

# Opportunities and Challenges of Building International Connectivity: The Indian Perspective on China's "One Belt and One Road" Initiative\*

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## Abstract

India is among the countries invited to join China's initiative to build the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (the OBOR). New Delhi has not yet decided whether to join. In fact, there is a diversity of opinion within India. This paper proposes an alternative perspective for examining India's policy and responses to the OBOR from the perspective of international connectivity. For India, the OBOR presents both economic benefits and geopolitical concerns. Particularly, India prefers to be the hub of the network of international connectivity. To bracket the concerns together, this paper suggests that India may offer conditional support to the OBOR, join the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC), but oppose the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

**Keywords:** One Belt One Road, International Connectivity, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor

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## I. Introduction

China raised the initiative of building the Silk Road Economic Belt in September 2013 when Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Kazakhstan. Later, he proposed to construct the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road during the state visit to Indonesia in October 2013. Since then, the initiative of building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (the OBOR) has become China's main strategy. If successfully, it will increase connectivity among the countries to boost international investments, trade and the movement of people. More importantly, the initiative has geopolitical implications as it is arguably reshaping map of international politics. For Beijing, the international connectivity project is a crucial step towards strengthening its influence in the regions. In order to implement the idea, China has already initiated the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund to promote it abroad.

India is among the countries invited to join the OBOR as the cross-continent project runs through Asia and the Indian Ocean. This should not be deemed as a strange idea, because historically, India was a part of Silk Road. There is a considerable debate within India's strategic establishment on whether India should join the OBOR or not. So far, however, New Delhi has not committed itself to or indicated support for the OBOR project. India's discomfort about OBOR reflected the mixed future of China-India relations. To a certain great extent, China-India relationship has been shaped by asymmetrical threat perceptions between them. India has strategically perceived China as an uneasy competitor or a potential threat (Madhav 2014; Fang 2014). India's strategy vis-à-vis China are characterized with dual features: engage with China in economics, but hedge it in the security domain (Chaulia 2016, 145).

First of all, this paper is concerned with the development of the OBOR in the South Asia. Given India's significance and growing influence, the particular focus of this paper is to explore Indian perspective on the OBOR initiative. The main question is: how does India perceive the issue, and how will India respond it? In the course of this analysis, this paper will highlight India's concerns regarding the OBOR and two of its supplementing projects: the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Overall, the paper manages to retain focus on the opportunities and challenges for India in dealing with the OBOR issues. The second purposes of this research has been a review of the existing literature about international connectivity with a view to providing a clear overview and explanation of the paths by which the OBOR can impact on India's decision.

Therefore, in addition to the descriptive material, the author will apply the concept of international connectivity as an analytical framework for understanding and interpreting India's apprehension about the OBOR.

Although the international connectivity theory is yet a mature and comprehensive theory, some basic points can be summarized from the existing studies.<sup>①</sup>

First, connectivity is defined as a country's ability to effectively connect to others within a particular network. Considering that the OBOR falls into the category of international connectivity, the key concepts associated with connectivity hold the potential to lead to an understanding about the nature of the OBOR and how it will drive India's perceptions of the initiative.

The second point is the gains for building up the international connectivity. The majority of studies featuring the impact of international connectivity have focused on economic benefits and connectivity is understood as a positive factor for development. People expect that relative ease of movement of goods and service will hasten development. That is, the improved connectivity is likely to bring about greater economic growth and prosperity. Connectivity can be seen to impact on the economy through a variety of channels, including foreign direct investment ( FDI ), trade, tourism, labour market, and agglomeration effects ( Oxford Economics and York Aviation 2013, 2 ).

Third, following the above assumption, policy makers need to be concerned with two primary factors when it comes to connectivity: building stronger links with global and regional hubs and increasing the number and quality of connections with a wide range of countries to improve their place in the global network ( Arvis and Shepherd 2013, 3-4 ). To sum up, there is a "more is better" principle as the connectivity offered can never be 'enough' ( Oxford Economics and York Aviation 2013, 33-34 ). The more interdependence resulted from the connectivity may also imply more vulnerability or exposure.

The fourth concern is who will be the major winner of an international connectivity? Generally, there are two different points in the connectivity: the hubs and the nodes. The hub is the more connected point and the node is less connected within the network. In principle, connectivity is of general relevance to all potential users. International connectivity is essentially not a zero-sum distributional game in which regions of the world compete. But the hub occupies the pivotal position in the network, which allows it has greater access to the resources and other factors that contribute to development. Following the logic, China is undoubtedly the hub countries of the OBOR while India is one of the nodes.

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註① For more discussions on international connectivity theory, see Oxera Consulting Ltd ( 2010 ); Oxford Economics and York Aviation ( 2013 ); Arvis and Shepherd ( 2013 ).

Settling the paper in the framework of the international connectivity concept, this paper is aimed to forge an alternative approach to examine the issue and to test the theoretical explanation. This paper is organized as follows: the first part outlines India's geographical significances to the OBOR. The second section discusses the geo-economic aspect while the third part considers India's geographical concerns. The CPEC and BCIM are among the issues of particular concerns and are thus highlighted in the following two sections. India's countermeasures are also included. Finally, the concluding remarks summarize the findings of this study. The paper argues, India has so far adopted a mixed approach to the OBOR project, and may offer some conditional support to the initiative.

## II. India's Position in the OBOR

From the theoretical perspective, the choice of suitable ports at origin and destination and the links between them are the basic components of forging the international connectivity. Being the largest country of South Asia and the Indian Ocean region, India occupies a significant location on the China-proposed Maritime Silk Road. A map prepared by the state-run *Xinhua* news agency shows that Kolkata, capital of the Indian state of West Bengal, has been included in the maritime connectivity project. That is, if India is unwilling to endorse the project, the Maritime Silk Road has to be redrawn to bypass the ports of India. Also, the OBOR project will become incomplete without India's participation.

Indian scholars are fully aware of this situation. Some Indian analysts observed, during their recent interactions with their Chinese counterparts, the focus of all discussion was the OBOR initiative (Saran and Passi 2016). Rumel Dahiya and Jagannath Panda (2015) clearly pointed out that China has continually factored India as an important country in its Silk Road project because of India's strategic location in Asia. Without India's support, China may find it difficult to execute the mega project. That is why Chinese President Xi Jinping broke the normal protocol to fly to Xian to receive the visiting Prime Minister Narendra Modi when the latter visited China in September 2015. It was argued that the gesture signified that Chinese leaders held due regard for the Indian leaders and an attempt to improve the bilateral relations.

Interestingly enough, Prime Minister Modi chose Xian as his first stop, where is traditionally seen as the starting point and epicenter of China's ancient Silk route (Panda 2015). By arranging Prime Minister Modi to visit Xian, Beijing tried to "cajole" India, in the words of Jagannath Panda from the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, to rethink its reservation on China's invitation to India to join its Silk Road Project. Panda deemed that the Chinese side is keen to secure New Delhi's support and will henceforward try with

greater determination to convince India about the Silk Road Project ( Panda 2015 ). A similar point was made by Teshu Singh as she observed that China would be even more proactive in pursuing a friendly and good-neighborly policy toward its neighboring countries in order to quicken its OBOR initiative ( Singh 2015 ).

### III. The Economic Benefits

On the issue of whether India should join the OBOR project, there has been diversity of opinion within India, which reflects different considerations. The supporters tend to follow the geo-economic thoughts, saying India should jump on the bandwagon of China's grand project to develop India's own economy. The reason is that the OBOR will provide a new source of financing and technology, which is needed for India's long-term development.

As demonstrated above, international connectivity may bring more economic benefits as it will facilitate more economic exchanges. Such an idea is well elaborated by some Indian scholars. For example, B. R. Deepak ( 2015 ) of Jawaharlal Nehru University saw the OBOR as an important driver of economic growth as well as an opportunity to optimize the economic structure as the proposed project will cover a population of 4.4 billion with a collective GDP of USD 21 trillion. He asserted that India should cooperate with China on the issue as India tends to benefit from the project ( China Daily 2014 ). In an interview with the *People's Daily* newspaper, Manoranjan Mohanty from Institute of Chinese Studies said India has expectations for the OBOR. He considered the OBOR as a geo-economic concept to promote the common development of the countries along the Silk Road. He argued, the Indians and people of other countries along the Silk Roads will welcome the OBOR as it links the historical memory regarding the ancient silk routes and the development in the 21st century ( 莫漠蒂 2015 ).

The former National Security Adviser, Shankar Menon, also noted the economic benefit of the OBOR. He suggested that India should use the infrastructure and institutions that are being created to further India's transformation ( South Asia Monitor 2016 ). The viewpoint was echoed by Samir Saran and Ritika Passi ( 2016 ). The two researchers from the Observer Research Foundation stated, Chinese transportation facility and other capacities can serve as catalysts and platforms for sustained Indian economic growth. Therefore, the Indian side should concentrate on building last-mile connectivity in its own soil linking to the OBOR.

In fact, as the past studies shows, people and businesses are more likely to locate in places which are well connected, internationally and domestically ( Oxera Consulting Ltd 2010, 22 ). Improved connectivity will act as a spur to improve economy at home and can

definitely help Prime Minister Modi “Make in India” campaign. That is why India is also investing massively in port facility and road connectivity at home. The Sagar Mala project was approved by Indian government in March 2015 to develop 12 major ports and 1,208 islands. In addition, the Bharat Mala program envisages construction of road network along India's borders and coastal states though the details have not been finalized yet. Since the OBOR will help India to develop its infrastructure and build facilities in coastal area, on this point, the initiative can well be synergistic with India's initiatives of Bharat Mala and Sagar Mala (Deepak 2015). Kishan Rana, a former diplomat and senior fellow at the Institute for Chinese Studies, also agreed that the OBOR could provide funds and technology to India's ports and infrastructure. He argued, “we need to think about whether that's something we can ignore” (The Telegraph 2015). Thus, the OBOR may open new door for potential economic cooperation between India and China.

Geethanjali Nataraj also holds a geo-economic view to analyze the issue. She deemed that China has traditionally used its economic might against India in South Asia, and to enlarge its sphere of influence in the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea. Thus, she argued, the Maritime Silk Road may be an economic disguise for the so-called ‘string of pearls’ strategy, which focuses on the build-up of Chinese commercial and military facilities, and relationships in the India Ocean. If more and more South Asian countries coming under China's sphere of influence, India will become isolated if it refuses to be part of the OBOR project. On the other hand, India may make use of its prime position to be a key part of the OBOR (Nataraj 2015). Similar viewpoints were presented by some other Indian scholars. Ravi Bhoothalingam worried that India would be left isolated in its own backwater if it could not improve its connectivity with growth markets and link into Asia's production and supply chains (Bhoothalingam 2016). Moreover, the OBOR could potentially allow India a new path to integrate South Asia (Saran and Passi 2016). India can use the platform to attract Chinese investments and to enhance India's regional and bilateral cooperation (Nataraj 2015).

India's decision to sign up to the Chinese-proposed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is also often cited while assessing India's responses to the OBOR initiative. India was invited to join the China-initiated organization during Prime Minister Modi's meeting with Chinese president Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Brazil in July 2014. Indian government soon decided to join it without much debate because it hopes to get low-cost funds for infrastructure creation in India.<sup>②</sup> In fact, New Delhi has been very enthusiastic about the new institution. India not only became the founding member

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註② For a concise analysis on India's decision to join the AIIB, see The Times of India (2014a) and Sahasrabudhe (2015).

but also is the second-biggest shareholder by committing \$ 8 billion to the China-led financial institution. India's nominee D. J. Pandian has been appointed Vice President and Chief Investment Officer of the AIIB, while Dinesh Sharma, Additional Secretary of India's Ministry of Finance, has been elected to the 12-member board of the organization.

Nirupama Rao, the former Indian Foreign Secretary, also admitted that India has in some ways affirmed the OBOR initiative with its membership stake in the AIIB ( Rao 2016 ). Hence, the supporters argue, if India has signed up for the AIIB and the BRICS Development Bank, by the same reckoning, there would be no harm for India in joining the OBOR ( Deepak 2015 ). Under the geo-economic considerations, that is, India could benefit from being a part of the OBOR and further their development and economic agendas.

However, New Delhi is of the view that the OBOR and the AIIB were different in nature. Indian Foreign Secretary Jaishankar had provided the India's official perspective on the difference between the AIIB and the OBOR. He described the OBOR as "a national Chinese initiative", not an international venture the Chinese discussed with the whole world, or with the countries which are affected by it ( The Telegraph 2015 ).

Interestingly, the viewpoint is shared with some Chinese scholars. Shi Yinhong of Renmin University argued China needs to respect and engage other nations involved in the project and seek to allay their concerns through conducting far more international consultations, because the infrastructure systems are to be built on their sovereign lands. He deemed that the OBOR project must be international collective enterprises; this is the only way to substantially ease the other nations' worries and suspicions ( Shi 2015 ). In fact, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang has already replied that China would fully respect and accommodate India's concerns and will work with India to seek the convergence of interests between the two countries, explore a path of win-win cooperation and jointly promote development and prosperity in the region ( India Today 2015 ). Putting the "international feature" on top of the agenda could force China to making concessions to India.

## **IV. Geopolitical Concerns**

Regarding the approach towards the OBOR, New Delhi could have chosen an entirely different course from the AIIB model by following the geo-political thinking. New Delhi is conscious of the critical role that connectivity will play in affecting India's security environment. Just as Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj put it, "connectivity itself has emerged as a theatre of present day geopolitics." ( MEA 2016 ). Without naming China's OBOR, she expressed the worry that "the rivalry for influence among nations today is often expressed in terms of their competition in infrastructure connectivity" ( MEA 2016 ).

Quite logically, there is also concern that China will use the transnational connectivity such as the OBOR to enlarge its presence in the Indian Ocean and South Asia, and use it to strategically corner India. Nirupama Rao, former Indian Ambassador to Beijing and Foreign Secretary, warned that India needs be vigilant about the goal of the OBOR. She elaborated that China is using the connectivity initiative to “create a Sinosphere of trade, communication and transportation links that helps realize China’s vision of strategic continental and maritime advantage” (Rao 2016). For Indian strategic community, the Indian Ocean has always been a big deal. Just as India’s Ministry of Defence stated, India is a maritime nation and the country sits astride a very large number of busy International Shipping Lanes that crisscross the Indian Ocean. India is dependent on the oceans surrounding it, as more than 90% of India’s trade by volume and 77% by value is transported over the seas. Therefore, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is vital to India’s security and prosperity (MOD 2015, 5, 32).

India has long been treating the Indian Ocean as its own sphere of influence and very sensitive to the presence of external powers in the region. China’s enthusiasm with enhancing its relationship with India’s neighbors by establishing a closer strategic partnership and providing certain assistances was troubling to the Indians. As Robert D Kaplan put it, China is an emerging power in the Indian Ocean and expands vertically in the region (Kaplan 2011, 5-17). India’s Ministry of Defence also observed that China is extending its lines of access towards the Indian Ocean through Myanmar and Pakistan. Its footprint in India’s immediate neighborhood has also been increasing as a result of its proactive diplomacy through political, military and economic cooperation and engagement (MOD 2015, 27).

Since there is deep mistrust between India and China, India has feared the possibility of Chinese encirclement. New Delhi has deep concerns about Beijing’s moves and growing naval activities in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Once Chinese show up in the Indian Ocean, endless speculation begins on their intentions and activities. As a result, India has expressed strong concerns to Sri Lanka for allowing Chinese submarines to dock at Colombo in September and October 2014. Ignoring India’s misgivings, China’s Yuan Class 335 submarine visited Karachi port in May 2015. Moreover, China has decided to sell eight submarines to Pakistan, and four of them will be built in Karachi. China may use this opportunity to build up a logistics base for submarines in Karachi.

Though India could economically benefit from the OBOR, as suggested by logic of the international connectivity theory, the Chinese side will get even more. This is thus seen as a negative impact on India’s influence. With the OBOR, Beijing is poised to assume a more prominent strategic presence in the Indian Ocean. Against the above backdrop, skeptics are therefore opposed to the OBOR plan as it will help China expand its influence in the region



and undermine India's dominance.

## **V. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor**

The strongest India's resistance on the OBOR comes from the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is included as the supplement to the OBOR project. The CPEC will connect Kashgar of Xinjiang and Gwadar port on the Arabian Sea through a 3000-km-long network of roads, railways and pipelines. The CPEC would reduce distance of 6,000 km for China's route to transport energy and goods to the Middle East or Africa, which currently passes through the Strait of Malacca. By using the CPEC and Gwadar port, the journey time from China's west to the Middle East and Africa will be cut from 45 days to around 10 days. That is, it may also become a key energy supply route for China.

In fact, the idea of constructing CPEC first came in 2012, much earlier before the announcement of the OBOR. In May 2013 during Chinese Premier Le Keqiang's visit to Pakistan, the two sides officially agreed to jointly develop the Long-Term Plan for China-Pakistan Economic Corridor on the basis of thorough study. A MoU on CPEC was soon signed on 5 July 2013 in Beijing when Pakistani Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif visited China. The construction of the CPEC is gaining new momentum as it has been included as part of the OBOR. The "Vision and Actions on jointly building Silk Road Economic belt and 21st-century Maritime Silk road", issued in March 2015, mentioned that the CPEC and the BCIM-EC are closely related to the OBOR Initiative, and therefore require closer cooperation and greater progress. Weeks later, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Pakistan to unveil a \$46 billion infrastructure plan for constructing the CPEC.

Pakistan and China have enjoyed the so-called All-Weather Partnership for decades. Given the longstanding tension between India and Pakistan, India is keeping a close eye on China-Pakistan cooperation. Beijing has justified CPEC as a "livelihood project". Xi Jinping noted that China and Pakistan will form a "1+4" cooperation structure with the Economic Corridor at the centre and the Gwadar Port, energy, infrastructure and industrial cooperation being the four key areas to drive development across Pakistan and deliver tangible benefits to its people (Xi 2015). Though China said their presence were not aimed against any country but were only involved in activities to improve the livelihood of local people, India has constantly asked China to cease their activities in that region (Deccan Herald 2010; The Express Tribune 2013; The Economic Times 2014; The Indian Express 2015).

The CPEC has set new alarm bells ringing in Delhi. Controversially, the CPEC runs through Pakistan's Kashmir region, which India claims as its territory. India has conveyed its concerns to China about the presence of Chinese personnel and their activities in Pakistan-

occupied Kashmir. In addition to the security concerns caused by a China-Pakistan axis, New Delhi deems that the project has infringed on India's sovereignty. Therefore, India has repeatedly voiced its opposition to the proposed corridor (Dahiya and Panda 2015). During the visit to China in May 2015, Indian Prime Minister Modi raised the issue with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jipiang, saying the project is unacceptable to India (The Express Tribune 2015). In July 2015, Indian Prime Modi reiterated India's concerns over the CPEC project when he met Chinese President Xi Jinping in Russia's Ufa ahead of the BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summits. In the inauguration speech to the second Raisina Dialogue, Modi set forth India's preferences for building up regional connectivity, but stressed "connectivity in itself cannot override or undermine the sovereignty of other nations" (PMO 2017).

In general, it is still very difficult for the Indian government to bless the CPEC as it has been identified as a sovereignty issue. One of the reasons is that a formal nod to the OBOR will serve as a de-facto legitimization to Pakistan's rights on Pakistan-occupied Kashmir under the CPEC (Saran and Passi 2016).

Considering that the China-Pakistan alliance has always been a matter of security concern for India, China's physical presence in the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir is also problematic for India. Interestingly, the value of the CPEC as international connectivity is not totally overlooked by the Indian side. Few of Indian strategists have begun to think of the CPEC beyond the sovereignty discourse. For example, P. Stobdan, the former Indian Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, suggested that the OBOR may help India to connect the Eurasia, not only China. He argued, the transport infrastructure projects could be delinked from territorial disputes. In his opinions, India could continue to claim that the OBOR or the CPEC is passing through its territory (Stobdan 2016).

Despite efforts by India's Prime Minister, China's attitudes toward the CPEC have not changed. Beijing even termed the CPEC as a flagship project. Clearly, there is little scope for altering China-Pakistan strategic propinquity for now. It seems difficult for China and India to accommodate the differences over the issue.

## **VI. The Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor**

Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC) is another supplement project which is closely related to India. The corridor will run from Kunming to Kolkata, linking Mandalay in Myanmar as well as Dhaka and Chittagong in Bangladesh to advance multi-modal connectivity, promote investment and trade and facilitate people-to-

people contacts in that sub-region.

The idea actually originated from the "Kunming Initiative". In 1999, the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences and the Yunnan Provincial Economic and Technological Research Center jointly organized an international conference, which consisted of scholars from Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar. The conference was concluded with the announcement of the "Kunming Initiative" for the establishment of the Forum for Regional Economic Cooperation, and the agreement to study the construction of communication channels and networks among China, India, Bangladesh and Myanmar. It is aimed to integrate China's Yunnan with India's Northeast, Bangladesh and Myanmar. The sub-region will cover 1.65 million square kms and 440 million people. Since then, a track-II meeting had been held in the four countries in turns. In 2002, the quadrilateral meeting renamed as the BCIM Regional Economic Cooperation Forum.

The progress for the sub-regional cooperation has been very slow. The Chinese had proposed upgrading the track-II forum to the official level, but the proposal was turned down by the Indian side. It was till May 2013 when Chinese Premier Li Keqiang visited India, New Delhi finally agreed to jointly build the BCIM-EC. ( See Table 1 ) In December 2013, the First Joint Study Group Meeting of the BCIM Economic Corridor took place in Kunming. The four member countries agreed to establish a cooperation mechanism and to work out a joint research plan that covers topics such as transportation, trade and investment among them. Indian delegation was led by Gautam Bambawale, the then Joint Secretary of the East Asia Department of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs. The Deputy Planning Minister of Bangladesh, the Vice Chairman of China's National Development and Reform Commission, and a senior economic affairs official from Myanmar also joined the meeting.

Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jun argued, since the BCIM-EC is located at the intersection of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road, the corridor should be treated as priority direction to materialize the OBOR initiative. Li Jun asserted, once the BCIM economic corridor is established, it will combine the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area, ASEAN Free Trade Area and ASEAN-India Free Trade Area, shape the biggest free trade area in the world, and contribute to the free flow of goods, services and people throughout the region, thus setting a good example for broader regional cooperation between Pacific and Indian Ocean. Thus, he considered that the BCIM-EC should be put on the top of agenda of the OBOR initiative ( Li 2014 ).

Some Chinese scholars believed that China can provide technology and capital to the project, while India and others have other resources. In this way, they deduced that there is no reason for the related countries to turn down China's invitation of participating the corridor ( Wang 2015 ). But India has been lukewarm to the scheme, partly owing to problems such as insurgency, rebels finding sanctuary in Kachin and Kokang areas of

Table 1: China-India Statements on the BCIM

Time	Document	Statement
2006.11.20-23	<i>China-India Joint Declaration</i>	The two sides welcome the organisation of a car rally, recommended by the BCIM Forum, between Kolkata and Kunming via Bangladesh and Myanmar.
2008.1.15	<i>A Shared Vision for the 21st Century</i>	( nil )
2010.12.16	<i>Joint Communiqué of China and India</i>	( nil )
2013.5.20	<i>Joint Statement between China and India</i>	The two sides appreciated the progress made in promoting cooperation under the BCIM ( Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar ) Regional Forum. Encouraged by the successful BCIM Car Rally of February 2013 between Kolkata and Kunming, the two sides agreed to consult the other parties with a view to establishing a Joint Study Group on strengthening connectivity in the BCIM region for closer economic, trade, and people-to-people linkages and to initiating the development of a BCIM Economic Corridor.
2013.10.23	<i>Joint Statement -A Vision For Future Development of China-India Strategic and Cooperative Partnership</i>	Pursuant to the understanding reached between the two leaders in May 2013, China and India have each established a Study Group on the BCIM [Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar] Economic Corridor. The visit of the Chinese delegation to India in this regard was noted as a positive step. Further discussions on concepts and alignment of the economic corridor are envisaged. Both China and India would continue to discuss with the other parties to this initiative, and hold the first BCIM Joint Study Group meeting in coming December to study the specific programs on building the BCIM Economic Corridor.
2014.9.19	<i>Joint Statement between China and India on Building a Closer Developmental Partnership</i>	The two sides noted the progress made in promoting cooperation under the framework of the BCIM ( Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar ) Economic Corridor. Both sides recalled the first meeting of the Joint Study Group of BCIM Economic Corridor and agreed to continue their respective efforts to implement understandings reached at the meeting.
2015.5.15	<i>Joint Statement between China and India</i>	The two sides welcomed the progress made in promoting cooperation under the framework of the BCIM ( Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar ) Economic Corridor. Both sides recalled the second meeting of the Joint Study Group of BCIM Economic Corridor, and agreed to continue their respective efforts to implement understandings reached at the meeting.

Source: Author.

Myanmar where China has a definite strong influence, narco-arm nexus in the region, terrorism and refugees ( Deepak 2015 ). It is also because that New Delhi is not keen to seek closer regional integration with China as it has a run a huge trade deficit with China. For example, the trade deficit between the two sides increased about 34 per cent to USD 48.43 billion in 2014-15 from USD 36.21 billion in the previous year ( The Hindu 2015b ).

In February 2014, when Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi met the then Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, he secured a promise from Prime Minister Singh that the Indian side will actively join the projects of BCIM-EC and the Silk Road Economic Belt (國際在線 2014). But the Chinese side argued, India has stepped back from its previous offer since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power. (劉宗義 2015). It was reflected in the joint statements issued during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to India in September 2014 and Prime Minister Modi's visit to China in May 2015. There was no breakthrough on the issue. The Chinese side also complained, India has not appointed high ranking officers as its representatives to attend the Joint Study Group Meeting of the BCIM-EC. It seems that Delhi has left the BCIM-EC project aside for the moment (和訊網 2015).

India officially adopts a lukewarm posture towards the BCIM-EC because of its concerns about being connected with China, not because it disfavoured the regional connectivity. In addition to the BCIM, the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) group emerged as an alternative platform for India to pursue the sub-regional integration. India took the initiative to encourage the other three countries to sign a transportation agreement. As a result, the BCIM Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA) was signed in June 2015, which would facilitate the cross-border movement of goods and passengers among the four countries. Though the agreement has not been implemented yet, some Indian scholars have shown increased interest to discuss about the potential of BBIN. Some analysts have deemed the BBIN bloc as a small version of China's OBOR initiative (Chaulia 2016, 100). In Nilanjan Ghosh's opinion, China's model of economic development is very different from the South Asian states and there seems to be a higher possibility of achieving fiscal and monetary convergence in the BBIN, than the BCIM (Ghosh 2015).

Even so, it is worth noting that the BCIM and BBIN are not incompatible. As for China, it will use the AIIB to bolster the OBOR project. Bangladesh and Myanmar (part of the BCIM-EC) have already received loan from the finance institute. Under the auspices of the AIIB, China has therefore been able to expand its influences over the countries (Hsu 2017). In fact, India's North Eastern states have shown keen interest in the BCIM project as they expect the region's integration with Southeast and East Asia will lead to an economic resurgence in this area (Bhattacharjee 2014). Therefore, the momentum of sub-regional cooperation does not fade out completely.

## **VII. The Indian Version of Silk Route Projects**

There is no denying that many countries in India's neighborhood see the OBOR as an opportunity more than a threat. On the other hand, this international connectivity project may

be seen by some Indian analysts as reflective of a wider encirclement plot on the part of the Chinese. In order to keep its influence over its neighbors and not be outflanked by China, India needs to provide these countries alternative cooperative opportunities that can be explored and developed together. Or, the asymmetry between China and India will only grow over time if nothing is done to address it. Despite its reluctance to decide whether to join the OBOR initiative, India has been promoting its own route projects such as “Spice Route”, “Cotton Route” and “Mausam project.”

The *Project Mausam: Maritime Routes and Cultural Landscapes Across the Indian Ocean* was launched by India’s Ministry of Culture. People traveled the waters of the Indian Ocean as early as the third millennium BCE during the Mausam season by using the monsoon. This wind-system has therefore strengthened interactions between regions connected by the Indian Ocean. The Mausam project aims to explore the multi-faceted Indian Ocean world by collating archaeological and historical research. It will record the diversity of cultural, commercial and religious interactions in the Indian Ocean. In addition, the project will promote research on themes related to the study of Maritime Routes through international scientific seminars and meetings and by adopting a multidisciplinary approach. It will encourage the production of specialized works, as well as publications for the general public with an attempt at promoting a broader understanding of the concept of a common heritage and multiple identities. At the macro level, it aims to re-connect and re-establish communications between countries of the Indian Ocean world, which would lead to an enhanced understanding of cultural values and concerns. At the micro level, the focus is on understanding national cultures in their regional maritime milieu.<sup>③</sup>

Prime Minister Modi also actively promoted the project when he visited three Indian Ocean states: Mauritius, Seychelles and Sri Lanka in March 2015. So far, however, the Project Mausam has more cultural focuses, rather than economical priorities embedded in the OBOR. Even so, people are tempted to compare the two projects as the both ostensibly seek to revive ancient economic linkages to strengthen the exchanges among the countries along the routes. The report from the *Times of India* suggested that the Project Mausam offers an alternative to counter-balance the maritime silk route of China (The Times of India 2014b).

Similarly, the Indian side also proposes to revive the Spice Route and the Cotton Route. India’s cotton exports dated back to the 1st century CE. It was proved by the archaeological discoveries from sites at the Red Sea ports of Berenike and Myos Hormos. India also claimed that cotton was exported to Central Asia via the ancient Silk Road (The Economic Times 2015a; 2015b). The ancient spice route is said to have connected 31 countries in Asia and Europe with south-western India by sea. The Indian side is thinking to revive the route

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註③ For details, see MOC (n.d.) and IGNCA (n.d.).

by facilitating tourists to travel and explore the history and culture of the different sites, spanning continents that were in the loop (The New Indian Express 2014).

Again, it is widely believed that India tries to use the projects to blunt the impact of China's OBOR initiative and allowed India to continue to maintain its position in the Indian Ocean. India's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Syed Akbaruddin once argued, "There was a Silk Route, but there was also a Spice Route, a Mausam Route, and other routes." The message is that India may pick other pathways other than the China-associated Silk Routes (The Telegraph 2014). The idea is considered the Modi government's policy initiative designed to counter China (Pillalamarri 2014).

To what extent India's plan will be helpful in balancing China's campaign, however, remains to be seen. Chinese scholars observed that all India has done is talk the project up, without any specific measures, unlike China's OBOR initiative (Wang 2015). They claimed that the above-mentioned projects are still under planning. Even the Indian side did not know how to put them into effect. Let alone they can be used as counterproposals against China (林民旺 2015, 54).

But there is no denying that there are overlapping areas between the OBOR and the Indian projects. Le Yucheng, Chinese Ambassador to India claimed that China is willing to strengthen communication and coordination with India, to link the OBOR with India's Spice Route and the Project Mausam (The Hindu 2015a). Apparently, China would like to reduce India's resistance by including India-proposed routes to the OBOR initiative.

## VIII. Conclusion

This paper proposes an alternative angle for examining India's policy and responses to the OBOR from the perspective of the international connectivity. India's geo-location and influence in the region indicate a specific role for it in the OBOR project. Therefore, there seems to be a degree of Chinese eagerness to solicit Indian participation. Several research findings can be summarized as follows.

First, the economic benefits of the OBOR are well acknowledged by the supporters in India. From the perspective of connectivity theory, that international connectivity is a key determinant of national competitiveness. The cohorts suggest that India should not be an outsider because the funding and technology from the OBOR projects would be helpful to economic developments of the Modi government. New Delhi's participation in the China-initiated AIIB also lends a certain symbolism. The optimists expect that India will follow the AIIB model to be part of the OBOR.

The second issue is related to the distribution of benefits between hub countries and

nodes countries. On the case of the OBOR, China is the initiator and will be the primary beneficiary. India is still very cautious of the asymmetry in its ties with China, and worrisome about the growth of China's power in its neighbourhood. Particularly, New Delhi suspects that China will "win and take it all" from the OBOR connectivity and thus damage India's interest. New Delhi clearly indicated that the OBOR was devised by the Chinese and it was not an international initiative. Therefore, India wishes to bargain with China on an equal footing in order to secure its own benefits from the project. Indian Foreign Secretary Jaishankar maintained that India prefers to build the connectivity through consultative processes, saying that the key concerns for India to join the connectivity network is whether India will build the connectivity "through consultative processes or more unilateral decisions" (MEA 2016). Since the issues proliferate to India and other countries, New Delhi has requested China to adopt a multilateral/international approach to implement the OBOR. By doing so, India wishes to play a more important role for authoritative allocation of values of the OBOR. Identifying China as a competitor, New Delhi is more comfortable to undertake joint efforts with Beijing to develop the infrastructure for development instead of playing the role as China's followers. That is, with its rising influence in the world stage, India is not satisfied of being treated as one of "nodes". New Delhi prefers to be the hub while building up the international connectivity.

Third, the argument about the value of the international connectivity is not free from controversy. The economic opportunities may come with increased costs in other areas, which need rational evaluation. A disadvantage of using the international connectivity framework is that it provides limited or no information about the negative impact in relation to non-economic issues. However, simply examining economic benefits gives an incomplete view of the total effect of connectivity-building. There are several other effects that broadly fall under wider national interests that should be considered, such as how the infrastructure developments might affect the broader regional order. That is why theorists of international connectivity have not been able to foresee that the OBOR becomes one of the classic cases which India sees the threat of Chinese influence spreading. Moreover, for Indians, there is no room to compromise on the CPEC as it denies India's sovereignty over the POK. Although the economic gains of the OBOR are highlighted, the initiative has so far created more strategic distrust between Beijing and New Delhi. From the geopolitical perspective, the OBOR is more harmful to New Delhi than it is beneficial. It is imperative to reconcile both economic and security concerns with the practical realities facing New Delhi.

For Indian side, therefore, the OBOR presents both economic opportunities and geopolitical challenges. Projects such as *Mausam* are part of India's strategy towards deterring China's penetration of South Asia. But it also implies that India is aware of the importance of building up international connectivity. Realistically speaking, it is very



difficult for New Delhi to prevent other South Asian states from joining the OBOR. Under this circumstance, India's association with the OBOR may allow New Delhi to be a shareholder with the ability to influence the project instead of being an outsider.

As China is still trying to gauge the scope and operational aspects of the OBOR project, India may ideally like to wait before committing itself to expressly support the OBOR project, as it is scrutinizing the development and impact of the OBOR. To bracket the concerns together, India may offer some conditional support to the OBOR, while joining the BCIM-EC but opposing the CPEC. Just as many analysts pointed out, it is unlikely to see New Delhi's formal endorsement of OBOR as a whole (Madan 2016). In fact, it is also possible to conceive of international connectivity as building mutual benefits. The best way forward would be focus on establishment of the BCIM-EC. Though the corridor also progresses slowly, but it is much easier to further the development because the issue has been studied for decades. With the involvement of Bangladesh and Myanmar, the project is an international and multi-national one which could help alleviate India's concerns. On this basis, it seems reasonable to suggest that China may consider taking this roundabout route to materialize the South Asia arm of the OBOR.

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# 建立國際連結的機會與挑戰： 印度對於中國「一帶一路」計畫的觀點

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## 摘 要

印度是中國規劃「絲綢之路經濟帶」和「21世紀海上絲綢之路」(「一帶一路」)的沿線國家之一。但新德里迄今尚未決定是否加入此計畫。事實上，印度內部對於加入與否有不同意見。為提供對此議題的不同分析角度，本文將採用國際連結的觀點，來檢視印度對於「一帶一路」的政策及回應。對印度而言，「一帶一路」雖提供經濟利益，卻也帶來地緣政治的隱憂。印度在參與國際連結時，則傾向成為網絡的中心。綜合考量相關因素之下，本文認為，印度可能有條件性地回應「一帶一路」計畫：即參加孟中印緬經濟走廊建設，但反對中巴經濟走廊。

**關鍵詞：**一帶一路、國際連結、中巴經濟走廊、孟中印緬經濟走廊

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