

# ***Constructing New International Relations Between China and Its Neighbors: A Constructivist Analysis of the Impact of the Belt and Road***

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**Abstract:** The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road spearheaded by General Secretary Xi Jinping offers a practical framework for fostering a fresh approach to international relations between China and its neighboring countries. This study thoroughly examines how the Belt and Road Initiative contributes to shaping a new form of international relations between China and its neighboring regions from a constructivist viewpoint. This is achieved through qualitative research, literature analysis, and inductive methodologies. Under the constructivist perspective, The Belt and Road Initiative has transformed the dynamic between China and its neighboring nations on various levels. When looking at it from a horizontal perspective, the focus is on highlighting the unique aspects and qualities of international interactions, such as "common development", "mutual respect", and "harmonious coexistence". Looking at things from an aerial viewpoint, the Belt and Road Initiative delves into a fresh approach to China's relationships with its neighboring countries across three levels: national, subnational, and regional. China prioritizes establishing innovative international relations with neighboring countries through the Belt and Road initiative to stabilize domestic growth and navigate foreign relations amidst the changing development scenario. Faced with intricate regional dynamics stemming from recent historical shifts, China must steadfastly advance the "Belt and Road" project to cultivate a conducive neighboring atmosphere, fostering the development of a shared human destiny.

**Keywords:** constructivism, the Belt and Road, new international relations, neighboring countries.

## **1. Introduction**

Since the new century began, China has been gaining increasing influence in its neighboring regions, prompting an urgent need for corresponding neighboring relations. In alignment with the current paradigm of fostering peace, progress, collaboration, and mutually beneficial outcomes, General Secretary Xi has introduced the concept of advancing the establishment of a fresh model of global interactions founded on mutual regard, equity, impartiality, and cooperative gains[1]. The "Belt and Road" endeavor serves as a pivotal mechanism for cultivating a novel form of bond

between China and its neighboring nations. Exploring its role in shaping a fresh international dynamic from a constructivist viewpoint is of significant value. The impact of China's Belt and Road Initiative on its international relations has been a topic of significant interest within the academic community. Numerous scholarly works[2][3][4] have delved into this subject, exploring how the initiative has shaped China's relationships with neighboring countries. Some studies have adopted a more focused approach, undertaking case studies and conducting country-specific analyses to better understand the dynamics of cooperation and development between China and its neighbors[5][6][7][8]. Existing studies have not delved deeply into this matter, nor have they systematically explored it. Moreover, few have applied constructivist theories to analyze the impact of the Belt and Road initiative on fostering a novel form of international relations between China and its neighboring countries. Therefore, this paper seeks to examine how the "Belt and Road" initiative is positively shaping the new international relations between China and its neighboring countries according to a constructivist viewpoint. It aims to emphasize the interconnected nature of state relations within the implementation of the "Belt and Road" and to actively encourage mutually beneficial interactions between China and its neighboring nations.

## **2. Literature review**

The Belt and Road endeavor launched by China has sparked widespread interest in global circles, being hailed as a crucial step towards forging novel international relations with neighboring countries. Scholars have conducted many fruitful theoretical studies on the Belt and Road to build a new type of international relations between China and its neighbors, laying a solid foundation for the next stage of research work.

### **2.1. Constructivist Theory**

Based on Alexander Wendt's definition, constructivism emphasizes the influence of social structures in international relations on international political behavior. He argues that international relations are characterized not only by national interests and the balance of power but also by the structure of international society and the interaction between international actors[9]. In a landmark study, Schweller, R. proposed the process of socialization of international organizations, international norms, and international politics, with an emphasis on the impact of norms and perceptions in the international system on international politics, which makes an important contribution to the field of constructivism[10]. The application of constructivist theory has a positive impact on the study of the impact of China's Belt and Road Initiative on building new international relations between China and its neighbors.

### **2.2. The Belt and Road Initiative on the Construction of New International Relations between China and Neighboring Countries**

Weidong Liu concluded that China's ambitious the Belt and Road project, which includes the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road," is designed to enhance economic globalization by ensuring the seamless movement of economic elements, optimizing resource utilization, and promoting market amalgamation. Its objective is to promote wider regional collaboration in order to create a transparent, all-encompassing, and equitable economic structure[11]. Furthermore, a fresh approach to international relations is emerging, placing a strong emphasis on fostering mutually beneficial partnerships. This progressive model encourages open communication and collaboration for the mutual advantage of all parties involved. The principles of win-win cooperation are key in shaping diplomatic, economic, security, and cultural interactions[12].

In his analysis of China's diplomatic ties with neighboring nations under the Belt and Road Initiative, William Yale points out that the initiative has improved China's relations with neighboring countries and undermined the "Great Power Threat Theory", playing a key role in advancing research on the correlation between China and its neighboring nations within the Belt and Road Initiative[2]. Besides, A.J. Venables has pointed out that border areas play an important role in "agglomeration" between neighboring countries[3]. This study emphasizes neighboring countries' positive role in economic and social interactions at regional levels, providing a basis for further research. However, the complexity of interstate relations calls for a more holistic approach, highlighting the need for a systematic perspective in current research. In addition, on the one hand, Scholars have studied strategic initiatives like Kazakhstan's "Bright Path," Uzbekistan's "Development Action Strategy," the "Belt and Road Initiative," Indonesia's "Global Maritime Pivot," Tajikistan's "National Development Strategy up to 2030," Russia's "Greater Eurasia Partnership," South Korea's "New North Policy," and "The New North," examining the alignment between initiatives such as the "New North Policy" and "New South Policy." [5][6][7][8]. These studies underscore the importance of personalized assessments and argue that the "Belt and Road" project has effectively strengthened collaboration and developmental relationships between China and its neighboring countries. This has been achieved through strategic alignment and targeted collaboration in sectors like infrastructure and finance. On the other hand, some scholars hold a negative attitude towards the strategic docking between countries, such as the docking and cooperation between China and Central Asian countries under the framework of the "Belt and Road" construction, which will touch on Russia's political interests[4].

### 2.3. Direction of Exploration

This review demonstrates that scholars have established a solid foundation for further enhancing research on the establishment of novel international relations through the implementation of the "Belt and Road" initiative. However, there is a notable lack of in-depth and organized research on the emergence of a new international relations framework between China and its neighboring countries through the "Belt and Road" initiative. In addition, previous research has overlooked the implementation of constructivist theory in examining the development of fresh international connections between China and its neighboring countries in the framework of the "Belt and Road" project. Consequently, this paper aims to evaluate how the Belt and Road Initiative has affected China's international relations with neighboring countries by adopting a constructivist perspective. The goal is to thoroughly and systematically explore the initiative's impact on shaping a fresh form of international relations between China and its neighboring nations.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research choice

The study delved into the effects of the Belt and Road project on establishing fresh diplomatic ties with neighboring nations, choosing the Mono method for thorough qualitative analysis. According to Bernard, H. R., qualitative research involves a distinct array of methods and techniques that allow researchers to delve "closer" into the experiences of participants. Qualitative research sets itself apart from quantitative research by prioritizing a deeper understanding of participants' experiences rather than concentrating on measuring and explaining variable relationships[13]. Tashakkori and Teddlie show that qualitative research is a type of research that has its own philosophical, reasoning, and conceptual foundations. It encompasses purpose, questions, information collection, data analysis, and conceptual criteria for deployment[14]. By employing qualitative research techniques, scholars gain insight into China's changing engagements with

nearby countries within the scope of the "Belt and Road" initiative. This not only illuminates its worldwide influence but also aids in establishing a sturdy novel framework for international relations.

Among the qualitative research, this study mainly adopts the literature analysis method. According to Krippendorff, the documentary analysis method is a systematic research method that aims to analyze the content, structure, and meaning of a text to reveal the patterns, trends, and relationships within it. He emphasized that the purpose of content analysis is to understand the information and meanings in the texts by systematically classifying and interpreting them[15]. Centered around the concept of the Belt and Road which is the establishment of fresh diplomatic connections between China and its nearby nations, this study focuses on examining the dynamic relationship between China and its neighboring nations. It meticulously and thoroughly analyzes the existing scholarly works on the Belt and Road initiative, which aims to forge fresh international relations with China's neighbors. The aim is to establish a solid foundation for the investigation covered in this paper.

### **3.2. Research approach**

To effectively analyze the current academic literature on the Belt and Road constructing a fresh form of international relations involving China and its neighboring nations in a reasonable, systematic, and comprehensive way, this study adopts the inductive method, deriving theories from specific observations and data analysis. John Stuart Mill showed in "A System of Logic" that induction is a method of reasoning that infers general principles, laws, or concepts from specific facts, observations, or experiences. By observing and analyzing multiple specific cases or instances, induction attempts to summarize universal conclusions[16]. The inductive method helps synthesize literature on China's new international relationships through the "Belt and Road" initiative, identifying patterns and themes for constructing an analytical framework to explore China's interactions with neighboring states systematically.

### **3.3. Research design**

#### **3.3.1. Literature Collection and Analysis Phase**

Firstly, collect relevant literature on constructivist theory, international relations, and China's "Belt and Road Initiative." Secondly, the literature is synthesized using the literature analysis method to clarify the importance of constructivism in international relations and to study the influence of the Belt and Road Initiative on global diplomacy. Finally, based on the results of the analysis, this study summarizes the role of constructivism in cognitive, conceptual, social structure and normative systems, and the effect of the Belt and Road Initiative on China and globally.

#### **3.3.2. Inductive Summarization Phase**

Building upon the results of the literature analysis, utilize inductive reasoning to extract general patterns or conclusions from specific cases and observations. Simultaneously, examine practical cases and real-world data from the execution of the "Belt and Road Initiative" to confirm how useful constructivism is in analyzing China's diplomatic relationships with adjacent nations and to dig deeper into how the initiative influences various regions.

#### **3.3.3. Comprehensive Analysis and Conclusion Phase**

Perform a thorough examination of the aforementioned results to delve into the significance and impact of constructivist theory in elucidating the "Belt and Road Initiative." Draw conclusions on

how constructivism can be applied in international relations and assess the effects of the "Belt and Road Initiative" in shaping novel forms of international relations between China and its neighboring nations. Additionally, provides recommendations for future research and policy implications.

## **4. Results**

This study employs qualitative and inductive methods, emphasizing literature analysis to explore the wide-ranging impacts of the Belt and Road Initiative on China's relationships with neighboring countries and the development of a new type of global connection from a constructivist perspective. It accomplishes this by reviewing relevant literature and offering an in-depth analysis of the research results.

### **4.1. Theoretical Analysis of the Belt and Road Initiative on International Relations between China and Neighboring Countries from the Perspective of Constructivism**

The constructivist theory unveils a fresh perspective on comprehending the profound influence of the Belt and Road Initiative on China's interactions with neighboring nations, reforming social structures and conventions within the area. The Belt and Road Initiative has significantly altered China's interactions with neighboring nations, impacting societal trends and international norms, and consequently fostering the development of novel forms of global collaborations. In line with constructivist theory, the Belt and Road Initiative acts not just as an economic endeavor but also as a platform for China to assert its clout in global affairs, reposition itself on the international stage, and influence how neighboring countries view China. Through a constructivist lens, the Belt and Road Initiative can be seen as a transformative social endeavor that redefines how international relations are perceived and established, paving the way for fresh collaborations between China and its neighboring countries.

### **4.2. The Belt and Road Initiative Promotes China's Relations with Neighboring Countries**

As the Belt and Road Initiative moves forward, China's connections with neighboring nations are transforming, displaying new characteristics and fluid dynamics. The initiative's advocacy of international relations principles such as "mutual respect," "common development," and "harmony and coexistence" transcends traditional realist perspectives on state relations. These concepts have sparked a fresh perspective on how China interacts with its neighboring countries, moving away from the conventional notion of asserting dominance and engaging in power conflicts.

First, the Belt and Road Initiative is anchored in the fundamental principles of mutual growth and collaboration, with the goal of unlocking the development prospects of every nation, while nurturing a bond of collective progress and prosperity across countries. Secondly, by fostering a climate of mutual respect founded on equality, nations can secure the safeguarding of their uniqueness within the global framework, establishing a firm footing for enduring diplomatic ties. Finally, the Initiative prioritizes "harmony and coexistence," encouraging cooperative dialogues, shared efforts, and fair benefits. Through cultivating peaceful collaboration and mutual benefits between China and its neighboring nations, this strategy effectively nourishes constructive relationships that go beyond borders.

### **4.3. The Belt and Road Initiative's multi-level construction of a new type of international relations between China and its neighboring countries**

Throughout the Belt and Road Initiative, the nearby nations of China transitioned their attention from individual states to a more expansive and interconnected geopolitical panorama. This shift



entails interactions on a national scale, cross-border collaborations at the sub-national level, and cooperative ties at the regional level[17]. Under the "Belt and Road" initiative, the geostructures of neighboring nations have undergone a significant transformation, shifting from simplistic two-country connections to a more intricate and interconnected dynamic. This fresh paradigm involves collaborations at a national scale, cross-border interactions at a local level, and collective efforts on a regional front. The foundational element lies in national-level interactions, with subnational and regional partnerships expanding upon this core. Through strategic goal alignment, the cultivation of cross-border ties, and the encouragement of regional cooperation, these endeavors cultivate a sense of unity, laying the foundation for a unified community with shared goals and opportunities. This metamorphosis is pivotal in shaping a novel framework for global relations.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1. Theoretical analysis of the Belt and Road Initiative's impact on the international relations of China and neighboring countries from a constructivist perspective**

The Constructivist theory offers a compelling lens through which to examine the impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on global relations. By reshaping societal norms and standards, the initiative catalyzes the development of a new paradigm for international relations. Viewing it through a Constructivist framework reveals that the initiative transcends mere economic cooperation; it also shapes the broader global landscape. This process redefines China's position on the global stage and transforms neighboring countries' perceptions of China.

Viewed through a constructivist lens, the Belt and Road Initiative represents a social construct that shapes perceptions and practices in international relations, leading to significant shifts in China's interactions with neighboring countries. Its influence transcends economic benefits, embodying principles of shared development, mutual regard, and harmonious coexistence within the framework of global relations.

Furthermore, the Belt and Road Initiative affords China a chance to influence the course of global affairs by collaborating with other nations. This extends beyond economic considerations to encompass cultural exchanges, cooperative endeavors rooted in shared human values, and progress in global governance. Therefore, the Initiative transcends its economic nature; it represents a holistic strategy to drive transformations in global affairs and establish a fresh paradigm.

### **5.2. The Belt and Road Initiative Promotes China's Relations with Neighboring Countries**

This chapter centers on China's reshaping of its ties with neighboring nations via the Belt and Road Initiative, emphasizing key international relations principles like "shared progress," "reciprocal respect," and "peaceful coexistence." These values have fostered a fresh approach to interactions between China and its neighboring states.

#### **5.2.1. Co-development**

As economic globalization continues to deepen and countries become increasingly interdependent, there is a rising endorsement of advancing shared interests. While the use of force to settle disputes is on the decline, notions like hegemony and zero-sum games concerning interests persist. Numerous countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative are middle-income nations contending with ecological, economic, and healthcare dilemmas.

First, the "Belt and Road" initiative places a strong emphasis on promoting mutual development and cultivating a sense of interconnected interests and collective fate among nations. Secondly, it promotes economic cooperation and cultural exchanges through infrastructure connectivity, aiming

for mutual benefit. Finally, the initiative is an open and inclusive framework that welcomes regional participation, contributing to poverty eradication and the achievement of the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

### **5.2.2. Mutual Respect**

The "Belt and Road" construction upholds the neighboring diplomatic concept of "affinity, sincerity, beneficence and tolerance"[18], which is premised on mutual respect among countries. China, in the creation of the "Belt and Road" initiative, honors the development aspirations of its small neighboring nations, fosters their voluntary engagement, and seamlessly assimilates them into the worldwide industrial, value, and supply networks. China actively boosts regional well-being and security through initiatives like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), backed by 103 nations. AIIB prioritizes infrastructure development in Asia without political constraints. The alignment of China's development strategy with Laos has enhanced the connectivity between the Central and South Peninsula, materializing the aspiration of landlocked nations to access sea routes.

### **5.2.3. Harmony and Symbiosis**

Since ancient times, China has been upholding the tradition of treating neighboring countries with courtesy, "practicing the way of the king rather than the way of the hegemon"[19], emphasizing "convincing people with virtue" and "being gentle to the neighbors". It also emphasizes the concepts of "persuading people by virtue", "softening the surrounding area" and "moral power rather than military power"[20]. Nowadays, China's "Belt and Road" project promotes the principles of mutual cooperation, joint development, and collaboration, encouraging transparency, acceptance, and peaceful cohabitation in its interactions with neighboring nations. Through innovative state relations, the initiative introduces a new concept of "harmony and coexistence", moving beyond traditional international relations of "hegemonic plunder" and avoiding hegemony and predation. This change enables China to make a constructive contribution to regional collaboration, fostering stability and prosperity, and laying the groundwork for shared growth.

## **5.3. The Belt and Road Initiative's Multi-Level Construction of New International**

Within China's foreign policy framework, neighboring nations are viewed as crucial allies essential for cultivating novel global connections. This section examines how the Belt and Road Initiative promotes the diverse growth of modern international relationships between China and its neighboring states.

### **5.3.1. Interaction at the national level**

On a global scale, China's increasing collaboration and interactions with bordering nations indicate the development of a fresh model for international relationships. Through the Belt and Road Initiative, China promotes regional cooperation, laying the groundwork for inter-country communication and collaboration. This initiative has introduced fresh platforms for cooperation, fostering mutual collaboration. China's inclusive approach, respect for neighboring countries' development paths and interests, and advocacy for joint construction and sharing have bolstered stability, harmony, and trust between nations. This national-level interaction not only boosts regional cooperation and development but also sets a positive precedent for a more open, inclusive, and mutually beneficial international order.

### 5.3.2. Cross-border relations at the subnational level

At the regional level, Chinese local authorities are joining forces with neighboring counterparts to breathe new life into creative global partnerships. As economic globalization advances and interdependence grows, border regions have undergone a significant transformation. Rather than merely serving as security buffers, these areas now play a vital role in connecting countries and embracing interactions with the wider world. Border openings have offered neighboring countries of China a vital exchange platform. China has resolved border issues with 12 out of 14 land neighbors, with border conditions currently at their peak. The Belt and Road Initiative's development is closely linked to China's borders, as six economic corridors must traverse these regions for international access. This initiative fosters fresh cooperation prospects between border areas and neighboring nations, enhancing cross-border connectivity, economic partnerships, and mutual gains.

### 5.3.3. Cooperation at the regional level

Under the Belt and Road Initiative, neighboring countries' relations expand from borders to regional levels, emphasizing the significance of multi-level cooperation. According to Clark, C., a region is "formed by the association of a limited number of countries based on geographic relations and interdependence"[21]. In other words, Geographic proximity and interdependence are essential for regional formation. As economic globalization advances, countries enhance cooperation with neighbors due to increased interdependence. Proximity facilitates regional collaboration. The Belt and Road Initiative encourages neighboring regional cooperation, multilateral engagement, and strategic alignment between China and neighboring nations, fostering innovative development and a new regional cooperation framework.

## 6. Conclusion

Currently, the global community is undergoing a significant transformation unlike anything witnessed in a century. While the widespread outbreak of C pneumonia has fueled anti-globalization sentiments, the push for globalization continues unabated. Despite challenges, the world's interconnectedness remains intact, and economic globalization persists, albeit navigating through obstacles. This paper introduces an analytical framework for forging a fresh approach to international relations between China and its neighboring nations. The implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative serves as a catalyst for transforming relations between China and its neighbors on a broader scale and has built a strong partnership with its neighboring countries, forming a complex network of cooperation that spans multiple levels. The "Belt and Road" initiative has played a crucial role in restructuring China's relationships with neighboring nations on a horizontal level, while also fostering a multifaceted collaborative partnership with these countries on a vertical scale. As China advances the Belt and Road Initiative, its strategic connections with neighboring nations are being tactically established both vertically and horizontally, following a well-defined trajectory and rationale. Relationships of different dimensions and levels do not exist in isolation from each other, but are interconnected, mutually reinforcing, and indivisible as an organic whole. China should always push forward the construction of the Belt and Road, optimize its relations with neighboring countries, replace hegemony with respect, bridge differences with development, and resolve conflicts with cooperation, to promote benign interactions in China's relations with neighboring countries, and to foster the development of a novel form of global interactions founded on mutual regard, equity, and cooperation that benefits all parties involved.



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