displayed a sophisticated approach, combining a tendency to portray Chinese intentions negatively with a favourable opinion of the initiative and a belief that Indonesia could still benefit from it. Their comments suggest that if Jakarta maintains its present perceptions, Indonesia is highly likely to maintain its engagement with the BRI. Nevertheless, the diplomats' mixed feelings could place some constraints on how intensive the Indonesian–Chinese bilateral economic exchanges related to the BRI will become, as well as on how explicitly Indonesia will demonstrate its support for China by promoting the initiative globally.

**Keywords:** *image theory, perception, Belt and Road Initiative, Indonesian foreign policy, Indonesia–China relations*

### **1. Introduction**

Since the rise of Xi Jinping as China's paramount leader, Beijing has introduced some changes in how it conducts foreign policy. Scholars have disagreed on the extent to which these changes mark a fundamental

transformation. They seem to have agreed, however, that China has become more confident, particularly in articulating its aspiration to be more than a mere regional power (Baviera, 2016; Hu, 2019; Wang, 2019). Chinese leaders have sought to ensure that such an aspiration would go beyond the rhetorical level. New foreign-policy initiatives have been taken up under the banner of the ‘China Dream’ (*Zhongguo Meng*) slogan, which was aimed at ‘realis[ing] the great renewal of the Chinese nation’.<sup>1</sup> In this context, President Xi has launched a plan to revive the ancient Silk Roads – both the land-based and the maritime ones – through the ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative, subsequently renamed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Clarke, 2017).

The BRI seeks to cover a vast geographic area linking Asia, Europe and Africa. Such a grand initiative has been viewed as unprecedented in the diplomatic history of the People’s Republic (Cai, 2018). As a result, a large body of literature has accumulated around ‘Beijing’s most ambitious foreign-policy initiative’ (Zhou & Esteban, 2018: 488). Scholars have discussed, among other things, what China is attempting to achieve by introducing the BRI (Clarke, 2018; Hong, 2016; Jones and Zeng, 2019; Yu, 2017) and what challenges and downsides could accompany the initiative’s implementation (Shah, 2019; Styan, 2019; S. Zhao, 2019). Considerable attention has also been devoted to the responses by other countries, especially those in Southeast Asia since this region has been considered instrumental to the BRI’s overall implementation (see Blanchard, 2019; Chan, 2019; Chen, 2018; Gong, 2019; Leng, 2019; Liu & Lim, 2019; H. Zhao, 2019). The present article examines how Indonesia, the largest country in Southeast Asia, has responded to the BRI and thereby to contribute to the discussions about the initiative’s prospects for successful implementation.

There exist only a relatively limited number of studies on bilateral Indonesian–Chinese interactions related to the BRI. One group of studies has mainly explored the progress of BRI implementation and its prospects for success in Indonesia (Damuri, Perkasa, Atje and Hirawan, 2019; Lovina, Jiajia and Chen, 2017; Negara and Suryadinata, 2019; Xu, Du, Jin, Fu and Li, 2017). These papers have reported the opinions of various relevant stakeholders in Indonesia about the BRI, identified possible areas of cooperation as well as various challenges that have emerged thus far, and offered policy recommendations for both Jakarta and Beijing to maximise the benefits resulting from their cooperation.

In addition, another group of studies has examined and attempted to explain Indonesia’s responses to the BRI. In an investigation of Southeast Asian countries’ reactions to the BRI, Chen (2018) groups Indonesia under the category of ‘Tier 2 countries’, i.e. those providing conditional support for the initiative but with strong reservations. Jokowi’s Indonesia has indicated positive signs of support by attending the 2017 and 2019

Belt and Road Forums for International Cooperation (BRF), as well as by signing an intergovernmental cooperation document linking the BRI and Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum vision.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the Indonesian government has been rather slow in transforming its support into action. This is particularly evident in the construction of the Jakarta–Bandung high-speed railway – the BRI's landmark project in Indonesia – which has been plagued by significant delays (Negara & Suryadinata, 2018).<sup>3</sup> Fitriani (2018) in her examination of Indonesia's responses to the initiative made similar observations, describing Jakarta as somewhat restrained despite the favourable opportunities that the BRI offers. She further argues that such a response has been primarily shaped by concerns that Indonesia could be economically exploited and politically undermined by promoting the initiative.

In most of the studies mentioned above, Indonesian perceptions of the BRI have received significant attention. The information sources for these studies have included interviews with key government officials at various levels, leading business associations and prominent scholars and pundits. To complement such an effort, public statements by leaders of the BRI have also been examined.

For the most part, however, previous studies have investigated Indonesian perceptions of the BRI in only a casual manner. This limitation is notably evident in their tendency not to study perceptions as psychological concepts. Rather, these scholars have regarded perceptions as readily observable by means of texts or verbal statements, whereas cognitive variables are in fact abstract and not linguistic realities that can be directly identified. Lacking a more rigorous, systematic procedure by which to infer perceptions, these studies have reported only what Indonesians say they think about the BRI, without presenting any meaningful interpretation of what their verbal statements mean about their actual perceptions – let alone any inferences about perceptions that would be useful in attaining a deeper understanding of current Indonesia–China relations.

With those concerns in mind, this article seeks to contribute to the current literature by empirically and systematically investigating Indonesian perceptions of the BRI. In so doing, it follows the procedure established by image theory in international relations to ensure that the inquiry into perceptions is conducted in a systematic manner. The inquiry aims to uncover both the substance and structure of Indonesian perceptions of this grand Chinese initiative. In other words, it seeks to reveal variations in how the Indonesians see the BRI as well as to examine their degree of sophistication in perceiving it. As a result, I hope to shed some light on how perceptual factors might impact Indonesia's attitude towards the initiative in the long run.

The next two sections of the article outline image theory in international relations and then the methodological procedures used to collect and interpret

the data. The fourth section presents the varied themes emerging from Indonesian comments on Chinese intentions in promoting the BRI. The fifth section analyses these descriptions by applying image theory to them; it is followed by a systematic examination of Indonesians' affective orientation towards the initiative. The concluding section summarises the findings and considers how they might impact Indonesia's future engagement with the BRI.

## 2. Image Theory in International Relations

Image theorists assert that perception is an abstract psychological construct (Herrmann, 1985). In other words, perceptions are an outgrowth of cognitive processes that take place inside the human mind and are thus not readily observable. The lack of access to the mind's internal workings, however, is not a reason to avoid studying perceptions (Herrmann, 1988: 180-181). Instead, image theorists have developed a procedure designed to facilitate systematic, empirical investigations of perceptions of a particular target country.

According to image theorists, one's perception of a country can be traced to the images one uses in referring to the country. Images are defined as 'conscious pictures or descriptions of foreign countries that a leader presents through language' (Herrmann, 1985: 31). Accordingly, unlike perceptions, images are linguistically observable. If perceptions are considered analogous to diseases, as Herrmann (1985: 34) argues, images are like symptoms. One can infer perceptions from images, just as medical doctors identify a disease by looking at its symptoms. This approach further implies that one can identify, through analysis of images, variations in how different individuals perceive a country; for example, one may see a threat whereas someone else sees an opportunity.

In the field of international relations, image theorists have identified at least five images: enemy, ally, imperialist, degenerate and colony (Herrmann and Fischerkeller, 1995). Each image reveals distinct strategic judgements about whether a target country represents a threat or an opportunity.<sup>4</sup> When they sense an intense threat from a target country, perceivers may hold either the *enemy* or the *imperialist* image. The former image arises when one fears being outcompeted by the target country; the latter derives from a perceived danger of being exploited or overpowered by the target country. The other three images arise in response to a particular perceived opportunity. The *ally* image portrays the target country as holding mutual interests and goals and presenting an opportunity for mutual gain; the *degenerate* image reflects a perceived opportunity to dominate the target country; and the *colony* image (the inverse of the imperialist image) is endorsed when one sees an opportunity to exploit a target country is perceived. Table 1 presents the five images with their corresponding perceptions.

**Table 1** Ideal-Typical Images and Their Inferred Perceptions

Image	Perception That the Image Reveals
Enemy	Threat
Imperialist	Threat
Ally	Opportunity through mutual interests
Degenerate	Opportunity through domination
Colony	Opportunity through exploitation

Image theorists emphasise that those who seek to identify which image perceivers attribute to a target country should avoid taking their verbal rhetoric at face value (Herrmann, 1985; Herrmann & Fischerkeller, 1995). Perceivers, for example, might use the word enemy to describe a target country, but this is not necessarily a clear indication that the speaker holds the enemy image of that country.

The image that perceivers hold of a target country can be identified indirectly by how they describe three dimensions of the country: motivation, capability and decision-making processes. Of the three, Herrmann (1981) puts the greatest weight on the motivational dimension. He contends that this dimension is located at the centre of the image and represents one's unified impression of the target country, or that it contributes most substantially to how the country is portrayed overall.<sup>5</sup> This implies that one can infer which of the five images is endorsed by perceivers primarily from their depictions of the target country's motivation.

Table 2 outlines the components that commonly accompany a description of the target country's motivation associated with each image. For example, perceivers holding an imperialist image of the target country may believe that the target wants simply to exploit their home country's economic resources. This image further reveals a fear that the target country could overpower one's country and therefore presents an intense threat. In contrast, if perceivers describe the target country's motivation in ways that resemble the ally image, then one can infer that they see an opportunity for mutual gain from dealing with that country.

Based on findings from cognitive psychology, image theorists argue that images have stereotypical functions. They perform the role of an information filter, affecting what perceivers notice about the target country they are dealing with and thereby simplifying the perceivers' knowledge about the country. An experimental study by (Herrmann, Voss, Schooler and Ciarrochi, 1997) confirmed these functions of images. It showed that images help individuals fill in missing information about a particular country and shape the interpretation of new information. In light of these contexts, the

**Table 2** Images of Target Countries and Associated Descriptions of the Target's Motivation

Image	Perceiver's description of target's motivation
Enemy	Motives are judged to be evil and unlimited. They can include a variety of imperialistic interests in economic, ideological and communal domination.
Imperialist	Great cynicism about the target country's supposed altruistic ideology, including a strong perception of hypocrisy. The imperial power is seen as interested in maintaining colonies for the purpose of exploitation, as a source of raw materials, a locus of investment and a market for its manufactured products and culture.
Ally	Ready to pursue mutually beneficial economic relations and cooperate in peaceful joint efforts to protect and improve the global environment. Motivated by altruism as much as by self-interest.
Degenerate	Leaders are more concerned about preserving what they have than with a vision for the future and have accepted their fall from greatness, wanting only to make it less painful.
Colony	<p><i>Good forces</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paternal leader; progressive moderniser; nationalist; leader driven by the people's interests.</li> </ul> <p><i>Bad forces</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Radical, fanatical demagogue; xenophobic, racist extremist; evil dictator; puppet of great-power enemy.</li> </ul>

Source: Herrmann and Fischerkeller, 1995.

components defined in Table 2 should be regarded as a reflection of each image's stereotypical description of a target country's motivation. These simplified descriptions should be understood as the results of the cognitive process in which an image performs its stereotyping functions.

Image theorists propose one additional description to accommodate cases in which perceivers provide a non-stereotypical motivational picture of a target country. Such a description indicates that those perceivers' mental representation of the country does not have the properties of a stereotype, which is then labelled *complex*. Cottam (1977) defines this complex image's motivational dimension as follows:

Motivational complexity will be granted governments in this situation. There will be little tendency to ascribe a judgement of good or bad to the policy thrust associated with motivations. Defence is likely to be perceived as a significant aspect of motivation.

Such a non-stereotypical description of a target country's motivation is used as a reference point when one is measuring the degree of simplification in a perceiver's image. In this process, analysts should assess the extent to which perceivers' verbal rhetoric differs from the non-stereotypical complex terms and how closely it resembles one of the stereotypical descriptions in Table 2. The more simplified the motivational picture that perceivers assign to a target country is, the more stereotypical the image and thus the more significantly the image deviates from the reference point. Conversely, the more sophisticated the perceivers' description of the country's motivation is, the less stereotypical the image, and thus the image more closely resembles the complex terms.

For instance, analysts might find that a particular perceiver describes a target country's motivation simply as evil and unjustified, while further emphasising its unlimited drive for world domination. Such a description clearly shows the perceiver's strong tendency to make a negative judgement about the country, in a way that closely resembles the stereotypical enemy image.

In contrast, other perceivers might present some elements of the enemy image while appearing to make a relatively impartial judgement about a country. In this case, they are assigning a more complex motivational picture to the country, one with only a moderate or even weak resemblance to the stereotypical enemy image.

According to image theorists, the degree of stereotypical character in a perceiver's image correlates positively with the level of perceived threat or opportunity (Herrmann, 1988). Therefore, those who hold a stereotypical image of a target country perceive the most intense threats or opportunities coming from the country. For example, people whose description of a target country closely parallels the stereotypical imperialist image are likely to feel considerable concern about their country's risk of being exploited and overpowered by the target country. On the other hand, if perceivers hold a relatively non-stereotypical ally image of a target country, containing some elements of complex aspects and only moderately resembling the ally construct, analysts can infer that opportunities from that country are seen as less strong.

This study applies the theoretical approach outlined above to systematically infer Indonesian elites' perceptions of the BRI based on how they describe China's motivation in promoting the initiative. In the next section, I describe the group of Indonesian elites interviewed for the study.

### **3. Methodology**

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 50 Indonesian diplomats from March to May 2018. The interviews used primarily open-ended questions to elicit respondents' views regarding the BRI. One closed-ended question

was also asked, following sufficient exploration of the respondents' views, to minimise the possibility of misrepresentation. Qualitative content analysis was then applied to analyse the responses.

A purposive sampling procedure was employed to select Indonesian diplomats for inclusion. To obtain the most influential views within the foreign-affairs bureaucracy, the sample included the top echelon of the foreign ministry, namely the directors general, ambassadors and the consulates general. In addition, I also interviewed the diplomats responsible for Indonesia–China relations and China-related issues during the first presidential term of Joko Widodo (2014–2019). This group comprised junior and middle-level diplomats within the Directorate General of Asia-Pacific and African Affairs, particularly the Directorate for East Asian and Pacific Affairs<sup>6</sup>, the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Beijing and the Consulates General of the Republic of Indonesia in Guangzhou and Shanghai.

To obtain a broader spectrum of perceptions, snowball sampling was also applied. This method secured participation by ten diplomats working under the Directorate of ASEAN Political and Security Cooperation, the Directorate of ASEAN External Cooperation, the Directorate of Asia-Pacific and African Intra and Inter-regional Cooperation and the Directorate General of Legal Affairs and International Treaties. These diplomats did not interact with China primarily from a bilateral perspective but through encounters in ASEAN- or APEC-related forums, or based on their understanding of international law. Table 3 indicates the number of respondents of each diplomatic rank.

Informed by discussions with some respondents in this sample, I categorized Indonesian diplomats according to their diplomatic ranks into three groups: the lower-ranking, the middle-ranking and the high-ranking officials. The first group consisted of respondents with the ranks of second

**Table 3** Description of the Sample of Respondents by Diplomatic Rank<sup>7</sup>

Diplomatic Ranks	N
Attaché	0
Third Secretary	5
Second Secretary	18
First Secretary	8
Counsellor	8
Minister-Counsellor	2
Minister	6
Ambassador	3
Total	50



secretary and lower. The second group included those with the rank of first secretary, counsellor and minister counsellor. It should be noted, however, that I classified respondents with the rank of minister counsellor into the second rather than the third group, despite their status as senior-level diplomat. By so doing, I reserved the third group only for respondents with more direct relevance to the foreign policy processes inside the ministry, as compared to those in the second and the first group. These diplomats were the top echelons in Indonesia's foreign-affairs bureaucracy, namely the directors, the director generals, the consul generals and the ambassadors. Together with the respondents in the second group, they formed the majority of the research sample (Table 3).

Similar to many countries, despite their ranks, diplomats are the most prominent members of the foreign affairs bureaucracy (Neumann, 2005). They do not have the principal or formal authority to make foreign policy decisions, nor are they directly involved in foreign policy decision processes. The bureaucratic mechanisms, nevertheless, allow them to devise foreign policy processes in support of the foreign minister (who is the key decision maker), providing information on external situations or on a particular country under consideration (Novotny, 2010; Wirajuda, 2014). Moreover, they are people with 'implicit influence; those to whom [top] decision makers look for advice, [and] whose opinions and interests they take into account' (Putnam as quoted in Shambaugh, 1991: 21). In this, as Wang (2000: 27-31) noted, studying their perceptions can reveal 'the nature, potential and constraints' of one country's foreign-policy behaviour.

Additionally, as previously described, this study's samples include Indonesian diplomats who are directly or indirectly dealing with China-related affairs. By examining their images, therefore, this study explores one of the most influential perceptual environments within Indonesia's foreign-policy processes<sup>8</sup>, and one in which substantial discussions about China, including the BRI and its implementation take place. Since the views held and expressed in this environment can substantially shape Indonesia's responses to the BRI, a close study on these views can be illuminating.

The following two sections systematically present how the diplomat respondents assigned motivational pictures to China in promoting and implementing the BRI. Based on these data, I then inferred their perceptions of the BRI by applying the framework of image theory in international relations.

#### **4. Perceived Chinese Intentions in Promoting the BRI**

During the interviews, the respondents were asked, 'How do you understand the BRI launched by China?' To elicit further detail, a follow-up question was also used: 'From your perspective, what then drives China to promote the

BRI?' The responses to these questions were coded based on the diplomats' various descriptions of the goals that they believed China seeks to pursue through this initiative. Five themes emerged: (1) pursuing self-centred economic interests, (2) serving geopolitical interests, (3) establishing domination over other countries, (4) strengthening the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party and (5) making a positive contribution to other countries. The following sub-sections present each of these themes in succession.

#### ***4.1. Pursuing Self-centred Economic Interests***

One group of respondents viewed the BRI as China's grand initiative and as predominantly economic in nature. They stated that by launching the initiative globally, China was seeking mainly to advance its economic interests. The word *connectivity* was frequently mentioned in the descriptions of how the country would advance its interests; China was depicted as attempting to enhance physical connectivity between countries in various regions. In this context, the BRI was understood as a China-initiated cooperation framework that provided massive funding for infrastructure project development in partner countries. The construction of roads, highways, ports and airports was regarded as serving China's interests.

Diplomats indicated that by improving infrastructure along the Belt and the Road, China intended to ensure an unimpeded flow of energy and raw materials into its country from resource-rich nations in the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia. In this regard, the BRI was perceived as part of China's energy security strategy, aimed at satisfying domestic energy demand by ensuring an adequate and continuous supply of energy from overseas. Indonesian diplomats also expressed the view that through the BRI, China ultimately envisioned reducing its dependence on traditional energy routes. By improving port infrastructure and building pipelines in the Belt and Road regions, they said, China was seeking to create alternative means of transport for its energy supplies.

China was also depicted as active in developing new overseas markets for its products, since its domestic market is already saturated due to the pressure of overproduction. In this regard, the BRI was perceived as serving China's market expansion objective. By enhancing infrastructure connectivity between China and many other regions, the initiative would better link Chinese manufacturers to potential export markets along the Belt and the Road. China's main goal was seen as creating outlets to channel the country's excess manufacturing output to other countries.

In view of these circumstances, the promotion of the initiative was often described as motivated primarily by China's desire to boost its international trade. One middle-ranking diplomat referred to the BRI, like the ancient Silk

Road, as 'a trade link' rather than 'a military line', designed to minimise disruptions in China's commercial exchanges with the world. Another respondent summarised China's focus on international trade by stating that the Chinese 'merely think about how their products could reach any corner of the world'.

The BRI was also perceived as an endeavour to mitigate the problem of overcapacity in some industrial sectors that had been central to China's vigorous efforts to promote infrastructure development at home. By providing support for the construction of transport infrastructure in Belt and Road partner nations, some diplomats contended, China was seeking to unload the excess capacity of its steel and cement industries to other countries. Aside from promoting the development of basic infrastructure overseas under the BRI framework, China was also seen as attempting to make the best use of its surplus capital. One diplomat pointed out that China 'has a massive [financial] resource. With the BRI, its excess of capital is dispensed to some projects [from which it could also benefit]'.

As they described the economically oriented objectives China sought to pursue by promoting the BRI, these respondents projected an image of China as a self-centred power. They mentioned that Beijing frequently put forward the principle of win-win cooperation as the basis for inter-state interactions under the BRI framework. To these Indonesian diplomats, however, such a claim was empty Chinese rhetoric intended merely to attract other countries' support for a grand initiative. As the originator of the undertaking, China was perceived as seeking to get the biggest share of the pie. This purpose was arguably evident in the preconditions stipulated for receiving Chinese cooperation on infrastructure development projects. China required these projects to employ Chinese expertise, technology and apparatus, thereby bringing the major financial benefit back to China. In this context, the respondents understood that underlying China's offer of a mutually beneficial cooperation framework was the country's expectation of a greater gain in return.

#### ***4.2. Serving Geopolitical Interests***

Many respondents described the BRI as merely a part of China's neighbourhood diplomacy (周边外交). China was perceived as using this initiative to establish cordial relations with countries in neighbouring regions, thereby creating a stable immediate external environment. In this context, the cooperation schemes that China offered under the BRI framework were not understood as aiming only to serve the country's self-centred economic interests. By providing massive funding for infrastructure projects overseas, China was depicted as ultimately seeking 'to win as many friends as possible'. The diplomats saw the BRI as basically an instrument to persuade countries

along the Belt and the Road to adopt a positive attitude towards China. One young official made this comment: '[The BRI] is one of the Chinese means to cultivate support from surrounding countries for China's [geopolitical interests] as a great power. ... [Such an objective], however, was indirectly attained by backing infrastructure project development in these countries, rather than by explicitly conveying that "we wish to have your support"'.

In promoting this ambitious initiative, China was also described as having the immediate goal of 'bringing back its past glory'. It was a great civilisation during the ancient Silk Road period, a centre of world trade and international exchanges and a nation to which other countries looked up. The launching of the BRI globally was understood as indicating an intention to once again make China a world-leading power. From some respondents' perspective, it was only natural for China to pursue such an objective. As one diplomat explained, 'If you were once big, I am sure that you would like to be big again'. Comments further suggested that by attempting to win other countries' support for the implementation of its grand initiative, China was merely doing something expected of great powers. As another respondent pointed out, '[China] is a great nation, so that [it] wishes to be the pioneer, the one who leads'. In this context, the BRI was depicted as a Chinese strategic endeavour to project the country's status as a great power.

China was further seen as seeking to gain broad acknowledgement of its central position in current international affairs. Putting the BRI at the heart of China's foreign-policy conduct, Indonesian diplomats said, sent a message that China could not be ignored in any equations of international politics. As one respondent commented, 'For me, [the BRI] is simply an ambitious project initiated by China to demonstrate that it is no longer a developing country, but one of the developed ones, and therefore should be taken into account'. Echoing this perspective, another respondent described the BRI as a strategy 'to realise China's ambition to become a powerful country that occupies a determinative role in international [affairs]'.

While providing descriptions like those quoted above, many respondents also mentioned China's desire to gain influence over countries along the Belt and the Road. The economic cooperation framework contained within the initiative, which partner countries can use to fund infrastructure projects, was thus seen as a mere entry point by which China could exert its influence. In this context, the BRI was then interpreted as a strategic means that 'enable[d] China, in the long run, to get whatever it wishes to obtain from its [belt and road] partners', including support for China's geopolitical interests. The vast geographic area across which China has planned to promote the initiative, moreover, convinced these respondents that the country was attempting to make its presence felt, and not only in its immediate neighbouring regions. In short, the BRI was seen as a Chinese strategy to expand its sphere of influence.

Regarding China's pursuit of such an objective, many respondents contended that the country was hardly unique. As one diplomat stated, for example, 'Nothing is new about [the BRI]'. Pointing to the US-initiated Marshall Plan, which provided Western Europe with aid to rebuild its economies following World War II, he referred to these two initiatives as 'in fact similar', particularly in terms of the ultimate goals they sought to achieve. As for the fact that China introduced the BRI globally, another respondent commented, 'It is completely normal' (Indonesian: *itu wajar-wajar saja*). Like China, as she further explained, the US and Japan have also brought forward their proposal for a 'free and open Indo-Pacific'. In this context, China was seen as simply doing what great powers are expected to do.

In addition, respondents considered it natural for China to extend its influence overseas because the country has the capacity to do so. One diplomat stated, '[The Chinese] have addressed [their people's] primary needs and even the secondary ones. Therefore, they are currently attempting to show to the world who they really are'. Another respondent suggested that Indonesia would be likely to pursue the same objectives as China if the country reached a comparable level of capability. He said, 'As [Indonesia] grows stronger, [I believe], the country will then feel a stronger desire to have influence over other countries'. In view of these considerations, a third respondent described it as inevitable (Indonesian: *keniscayaan*) that China would promote the BRI globally to expand its sphere of influence. He commented that 'a developed country with great ambition, glorious past and massive capability ... does not really have the option of taking a step backward'.

#### ***4.3. Establishing Domination over Other Countries***

Some respondents contended that China's ultimate goal in promoting the BRI was to establish domination over its Belt and Road partners. This suggestion frequently dovetailed with the claim (discussed above) that China was driven heavily by self-centred economic interests. The BRI's efforts to enhance infrastructure connectivity between China and its partners were seen as designed to boost international trade and expand the market for Chinese products. Respondents indicated that the People's Republic of China was likely to be the party that obtained the greatest benefit. Although China's rhetoric emphasised 'mutual benefit', the proposed economic cooperation was understood as subject to certain conditions. As one respondent explained, the Chinese demanded that infrastructure project development related to the BRI must use Chinese resources as much as possible, including Chinese technology.

However, some respondents went on to claim that China's foundational interest was in the political gains to be achieved from its intensified economic cooperation with BRI partner countries. One diplomat opined that the

requirement to use Chinese technological advances on BRI projects could ultimately make the Belt and Road partners more dependent on China in the long run. In this context, BRI was presented as the Chinese strategy ‘to dominate the world through economic means’. This is where the respondents expressed their deepest concerns about Indonesian participation. As another respondent pointed out, ‘What is so wrong about [seeking] economic cooperation [with China]? Nothing ... My main concern, [though], is that the Chinese always attempt to make use of economic cooperation for obtaining political gain, just like what happened in Africa’. The speaker stressed China’s potential ability to use initiatives like the BRI to increase its political leverage over its partners and thereby undermine their sovereignty.

To reinforce their concern, this group of respondents highlighted the situation in some countries that were viewed as falling into the Chinese debt trap. One interviewee, for instance, described the consequences of increased economic cooperation between China and Sri Lanka. The latter country was ultimately unable to pay back its massive debts, with the result that China took over ownership of the infrastructure project that the two countries had agreed to build. The Indonesian diplomat cited this example to demonstrate that cooperation under the BRI framework was not driven by purely commercial calculations – i.e. whether the project was economically viable. Echoing this perspective, another respondent argued that Chinese judgements on what projects to participate in were based on the country’s interest in making other countries heavily dependent upon it. This view was grounded partially on the conviction that the private sector is almost non-existent in China. This respondent stated, ‘When the state agency is behind [any foreign economic assistance, political] calculations will take precedence over business ones. This would only create concerns’.

#### ***4.4. Strengthening the Chinese Communist Party’s Legitimacy***

Some Indonesian respondents depicted China as having the ultimate intention of strengthening the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) power base at home by promoting the BRI extensively abroad. In this case, obtaining economic gain from the BRI projects was seen as an intermediary objective. By ensuring the successful implementation of this grand and ambitious initiative, China was trying ‘to keep the CCP regime credible in the eyes of the Chinese people and to gain trust from the people, so that the regime can stay in power’. This comment suggests that for the respondents, China’s economic performance was still an important source of legitimacy for the CCP regime. In advancing the BRI, one diplomat said, China was ‘after economic gain to promote the welfare of its people. Its failure to do so would only put the CCP’s legitimacy at risk or even trigger another revolution to remove the regime from power’.

#### **4.5. Making Positive Contributions to Other Countries**

China was also seen as pursuing altruistic goals in promoting the BRI. For example, one diplomat described the Chinese as seeking to make a positive contribution to the world by attempting to improve economic conditions following the 2008 global financial crisis. The country was praised for taking the initiative to create a cooperative platform by which to facilitate and boost international economic exchanges amidst the global economic downturn.

By promoting the BRI, moreover, China was depicted as seeking 'to promote the welfare of and bring prosperity to the countries along the Belt and the Road'. In this regard, the country's interest in deploying its overcapacity in the infrastructure development sector corresponded with many other countries' desires to address their own infrastructure deficits and their lack of financial capability to do so. Promotion of the BRI was therefore perceived as China's effort to establish a 'win-win cooperation' with its Belt and Road partners.

### **5. Indonesian Diplomats' Perceptions of the BRI**

I will now apply image theory to infer Indonesian respondents' perceptions of the BRI from their views (presented above) regarding China's intentions in promoting the initiative.

The diplomat respondents' descriptions of China's reasons for promoting the BRI include elements that resemble four different stereotypes: the enemy, the imperialist, the degenerate and the ally. First, for those whose responses fit the enemy stereotype, the economic cooperation offered under the BRI framework is a trap to make other countries highly dependent on China, enabling the People's Republic to take advantage of these countries' economic resources. These diplomats expressed the concern that by supporting the BRI, Indonesia could eventually be economically exploited and politically subordinated by China.

Some respondents suggested that through the BRI, China was attempting to secure an unimpeded supply of energy and raw materials from the countries along the Belt and the Road. It was also described as seeking to expand the market for Chinese products by penetrating deeply into the economies of partner countries. In this regard, the slogans of mutual benefit and win-win cooperation that the Chinese used in promoting the BRI were perceived as mere empty rhetoric. Beijing was also regarded as seeking mainly to advance its self-centred economic interests by attracting support for this China-led initiative. These motivational images assigned to China most closely resemble the imperialist stereotype. However, the resemblance was only moderate, since the diplomats did not view China as actually trying to place other countries under its control or treat them as overseas colonies.

Some of the comments about China's intentions could be characterised as similar to the degenerate stereotype, as Chinese leaders were seen as ultimately seeking to prop up the CCP's uncertain legitimacy at home by promoting the BRI abroad. However, this description lacks most of the central characteristics of the degenerate image. Primarily, there was no indication that the Chinese leaders viewed their country's status in international politics as declining.

Those who attributed altruistic motives to China's promotion of the BRI painted a picture that highly resembled the ally image. China was described as seeking to bring prosperity to other countries along the Belt and the Road and as making a positive contribution towards addressing the global economic slowdown following the 2008 financial crisis. In these descriptions, China was depicted as willing to ensure that its partners would also benefit from the BRI.

One theme that emerged from the respondents' descriptions of China's intentions in promoting the BRI does not neatly fit any of the identified stereotypes. This theme was the viewpoint that by implementing the BRI, China was attempting to expand its sphere of influence. For these respondents, the BRI was a strategy to cultivate support for China's geopolitical interests while further projecting its status as a great power. Those who assigned this motivational picture to China did so without making positive or negative judgements on it, regarding such foreign policy goals as more or less legitimate and understandable (see Zhang, 2014). They explained that it was not unusual for China, a country with massive power, to pursue such objectives in its foreign-policy engagements. In the present context, such descriptions of Chinese intentions bear the closest resemblance to what image theory calls a complex image. Table 4 summarises the findings from the exploration of the respondents' descriptions of Chinese intentions in promoting the BRI.

**Table 4** The Resemblance between Respondents' Descriptions of China's Goals in Promoting the BRI and Relevant Images<sup>9</sup> (sample: 50 respondents)

Images	Degree of Resemblance	Inferred Perceptions	%
Imperialist	Moderate	<i>Moderate</i> threat	76.0
Degenerate	Low	<i>Little</i> opportunity through domination	10.0
Enemy	High	<i>Major</i> threat	8.0
Ally	High	<i>Considerable</i> opportunity to pursue mutual interests	4.0
Complex/Non-stereotypical	High	<i>Neither</i> threat <i>nor</i> opportunity	56.0



More than three-quarters of respondents presented descriptions that resembled, at least to a moderate extent, the ideal-typical motivational attributes of the imperialist image. Only four respondents depicted China's motives for the BRI in a way that matched the enemy image and just two made comments that aligned primarily with the ally image. Five respondents' perspectives had a low degree of resemblance with the degenerate image. On the other hand, 56 percent of respondents also presented aspects of a complex image, describing what China seeks to pursue through the BRI in a manner that did not match any of the stereotypes.

Table 4 further shows that perceiving threats from China was a predominant trend among the respondents in this sample. More than 80 percent described various degrees of threats from the People's Republic, projecting either the enemy or imperialist images when discussing the country's intentions in launching the BRI. However, most of the diplomats saw the threat as moderate in degree. Only 8 percent of respondents perceived a high-intensity threat from this China-led initiative.

On the other hand, those who perceived that the BRI offered various kinds of opportunities for Indonesia represented only 14 percent of the respondents. Five of these seven diplomats perceived an opportunity for domination, but only to a low degree, since they projected a largely non-stereotypical version of the degenerate image. Only two described the opportunity to pursue mutual interests with China, consistent with the highly stereotypical ally image.

The tendency to perceive China in a relatively non-stereotypical way was quite strong among the diplomats in this research sample. In fact, only about 12 percent of the respondents presented highly stereotypical descriptions of China and its foreign-policy motivations in the context of the BRI. These respondents hold the ideal-typical images of either enemy or ally, perceiving either major threats or considerable opportunities for Indonesia from its partnership in the initiative.

In contrast, 56 percent of the respondents included non-stereotypical motivational features in their descriptions of China's intentions in promoting the BRI. Primarily, they indicated that nothing was particularly unusual about the goals the People's Republic sought to pursue through the initiative. In this regard, they were less explicit in ascribing either a positive or a negative judgement to China's purposes in launching the BRI. China was further regarded as no different from other great powers in aiming to expand its sphere of influence by introducing a grand foreign policy initiative.

The tendency to view Chinese motives in non-stereotypical ways indicates that the Indonesian diplomats in this study's sample are relatively sophisticated in their perceptions of China and the BRI. A substantial majority avoided making strongly negative judgements on China's motives. In addition,

they saw China's manoeuvre to launch the initiative as hardly a unique foreign policy behaviour, since other great powers have taken similar actions.

To this point, this section has presented the perceptual trends in the overall samples. Now, how are the perceptions of the BRI shared among the lower-, middle-, high-ranking officials? Table 5 provides a closer look at the data.

**Table 5** Distribution of Images across Groups of Respondents

Images	No. of Lower- Ranking Officials (N=23)	No. of Middle- Ranking Officials (N=18)	No. of High- Ranking Officials (N=9)	Total (N=50)
Moderate-Imperialist	16	16	6	38
Complex	14	8	6	28
Low-Degenerate	2	3	0	5
High-Enemy	3	0	1	4
High-Ally	1	1	0	2

It can be seen that images are distributed in relatively similar patterns across the three groups of respondents. In each group, a large majority of diplomats presented the moderate-imperialist image. Additionally, those presenting the non-stereotypical image comprised a large proportion of each group. They constituted more than 60 percent of the junior diplomat and top official samples and around 44 percent of the middle-ranking official sample (Table 5). Indeed, these trends correspond to the prevailing tendencies of how the overall samples perceive the implementation of the BRI. As such, those who perceived a moderate level of threat from the BRI or viewed the Chinese motives in a sophisticated way were dominant not only in the overall samples but also in each sub-sample.

## 6. Affective Orientations towards the BRI

In addition to exploring the respondents' cognitive orientation, the interviews also inquired into Indonesian diplomats' attitudes towards the BRI by asking, 'What is your overall opinion about the BRI?' Coding of the responses identified five broad themes: (1) taking a positive attitude towards the initiative, (2) taking advantage of the initiative, (3) engaging China cautiously, (4) describing the Chinese as ambitious, and (5) other remarks. Table 6 indicates the number of responses by category.

**Table 6** Respondents' Overall Attitude towards the BRI  
(Sample = 49 respondents)<sup>10</sup>

Subjects	No. of respondents	Proportion (%)
Taking a positive attitude	9	18.4
Taking advantage of the initiative	12	24.5
Engaging China cautiously	24	48.9
Describing the Chinese as ambitious	3	6.1
Other remarks	3	6.1

Nine respondents expressed a positive attitude towards the BRI, as demonstrated by their admiration and support for China's launch of the initiative. One diplomat, for example, portrayed the BRI as a 'smart' (Indonesian: *cerdas*) initiative that 'deserves appreciation'. For him, it was very timely, coming at a point when the world was suffering from economic stagnation and many countries needed funding to stimulate economic growth. Another respondent characterised the BRI as 'the new driving force in international affairs', emphasising China's positive contribution to the current dynamics of inter-state relations. The BRI was also seen as a visionary initiative that provided useful lessons for Indonesia to apply in its own future strategic planning. China was described as having approached Indonesia in an 'elegant' and 'sympathetic' manner in its endeavours to promote the BRI. The respondent who used these terms highlighted China's use of dialogue rather than coercion in determining the projects on which Indonesia and China would cooperate within the BRI framework.

This group of respondents maintained an optimistic attitude about BRI implementation, perceiving China as having both the capability and total commitment to realise this grand initiative. These respondents did not deny the potential challenges that could hinder successful implementation, but they took the attitude that whatever comes from China should not always be seen in a negative light.

Beyond simply holding a favourable opinion of the BRI, 12 respondents noted some features of the initiative from which Indonesia could benefit. They observed that the BRI offered a scheme that could address the needs of many other countries, including Indonesia. In this regard, most of them stressed the issue of connectivity. They stated that lack of connectivity, caused by poor infrastructure, was undermining Indonesia's competitiveness in international trade, thereby harming the country's economy. In this context, the BRI was seen as an alternative source of funding to help Indonesia improve its infrastructure. As one respondent said, '[While] the Chinese have massive capital, Indonesia is in need of [fostering its national] development'.

Given the BRI's concern for enhancing inter-regional connectivity, it was further perceived as providing opportunities for Indonesia to connect with an improved logistics network that would eventually increase the country's performance in international trade.

For this reason, one respondent portrayed the BRI as an 'attractive' proposal. 'Whatever the motives behind [its launch]', she commented, 'if we can reap benefits from it, then why [should we be against it]?' China was seen as presenting a considerable opportunity that Indonesia could not afford to miss. Its massive reserves, according to another respondent, 'certainly present an opportunity; we should take advantage of it'. Echoing such a perspective, a third respondent stated, 'This is, in fact, a good initiative that is supported by many countries, just like a moving loaded train ... Either we miss the train, or the train takes us. ... There are only these two choices. However, the train will move anyway, with or without us. So we had better jump on it'.

The largest group of respondents contended that Indonesia should exercise caution while engaging with the BRI. They did not dispute that China was offering an alternative funding scheme that Indonesia could take advantage of to improve the country's infrastructure condition. However, instead of translating this acknowledgement into complete support for the initiative, these respondents expressed some concerns about Indonesia-China cooperation within the BRI framework. From their perspective, Jakarta should carefully consider where and how to cooperate, rather than merely giving in to China's demands. As one respondent pointed out, 'We basically are not in the position to oppose the [initiative]. ... [Indonesia], however, should not easily accept any offer of cooperation without a clear understanding, for example, of the detailed arrangements as well as the terms and conditions'. This diplomat believed that 'every country would take similar paths', except for those that are highly dependent on China. Indonesia, he said, should not be like those countries that 'would simply take up what China has offered'.

Among the concerns raised by this group was the potentially extensive use of Chinese workers in projects funded by loans from China. Underlying this concern was the belief that the expansion of BRI-related cooperation could benefit China at Indonesia's expense. As one respondent pointed out, 'We [Indonesia] have to look into [the cooperation framework], so that China would not be the only party that gains benefit'. Some suggested that Indonesia should impose constraints when engaging the BRI. One argued that Indonesia should have a say in determining 'where and in which sectors China could fund cooperation projects, how many Chinese workers could be employed, [and] how large a proportion of local components the projects have to utilise'. For these reasons, this group emphasised that Indonesia must be cautious in its negotiations. Another respondent added, 'We should further promote our cooperation with China. Anyway, nowadays, who would not want to

have cooperation with China? Nonetheless, we definitely need to [calculate everything] carefully and remain vigilant, so that we do not compromise our national interests or become the party that suffers loss in this [BRI] cooperation framework’.

Some respondents warned that Indonesia could be politically undermined by China while expanding its bilateral economic cooperation through the BRI framework. They stressed that in the implementation of this China-led initiative, ‘there is no such thing as a free lunch’. In accordance with this maxim, one respondent observed, ‘By receiving [funding from China], we then certainly have to give something in return’. He suggested that in exchange for the massive funding being provided for infrastructure projects in Indonesia, China might require the country to support its geopolitical interests in ways that could eventually place Jakarta under Beijing’s influence. In this context, another respondent commented that Indonesia must be able to take control of its engagement with the BRI, so that the country’s expanding economic relations with China ‘could serve [its] national interests well, without sacrificing its political [autonomy]’, particularly with regard to Indonesia’s foreign relations.

Three interviewees, when asked for their overall opinion of the BRI, simply depicted it as ‘highly ambitious’. According to one respondent, this feature was clearly reflected in how Beijing approached other countries to seek their support of the initiative, the vast geographic scope of the Belt and Road partners and Beijing’s use of the initiative to expand China’s sphere of influence in the context of its strategic rivalry with the US. While noting the ambitious nature of the BRI, another respondent commented, ‘Why not?’ She saw nothing particularly surprising about such a manoeuvre since, as a great power, China clearly had the capability to undertake it.

One respondent expressed no particular opinion of the BRI. He characterised the initiative as nothing more than a part of China’s strategy ‘to expand its sphere of influence’ and ‘to open new markets’ as well as ‘to ensure [energy] supply [from overseas sources]’. Another respondent declined to express an overall opinion, believing that more time was needed to properly assess the BRI’s impact on Indonesia’s national interests. From her perspective, whether BRI would be favourable or unfavourable for Indonesia remained to be seen. A third respondent did not explicitly express an opinion but instead discussed her uncertainty about the BRI’s implementation. ‘We still do not understand’, she said, ‘why China designed the initiative in such a way as to pass through some high-risk areas, like Afghanistan, that are replete with [armed] conflicts. What kind of benefit does China intend to obtain from such areas? I still do not get the answer’.

Table 7 shows how opinions on the BRI are distributed across the groups of respondents. In each sub-sample, most of the respondents argued that

**Table 7** Distribution of Opinions on BRI across Groups of Respondents

Subjects	No. of Lower- Ranking Officials (N=23)	No. of Middle- Ranking Officials (N=17)	No. of High- Ranking Officials (N=9)	Total (N=49) <sup>11</sup>
Engaging China cautiously	9	11	4	24
Taking advantage of the initiative	5	4	3	12
Taking a positive attitude	5	1	3	9
Describing the Chinese as ambitious	3	0	0	3
Other remarks	2	1	0	3

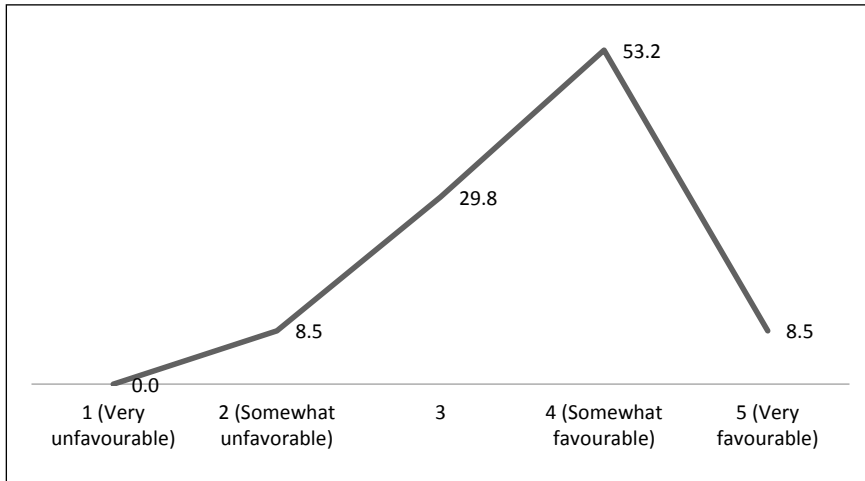
Indonesia should cautiously engage with China. Additionally, a fewer number of respondents either believed that Indonesia should benefit from the BRI or held a positive opinion about the initiative. This pattern of distribution is a reflection of how opinions on the initiative are shared among all the diplomats in this study's sample. In this, it can be said that those who view the initiative with caution predominated not only the overall samples, but also each sub-sample.

As presented above, many of the diplomats in the research sample seemed to avoid openly expressing an attitude towards the BRI, giving answers that could not be clearly coded as favourable or unfavourable. This is not surprising, since professional diplomats tend to be guarded in their answers. The reliance on open-ended questions, which do not permit the researcher to guide or tightly control responses, also partly explains this finding.

For this reason, one closed-ended question was used to ensure that the respondents' affective orientation towards the initiative was represented correctly. The question was as follows: 'I would like your overall opinion of the BRI. Would you say that your overall opinion is very favourable, somewhat favourable, somewhat unfavourable, or very unfavourable?' Respondents were shown a 5-point scale (1 = very unfavourable, 5 = very favourable) to guide their answers, but point 3 on the scale was intentionally not labelled with any attitudinal expression, to encourage the respondents towards choosing either a favourable or an unfavourable option. Figure 1 presents the distribution of responses to this question.

As the figure indicates, most respondents (61.7 percent of all answers) held positive feelings towards the BRI. Another 30 percent took a neutral stance. The mean score for the sample was 3.59, indicating generally favourable attitudes but at a fairly low degree of intensity. The respondents' feelings towards the BRI could not even be regarded as 'somewhat favourable' since the average score is still a bit far below 4.

**Figure 1** Distribution of Respondents' Affective Orientations towards China's Promotion of the BRI (by percentage; sample = 47 respondents)<sup>12</sup>



## 7. Conclusion

This article has explored Indonesian diplomats' perceptions of China and its endeavours to promote the BRI globally. By focusing on members of the foreign-policy bureaucracy who deal directly with Indonesia–China relations and other China-related affairs, it has probed opinions and attitudes in one of the most influential environments that have shaped Indonesia's responses towards the BRI. The findings suggest a strong tendency to see threats along with opportunities in China's foreign-policy endeavours. However, most of them rate the risks at a moderate level of potential economic exploitation, rather than as threatening to make Indonesia highly economically dependent on China. A small minority of the diplomats perceived the threat as more intense, believing that the Chinese could attempt to subordinate Indonesia politically through economic cooperation within the BRI framework.

Overall, the respondents adopted somewhat favourable attitudes towards the BRI. Their responses suggest a high level of perceptual sophistication. The presence of some negative perceptions of China's intentions does not prevent these diplomats from seeing positive aspects of this grand initiative. They do not ignore the fact that Indonesia could take advantage, to some extent, of the cooperation frameworks provided by the BRI. This sophistication is further reflected by the large number of responses emphasising that Indonesia should engage cautiously with the BRI. Most of the diplomats recognised that by proceeding carefully, Indonesia could also benefit from the initiative rather than merely being exploited economically.

These policy suggestions correspond closely to how Jakarta has responded to the BRI during the first six years following its launch. It thus appears that the sentiments expressed in the interviews conducted for this study have helped to shape Indonesian policy towards the BRI. China's offers have been viewed in a sophisticated way, as neither a complete threat nor simply an opportunity. The level of perceived threat has led the Indonesians to exercise some caution, but not to oppose participation in the BRI. Conversely, the degree of perceived opportunity has facilitated Jakarta's engagement with the initiative, yet not to the point of causing Indonesia to express complete support. As a result, Indonesia has continued to engage with China's BRI proposals but has held back from doing so thoroughly. By pursuing such a policy, Jakarta wishes to ensure access to China's massive financial resources while avoiding the risk of being exploited economically by the Chinese.

As shown above, holding less stereotypical perceptions of a target country appears to help policy-makers to steer clear of an either-or reaction when formulating a strategic response to that country's overtures. More sophisticated perspectives restrain them from rushing to adopt one particular strategic response at the expense of other possible alternatives. If Jakarta continues to respond in this way, it will most likely maintain its engagement with the BRI, but while still placing some constraints on how intensive Indonesia–China bilateral economic exchanges related to the BRI can become and on how explicitly Indonesia agrees to promote the initiative globally.

Under these circumstances, it is unrealistic for Beijing to expect Jakarta's complete and enthusiastic support for China's grand initiative unless a major shift in how Indonesians perceive China takes place. However, it is not inconceivable that the Chinese could achieve such a perceptual change over time. Ensuring that BRI projects in Indonesia contribute positively to the country's development and have direct impact on Indonesian society could ease concerns that BRI cooperation schemes will enable China to exploit Indonesia economically. For this reason, if China desires to gain strong support of the BRI, its implementation should be more demand-based than supply-based, thereby creating more positive economic exchanges and more sustainable cooperation between China and its Belt and Road partners.

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## Notes

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1. Xi Jinping pledges 'great renewal of Chinese nation' (2012, November 30). Retrieved 4 November 2019, from [http://www.china.org.cn/china/2012-11/30/content\\_27269821.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/2012-11/30/content_27269821.htm)
  2. Indonesia signed a BRI-related Memorandum of Understanding with China only five years after President Xi launched the initiative. In October 2018, this bilateral document (entitled "Jointly Promoting Cooperation within the Framework of the Global Maritime Fulcrum Vision and the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative") was signed in Beijing by Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and the Chairman of China's National Development and Reform Commission.
  3. This 142-km high-speed railway link was initially expected to begin operations in 2019. However, as of November 2019 only 36 percent of construction had been completed. See 'Progres Proyek Kereta Cepat Jakarta-Bandung Capai 36,01 Persen' (2019, November 12). Retrieved 6 December 2019, from <https://money.kompas.com/read/2019/11/12/164445626/progres-proyek-kereta-cepat-jakarta-bandung-capai-3601-persen>
  4. Drawing upon Fritz Heider's balance theory, image theory then establishes the link between perceptions and images, facilitating efforts to infer individuals' perceptions from their images. As Herrmann (1985: 34) argues, individuals are inclined 'to develop conscious images of others that are balanced with their emotional sentiment toward the other'. In the context of international relations, individuals' images of a target country are directly connected with the degree of threat and/or opportunity they believe that country presents (Jervis, 1976). This further implies that images could be used as 'indicators of an underlying perceived threat or perceived opportunity' (Herrmann, 1988: 184).
  5. In this regard, images should be understood in accordance with the gestalt tradition in psychology (Herrmann, 2013; Payne & Cameron, 2013). Images have a so-called 'gestalt quality', or 'a characteristic which is immediately given, along with elementary presentations that served as its fundament, dependent upon the objects, but rising above them' (Wagemans, 2015: 5). In other words, an image is a unified, whole impression that cannot be understood merely by summing up its elements. This implies that an image of a given country is not constructed simply by describing each of the ideas a person might have when thinking about that country. Although the observer may have impressions of the observed country's

geographic location, history, cultural traditions, people, weather, military strength, economic development and even culinary heritage, image theorists, following the gestalt tradition, argue that not all those ideas are central to the formation of an integrated overall impression of the country under consideration. As Herrmann (2013: 340) explains, ‘The pieces going into an impression were not seen as equal. Some were more important and seen to be at the center of the gestalt’.

6. The ‘China Desk’, formally known as the sub-directorate for East Asian and Pacific Affairs I, is located under this directorate.
7. According to the Regulation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Number 4 of 2009, there are eight ranks in the Indonesian diplomatic service as appeared in Table 3. Diplomats who have passed *Sekolah Staf Dinas Luar Negeri* (the Mid-Career Diplomatic School) will be promoted to the rank of first secretary. After completing a training at *Sekolah Staf dan Pimpinan Luar Negeri* (Senior Diplomatic School), diplomats are promoted to the rank of minister counsellor.
8. New foreign-policy stakeholders, especially ones outside the bureaucracy, have emerged since Indonesia’s transition to democracy (Dosch, 2006; Murphy, 2012; Nabss-Keller, 2013; Rüländ, 2014, 2016). As Dewi Fortuna Anwar (2010) has observed, in Indonesia’s democratic government, foreign policy is made by ‘multiple centres of power’. However, previous studies suggested that foreign policy processes in post-authoritarian Indonesia have largely retained their ‘state-centric’ nature, in which the president, cabinet members and the foreign ministry play prominent roles (Gindarsah, 2012; Novotny, 2010; Wirajuda, 2014).
9. During the interview, each respondent can mention more than one verbal imageries. For this reason, the total percentage distribution does not add up to 100 percent. The percentages in the table represent the proportion of respondents who mentioned each imagery. It should be noted that this mechanism also applies to other tables of the same kind throughout this article.
10. There is missing data due to an error during the recording process.
11. See footnote 9.
12. Three interviewees did not respond. Also, two respondents gave answers that were between points on the scale – specifically, 3.5 and 4.5. These answers have been rounded up to 4 and 5, respectively.

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