

Deepening Sino-Singapore International Relations under the Belt and Road Initiative: Synergistic Mechanisms in Multilateral Governance, Policy Innovation, and Public Administration

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Abstract: The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has not only facilitated deeper global economic integration but also fostered extensive cooperation among participating countries in governance, policy design, and innovation. As a global financial hub and a key strategic node in Southeast Asia, Singapore, with its advanced governance practices, robust financial system, and strategic geographic position, has established a close collaborative relationship with China under the BRI. From the perspectives of multilateral governance theory, new institutionalism, and digital public policy innovation, this study systematically explores the synergistic effects between China and Singapore in the fields of international relations, government governance, financial innovation, green development, and the digital economy. Through theoretical analysis and case studies, this paper not only unveils innovative practices in policy interactions between the two nations but also identifies challenges within the cooperation framework. Based on these findings, it proposes strategies to promote the sustainable development of BRI projects in the future.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Sino-Singapore Relations, Public Policy, International Relations.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine how China and Singapore collaborate on international relations, policy coordination, and governance innovation within the global context of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). By analyzing the cooperative models between the two countries, this study aims to understand how they advance regional economic integration, public policy innovation, and the modernization of global governance within a multilateral framework. The main focuses of the study include:

- 1) Governance mechanisms and policy innovations between China and Singapore in infrastructure connectivity and financial cooperation;
- 2) Public policy design and implementation in the areas of green development and digital economy collaboration[1];

3) Risk management and pathways for multilateral cooperation in the face of global economic and geopolitical uncertainties.

2. Theoretical Framework and Research Background

2.1. Deepening International Relations and Multilateral Cooperation between China and Singapore

Since the inception of the Belt and Road Initiative, Singapore has become a pivotal partner for China in advancing regional economic cooperation in Southeast Asia[2]. This partnership extends beyond bilateral economic cooperation, reaching into the realm of multilateral governance. Through its leadership in international finance, trade logistics, and technological innovation, Singapore actively fosters in-depth cooperation between ASEAN countries and China[3]. Notably, the two countries have worked together to enhance connectivity in infrastructure and transition to a green economy, thereby driving economic growth along the BRI corridor[4]. Leveraging its strategic geographic location and diversified economic structure, Singapore has played an essential bridging role in promoting regional economic integration. By utilizing its expertise and leadership in sectors such as finance, trade, logistics, and technological innovation, Singapore has actively promoted deeper cooperation between China and ASEAN countries, furthering the success of the BRI[5].

As a global financial center, Singapore has provided substantial financial and capital support for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). By partnering with multilateral financial institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Singapore has not only attracted significant capital investments into infrastructure projects along the BRI corridor but has also leveraged its advanced regulatory and risk management frameworks to help these countries optimize financing structures and reduce project risks[6]. This financial cooperation lays a solid foundation for the successful implementation of BRI projects, enhancing efficient capital flow within the region.

Singapore's role as a logistics and trade hub has also greatly contributed to the BRI's connectivity goals. As one of the busiest ports globally, Singapore's port facilities, supported by multi-tiered cooperation with China, facilitate seamless connections between BRI countries and global markets. Notably, within the Singapore-China-ASEAN multilateral cooperation framework, regional logistics efficiency has significantly improved, further promoting trade liberalization and economic integration[7]. Singapore has also played a crucial role in advancing green economic transition in collaboration with China. Through its leading green finance policies and commitment to sustainable development, Singapore has supported the construction of green projects within the BRI framework. Key areas of cooperation include green bonds, renewable energy projects, and environmental technology transfers[8], which have fostered green development in BRI countries and injected sustainable growth into the region's economic integration.

Through its excellence in finance, logistics, technology, and green economy, Singapore actively promotes economic integration and development along the BRI corridor, solidifying its position as China's most vital strategic partner in Southeast Asia[9]. This cooperation not only paves the way for regional economic integration but also enhances the BRI's influence in global governance through innovative multilateral governance models.

2.2. Governance and Policy Coordination from a Neo-Institutional Perspective

Neo-institutional theory posits that international cooperation depends not only on economic interests but also on the establishment of stable cooperative mechanisms through institutional design and policy innovation. Within the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China-Singapore collaboration encompasses both concrete areas such as finance and infrastructure as well as institutionalized cooperation in governance and policy alignment. Singapore's mature legal framework, efficient

public management model, and transparent governance structure[10] serve as a foundational reference for China and other BRI countries, embodying the neo-institutional theory's premise that effective, long-term cooperation requires structured institutions and continuous policy innovation[11]. This theory emphasizes that sustainable cooperation among countries can only be achieved through robust institutional frameworks and regulatory mechanisms that address global uncertainties and challenges. Under the BRI, China and Singapore provide a model for neo-institutional practices by illustrating the importance of institutional development and policy innovation in facilitating transnational collaboration.

The cooperation between China and Singapore extends beyond conventional areas such as financial cooperation and infrastructure development to encompass governance models and policy alignment. For example, in developing rules for cross-border financial cooperation, green development, and infrastructure investments, China relies on Singapore's legal and regulatory frameworks for critical institutional support and guidance. Singapore's governance model—characterized by transparency, rule of law, and administrative efficiency—offers proven governance practices that are applicable to China and other BRI countries. This institutional exchange is evident not only in aspects like contract enforcement for infrastructure projects and financial risk control but also in the coordination of laws and regulatory interoperability in cross-border cooperation[12]. This approach highlights the role of institutional borrowing in reinforcing governance structures, making it a central mechanism for achieving sustainable, resilient collaboration under the BRI framework.

Singapore's public management model is renowned for its strict efficiency management, performance evaluation, and adherence to the rule of law, forming a governance structure that combines transparency, efficiency, and stability. This model provides a robust institutional example for Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) countries, facilitating more standardized execution of international projects. Specifically, Singapore's advancements in project management, policy implementation, and regulatory standards offer replicable best practices for partner countries. For instance, Singapore's implementation of green bond issuance and management for BRI projects not only improves transparency but also creates a more stable and predictable investment environment for international investors. This institutionalized cooperation in governance is further reflected in policy innovation between China and Singapore[13]. Through jointly established policy dialogue mechanisms, China and Singapore have advanced multilateral policy coordination and institutional innovation within the BRI framework[14]. This mechanism has strengthened policy interaction between the two countries and brought in other ASEAN nations, making the BRI's policy framework more diverse and inclusive[15]. Singapore's focus on governance transparency, policy efficacy, and innovation offers valuable insights for China's domestic policy reform. For example, Singapore's innovative practices in e-government and digital public services have contributed to modernizing China's public management capabilities.

This institutional cooperation framework enables both nations to achieve mutual benefits in both hard projects and through institutional and policy innovation, strengthening the resilience and stability of cross-national cooperation[16]. The neo-institutional model of cooperation not only deepens the relationship between China and Singapore but also provides long-term development support and governance security for other BRI countries. This cooperative model demonstrates the practical value of neo-institutional theory in global governance and cross-national collaboration, underscoring the critical role of institutional design and policy innovation in promoting regional integration[17].

2.3. The Relationship between Global Governance Theory and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Global governance theory posits that in the context of globalization, cross-national cooperation increasingly depends on multilateral partnerships and the provision of global public goods rather than

on traditional state sovereignty[18]. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) can be viewed as an innovative practice of global governance. Beyond being a framework for economic cooperation, the BRI plays a vital role in enhancing the provision of global public goods through multilateral cooperation mechanisms. For example, the global construction of infrastructure within the BRI framework allows for the international sharing of transportation and energy resources, promoting deep economic integration worldwide. The establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has intensified financial cooperation by providing developing countries with substantial financial support, adding to the multilateralism that strengthens global governance[19]. On a policy level, the BRI fosters policy alignment and legal harmonization among participating countries, thereby enhancing the coherence and consistency of global policy governance. Singapore plays a particularly prominent role in the BRI as a global governance hub in Southeast Asia. With its globalized economy, advanced financial services, and well-established legal systems, Singapore supports BRI projects by serving as a platform for multilateral cooperation. It helps China, ASEAN countries, and other economies achieve policy, financial, and infrastructural collaboration[20]. Acting as a regional hub in global governance, Singapore is a crucial link between BRI countries and a strategic gateway for deep cooperation between China and Southeast Asian nations[21].

3. Cooperation Models and Policy Innovation

3.1. Infrastructure Connectivity and Regional Economic Integration

Infrastructure connectivity stands as one of the core objectives of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aiming to strengthen regional economic integration and connectivity through extensive cross-border infrastructure projects. This goal encompasses not only the optimization of transportation and logistics networks but also the interconnection of key areas like energy and communications to foster economic cooperation and cultural exchange among countries along the BRI routes[22]. By developing infrastructure, these nations can reduce physical distances, eliminate trade barriers, and enhance regional market integration and resource sharing. As a global logistics hub and critical BRI node, Singapore leverages its unique strengths in port and airport logistics and management, positioning itself as a key partner in advancing this ambitious initiative. Singapore's port facilities rank among the busiest and most advanced globally, and its efficient logistics management systems and comprehensive infrastructure network provide robust support for regional logistics and trade. Through deep cooperation with China, Singapore has played a crucial role in logistics integration and actively supports infrastructure upgrades for countries along the BRI[23].

The China-Singapore (Chongqing) Demonstration Initiative on Strategic Connectivity exemplifies this collaborative achievement under the BRI framework. This project integrates land-sea intermodal transportation, air logistics, rail transport, and an e-commerce platform, aiming to boost logistics efficiency between western China, Southeast Asia, and beyond. The initiative not only optimizes transport routes—reducing time and costs for exports from western China to Southeast Asia and other international markets—but also sets new standards for regional logistics infrastructure development[24]. The platform has significantly enhanced logistics service convenience and efficiency, spurring economic vitality in the western regions of China. Additionally, the success of this project underscores the potential for further collaboration in developing digital logistics platforms between the two countries[25]. The integration of an e-commerce platform has accelerated the digital transformation of cross-border trade, especially among BRI countries, where e-commerce growth fosters the internationalization of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Through digital logistics management platforms, cross-border movement of goods and services becomes more efficient and transparent, enhancing the logistics supply chain and advancing regional economic integration.

This infrastructure-led connectivity model highlights how cooperation between China and Singapore drives regional economic integration under the BRI. With Singapore's strengths in logistics and finance, the collaboration provides a viable infrastructure development model for BRI countries[26]. This model not only improves regional logistics efficiency but also creates new opportunities for regional cooperation, furthering economic integration across the Asia-Pacific region.

3.2. Policy Innovation in Digital Economy and Fintech Cooperation

The digital economy has rapidly emerged as a vital sector within the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), driving economic transformation and digitalization among countries along the route. Against this backdrop, Singapore and China have taken a leading role in digital economy cooperation, particularly through their deep alignment in digital infrastructure, e-commerce, and fintech, which has significantly advanced digital transformation for BRI countries.

Singapore's "Smart Nation" strategy and China's "Digital Silk Road" initiative form the core framework of their digital collaboration. Singapore's "Smart Nation" aims to enhance national governance and quality of life through widespread digital technology adoption, while China's "Digital Silk Road" focuses on fostering digital infrastructure, cross-border e-commerce, and technological innovation to integrate digital economies across BRI countries. Through strategic alignment, the two nations have undertaken extensive collaborations in digital infrastructure, cross-border e-commerce, digital payments, and smart city construction, thereby advancing the digital development of BRI countries[27].

Fintech cooperation is a crucial component of Singapore and China's collaboration in the digital economy. The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) leads globally in promoting fintech innovation and digital payment policies. Through Singapore's digital payment policies and the application of blockchain technology, the two nations have enhanced financial innovation and operational efficiency within BRI projects. For example, blockchain technology offers more secure and transparent solutions for cross-border payments and financial transactions, reducing intermediary costs and enhancing payment speed and efficiency[28]. This collaboration lays a foundation for modernizing financial infrastructure across BRI countries, strengthening their competitiveness within the global financial system.

Cross-border e-commerce has become a significant highlight in the digital economic cooperation between Singapore and China. Through joint e-commerce platform collaboration and the establishment of digital trade corridors under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the scale and efficiency of cross-border e-commerce have notably increased. Singapore, serving as a regional logistics and digital trade hub, leverages its advanced digital infrastructure and efficient cross-border logistics networks to act as a gateway for Chinese companies entering Southeast Asian and broader markets. Additionally, through partnerships with Chinese companies, Singapore has encouraged local enterprises to engage in the global e-commerce ecosystem, advancing the internationalization of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the region[29].

In smart city development, Singapore and China's collaboration has accelerated urban digital transformation in BRI countries. Smart city projects cover multiple areas, including the application of Internet of Things (IoT) technology, smart traffic management, and intelligent energy systems. By integrating smart city technologies, participating countries have improved urban management efficiency, enhanced public service quality, and elevated citizens' living experiences[30]. This cooperation injects digital innovation into the urbanization process of BRI countries, promoting a sustainable development model for urban areas. In fintech, e-commerce, and smart city initiatives, Singapore and China's strategic complementarity within the BRI framework is evident. Through these collaborations, both countries have not only facilitated the construction of digital infrastructure

but also led economic digital transformation, providing fresh momentum for the long-term sustainable development of BRI countries[31].

3.3. Green Development Policies and Sustainable Development Cooperation

Green development is a vital component of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and Singapore, with its leadership in green finance and sustainable development policies, has assisted China in advancing green projects among BRI countries[32]. By introducing a green bond framework and environmental standards, Singapore has provided advanced financial support for China's green initiatives. This partnership has not only promoted environmental sustainability within BRI projects but also set an example of sustainable economic development for other developing countries. For instance, the promotion of green bonds and clean energy projects has helped various nations address climate change while enhancing their competitiveness within the global green economy. Through Singapore's policy backing and green finance tools, many countries along the BRI have identified new growth opportunities within the green economy, achieving both economic and ecological advancements. Singapore's contribution has been instrumental to the success of green development within the BRI framework[33]. By offering green finance, environmental technologies, and policy standards, Singapore has supported China and other participating countries in driving regional sustainability. This cooperative model not only strengthens the ecological sustainability of BRI projects but also establishes new standards and directions for global green development.

3.4. Government Governance and Public Policy Collaboration

Singapore's efficient governance model has long been regarded as a benchmark within the region, especially for countries along the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)[34]. The core features of this model include highly institutionalized public management, effective performance evaluation, and extensive use of e-government systems. Through these mechanisms, Singapore not only leads in governance efficiency but also serves as an example for transparency and rule of law in policy implementation. Singapore's emphasis on efficiency and transparency in public service management holds particular relevance for BRI countries, many of which face challenges related to weak governance capabilities and inadequate policy enforcement[35]. In the realm of e-governance, Singapore pioneered the development of electronic government management systems, utilizing information technology to improve the efficiency and transparency of public services. Singapore's e-government initiatives span a wide range of services, from tax filing to urban management, significantly simplifying interactions between government, the public, and businesses, thereby enhancing transparency and policy implementation[36]. China, in collaboration with Singapore, has adopted many of these experiences to advance its own e-governance, particularly for the cross-national management of BRI projects. The integration of e-government technology has improved the efficiency of multilateral cooperation, reducing bureaucratic obstacles in policy execution.

This governance collaboration has not only played a crucial role in improving the efficiency of public policy implementation within China but has also provided an innovative governance model for other BRI countries. Singapore's governance approach demonstrates how efficient institutional design and innovative policy tools can achieve effective policy implementation, even under resource constraints. This model is widely applicable across BRI developing countries, particularly for those grappling with challenges in infrastructure development and public service provision. Replicating and adapting Singapore's model offers a viable solution for these governance challenges. Through this partnership with Singapore, China has not only strengthened its own public governance capabilities but has also contributed to governance innovations in policy implementation, public management, and e-government among BRI countries. This collaborative innovation has empowered

China with a stronger institutional influence within the global governance framework of the BRI, deepening policy coordination and cooperation with countries along the route.

4. Challenges in Collaboration and Strategic Responses

4.1. Cultural and Legal Differences in Policy Implementation

While China and Singapore demonstrate strong synergy in their Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) collaboration, cultural and legal differences still present major challenges in policy implementation. Singapore's legal system is heavily influenced by the Anglo-American common law, whereas China follows the civil law system. These differences in legal frameworks, contract enforcement, and cross-border dispute resolution could increase the legal risks associated with BRI projects. To address these issues, both nations should work to strengthen legal alignment and develop cross-border legal collaboration mechanisms in future partnerships.

4.2. Global Economic Uncertainty and Risk Management in Multilateral Cooperation

Global economic uncertainties, such as the U.S.-China trade tensions, the COVID-19 pandemic, and geopolitical strains, pose challenges for the implementation of BRI projects. As a global financial and trade hub, Singapore is well-positioned to leverage its multilateral stance and regional cooperation expertise to support the BRI's effective progress amidst these uncertainties. Strengthening regional cooperation frameworks and enhancing risk management through multilateral financial institutions could enable China and Singapore to better withstand fluctuations in the global economy.

To better manage global economic fluctuations, China and Singapore should deepen their regional cooperation mechanisms. Platforms like the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area (ACFTA) can facilitate economic coordination and policy alignment within the region, helping to counteract disruptions in global supply chains and increased trade barriers. Singapore, as a key Southeast Asian trade hub, can utilize its robust logistics network and efficient port facilities to help BRI countries maintain trade stability and sustainability in an environment of heightened uncertainty.

Furthermore, Singapore's leadership in global financial institutions presents an additional advantage. By collaborating with multilateral entities such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, Singapore can contribute to financial innovation and risk management within the BRI framework. The involvement of these institutions aids in dispersing risks associated with global economic uncertainties and provides China and Singapore a unified platform to ensure the stable advancement of BRI projects amid economic fluctuations. Given its role as a global financial and trade nexus, Singapore, with its multilateral approach and extensive experience in regional cooperation, is crucial to the sustained implementation of the BRI under shifting global conditions. By reinforcing regional cooperation mechanisms and collaborating with multilateral financial institutions, China and Singapore can effectively navigate the challenges brought by global economic fluctuations. This approach not only strengthens their strategic partnership within the globalization process but also ensures the continued success of BRI projects in a complex future environment.

4.3. Challenges in Data Security and Cross-Border Governance in the Digital Economy

As the global digital economy advances rapidly, data security and the harmonization of technology standards have become new challenges for collaboration between China and Singapore. Currently, there is no unified global standard for data security or a consistent regulatory framework for cross-border data management. This issue is especially pronounced along Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) countries, where regulations on data security and privacy protection vary significantly. By building

an international digital governance framework and enhancing policy alignment on data sharing and privacy protection, China and Singapore can reduce friction in digital economic cooperation and support the digital transformation of BRI projects.

5. Future Outlook and Recommendations

5.1. Establishing Multilateral Governance Mechanisms and a Policy Innovation Framework

In future collaboration, China and Singapore should further enhance their interaction and coordination on multilateral platforms, especially by leveraging international financial platforms like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to promote the construction of multilateral governance mechanisms under the BRI framework. By driving financial innovation, Singapore can continue to play a central role in the BRI as a global financial hub, providing long-term financial support and risk management mechanisms for regional infrastructure and green projects.

5.2. Deepening Government Governance Innovation and Public Policy Coordination

In their future collaboration, China and Singapore should further deepen government governance innovation, particularly in areas such as e-government, public services, and governance transparency. Strengthening policy coordination and sharing governance experiences will enhance the effectiveness of policy implementation in Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects and provide new pathways for innovations in the global governance system. In the continued development of the BRI, China and Singapore are encouraged to further cooperate on public governance and policy innovation. Singapore, with its highly efficient governance model and achievements in e-government, public services, and transparency, offers valuable insights for the effective execution of BRI projects. By adopting Singapore's advanced governance practices, China can improve transparency and efficiency in policy implementation, achieving deeper policy coordination through bilateral cooperation.

Moreover, expanding intergovernmental training programs will enhance governance capacities at the local government level in China, particularly in policy implementation and interdepartmental coordination. Platforms such as the Sino-Singapore Leadership Training Center can further facilitate the exchange of governance experiences and foster public policy innovation among BRI countries. This collaborative governance approach not only strengthens policy execution in BRI projects but also offers new models for innovation within the global governance framework.

5.3. Strengthening Cooperation and Innovation in Digital Economy and Green Finance

The digital economy and green finance represent two central growth areas for future Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) cooperation. Collaboration between China and Singapore in the digital economy, particularly in fintech, blockchain technology, and cross-border e-commerce, offers innovative economic growth drivers for BRI countries. As a global hub for digital innovation, Singapore can provide strong support for the digital transformation of BRI projects. Both countries should work towards deepening policy innovation and technical cooperation in the digital economy, thereby advancing the economic digitalization process for BRI nations. In addition, green finance is a crucial field for global sustainable development. With its extensive experience in green bonds and environmental governance policies, Singapore has already played a significant role in promoting green development within the BRI framework. Looking ahead, China and Singapore can establish green finance cooperation mechanisms, strengthen policy alignment in areas such as environmental protection and renewable energy, and jointly drive the sustainable development of BRI projects.

6. Conclusion

This paper systematically analyzes the collaborative model between China and Singapore within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), highlighting policy innovations and governance coordination across key areas such as infrastructure development, digital economy, green growth, and financial cooperation. By examining the practical applications of multilateral governance and public policy innovation, the study identifies both the innovative aspects of their partnership and the challenges it faces, proposing strategies to navigate global economic uncertainties. Looking ahead, China and Singapore should deepen their international cooperation under the BRI framework through institutional innovation, policy alignment, and multilateral collaboration mechanisms. Specifically, in the fields of digital economy and green finance, both countries can promote sustainable development of BRI projects through cooperative innovation, providing a new model of partnership for global governance.

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