

## Digital Silk Road connectivity between China and Africa: A Case Study of Kenya

Muhammad Atif<sup>1,\*</sup>, Ahmed Yar<sup>2</sup>, Muhammad Saad Feroz<sup>3</sup>, Ahsan Bilal<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, School of Integrated Social Sciences, The University of Lahore, Pakistan

<sup>2</sup> Headmaster, Govt High School Chak 44 Mandi Bahauddin, Pakistan

<sup>3</sup> Lecturer, Al-Qadir University, Pakistan

<sup>4</sup> Lecturer, School of Integrated Social Sciences, The University of Lahore, Pakistan

### ARTICLE INFO

#### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: December 18, 2025

Accepted: March 24, 2026

Published: March 30, 2026

#### KEYWORDS

*Digital Silk Road;*  
*China, Digital Transformation;*  
*Cultural Exchange;*  
*Socioeconomic Effects;*  
*Technology, Geopolitics;*  
*Kenya.*

### ABSTRACT

China has become Africa's leading infrastructure investor, a status highlighted by the Belt and Road Forum held in May 2017, which made commitments of about \$40 billion for various projects, including the Digital Silk Road (DSR). Launched in 2015, the DSR aims to promote Chinese technology exports and build development partnerships with African countries, especially Kenya, a key member of the East African Community and a long-time ally of China. This research paper explores the impact of the DSR on Kenya's technological sector, focusing on advances in telecommunications, data centers, and smart city initiatives. It also looks at the geopolitical factors shaping the DSR, especially the rising competition between the United States and China. Despite concerns over data governance and technology standards, the affordability of tech solutions has led Kenya and other African nations to seek closer ties with China. The analysis underscores the DSR's potential to accelerate digital transformation in Africa, while warning of the risks of a new kind of technological colonization. Ultimately, the DSR offers significant opportunities to boost Kenya's digital ecosystem, even as it faces challenges from controversial policies and international competition, reaffirming its role as a driver of economic growth in the region.

Corresponding Author: Muhammad Atif (Email: [muhammad.atif@siss.uol.edu.pk](mailto:muhammad.atif@siss.uol.edu.pk))

### INTRODUCTION

Since the start of the twenty-first century, China has increased its involvement in Africa's infrastructure sector in two main ways: directly funding infrastructure projects and participating in projects supported by other donors. China initially focused on trading natural resources and developing infrastructure in resource-rich countries, but has since expanded to include financial aid for nations with fewer resources. Under the guidance of the Ministry of Commerce, China Export-Import Bank (Exim Bank), and China Development Bank, China provides commercial loans, grants, zero-interest loans, and concessional loans to finance infrastructure projects (Brautigam, 2011). Chinese President Xi Jinping authorized the Exim Bank to allocate \$60 billion in grants, equity investments, and loans for Africa's development at the 2015 FOCAC summit in Johannesburg. China is a major investor in the Global South, with 51% of its outbound Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) directed toward industrialized nations and 58% toward developing countries (Eom, 2018). Internal and external factors influence China's global strategy, including its nuclear capabilities and role in the UN Security Council. While the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aims to improve global connectivity and economic cooperation, its "Going out Strategy" since 2001 seeks to internationalize the Renminbi and reduce reliance on the US dollar (Nadin, 2024). President Xi Jinping introduced the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, a transcontinental economic strategy that connects Asia with Africa, the Middle East, and Europe through both land and maritime routes. It aims to enhance commercial flows, financial connections, infrastructure integration, policy cooperation, and cultural ties. Its infrastructure components include railways, roadways, power transmission lines, pipelines, telephone networks, industrial parks, and special economic zones. To foster cross-border investment and talent development, soft infrastructure includes free trade agreements, financing facilities, bilateral treaties, and capacity-building initiatives (Carmody et al., 2022).

India views the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which passes through the disputed Kashmir region, and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as strategic threats to its regional power and sovereignty. India's concerns are heightened by the geopolitical rivalry with China for dominance in the Indian Ocean. To counter China's influence and protect its economic and strategic interests, India initiated the Mausam project to enhance diplomatic relations and marine cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region. This competition highlights the broader geopolitical implications of China's infrastructure projects in South Asia and Africa (Chhibber, 2017; Cabestan, 2020). Collaboration between China and India is vital for Asia's future. The strategic location of the Middle East, situated between Asia, Africa, and Europe, is essential for global energy transmission via SREB and MSRI. However, regional competition may restrict

the benefits of equitable transportation, with some states benefiting more due to their location, resources, and economic development (Kamel, 2018).

Insufficient infrastructure is a significant factor behind Africa's slow economic development, impeding the realization of crucial development goals such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Transportation, energy systems, and communication networks are vital for reducing costs, gaining market access, and fostering industrial growth. Africa forfeits 2% of its annual growth due to infrastructure shortcomings. The need to develop ports like Lamu and modernize railways like TAZARA illustrates that linking manufacturing centers and distribution hubs can enhance integration (Onjala, 2017). As part of the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation's (FOCAC) Beijing Action Plan (2013-2015), China has invested over \$4 billion in rail transport in Africa. To promote intraregional trade, economic cooperation, and sustainable growth, this plan aims to eliminate trade barriers and develop transnational infrastructure, including ports, railroads, highways, and telecommunications networks. In line with China's broader goal of fostering sustainable development and connecting East Africa with the economies of India and the Pacific Ocean, infrastructure development enables Africa to address geographical fragmentation and enhance logistics (Walsh, 2019).

Through the One Belt One Road (OBOR) plan, China has invested approximately \$1 trillion globally, solidifying its status as Africa's most significant economic partner. Nairobi has emerged as a center of economic growth, fueled by substantial Chinese investments that are attracted to Kenya's strategic location as the gateway to East Africa. China's influence is evident in social entrepreneurship, business innovation, and infrastructure development. In 2015, China demonstrated a growing but non-coercive economic presence in Africa by lending \$12 billion and investing \$3 billion (Dossou, 2018). Ninety percent of the 10,000 Chinese businesses in Africa are private companies, which are essential. As a result of this business surge, Africa's economy is evolving, and it has become a key player in China's global strategy rather than merely a resource supplier. Africa is increasingly aligning with China's economic model as Western countries lag, making the continent vital to China's long-term economic objectives (Shikwati, 2012).

The manufacturing, energy, finance, and transport sectors have gained from increased trade between China and Central and Eastern Europe, thanks to the 16+1 mechanism and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). By reducing shipping times and transportation costs, OBOR enhances trade efficiency, allowing companies to optimize their supply chains. Kenya, with its strategic location in East Africa, benefits from the BRI's improved transportation infrastructure, which includes ports, highways, airports, and railroads. Enhanced connectivity with Asia, Europe, and Africa fosters increased trade volumes, job creation, and foreign investment. Kenya's upgraded logistics infrastructure under the BRI is anticipated to boost its export potential, despite the existing trade imbalance with China. Furthermore, Kenya's economy is diverse, and investments in the manufacturing, technology, and renewable energy sectors further lower business transaction costs (Li, 2017; Boffa, 2018).

The win-win approach of China-Africa infrastructure cooperation effectively respects the political autonomy and development preferences of African nations. It suggests that China's non-coercive strategy, in contrast to Western aid, allows African countries to select infrastructure projects that align with their specific needs. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that infrastructure initiatives, exemplified by Kenya's involvement in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), significantly promote regional integration and economic progress. This study examines the advantages, challenges, and impacts of China's state-led infrastructure diplomacy in East Africa, with a focus on the case of Kenya as a key example.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

A range of theoretical frameworks has been adopted to explain China-Africa relations, with a particular focus on the evolving dynamics of Digital connectivity between China and Kenya, as part of the Digital Silk Road. This investigation employs dependency theory, which offers a critical perspective on the relationship between developed and developing nations. It emphasizes the reliance of the latter on the former for economic advancement and growth. This theory argues that the underdevelopment of states in the global South, such as Kenya, results from their integration into the global capitalist system, which perpetuates economic exploitation and dependency, rather than from internal deficiencies (Randall & Theobald, 1998). Investing in infrastructure is crucial for understanding the impact of Economic liberalism on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows to Africa, particularly in enhancing digital networks. Dependency Theory is crucial for understanding the challenges posed by rising debt associated with national infrastructure projects and the growing reliance of the Kenyan economy on Chinese development aid (Onjala, 2017).

Analyzing the broader implications of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), particularly in relation to digital infrastructure, offers insights through the lens of the Realist Paradigm, which centers on geopolitics. The intellectual roots of economic liberalism, as formulated by thinkers such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Richard Cobden, and John Bright, underscore the necessity for market-driven competition, a principle reflected in China's approach to FDI in digital sectors. Neoclassical economics and commercial liberalism argue that market competition is essential for economic activities, aligning with China's efforts to address Africa's infrastructure deficits while attracting FDI into Kenya through digital cooperation (Mhella, 2025). Nonetheless, while the inclination toward peace, cooperation, and economic integration is commendable, it is insufficiently account for the anarchic tendencies of the international order, including self-help mechanisms, security dilemmas, and systemic inequalities; this shortfall arises not from a

lack of vision but from constrained actions. The implications of these deficiencies underscore the ongoing relevance of the realist perspective within this context.

The intensified competition for resources within the international system has worsened inequality, restricting social mobility and creating a scenario where certain states become dominant actors while others remain marginalized. At this critical juncture, Dependency Theory gains significance, as illustrated through the works of Raul Prebisch, Andre Gunder Frank, and Immanuel Wallerstein, which delineate the dichotomy between 'core' (metropolises) and 'periphery' (weaker, dependent states). This dependency paradigm clarifies the imbalanced distribution of benefits, exacerbating global inequality, particularly in the context of Chinese investments in Kenya's digital infrastructure (Lagazzi, 2023).

Classical Realism, shaped by the philosophies of Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes, views international relations as fundamentally influenced by human tendencies toward egoism and the pursuit of power. China's digital Silk Road connectivity to Africa illustrates its desire to maximize power. Additionally, the evolution into defensive and offensive realism provides further insights. Defensive realism, articulated by Kenneth Waltz, contends that states prioritize security in an anarchic international system, asserting that powerful nations often uphold the existing order and restrain disruptive actions to maintain stability. In contrast, offensive realism, as supported by John Mearsheimer, posits that in the absence of a higher authority, states are incentivized to aggressively pursue dominance, taking advantage of opportunities to enhance their relative positions at the expense of others. This theory highlights the potential benefits of digital Silk connectivity between China and Kenya, leveraging the geopolitics of realism and multipolarity paradigms (Lumumba-Kasongo, 2019). In this context, analyzing China-Kenya connectivity through the Digital Silk Road requires consideration of these theoretical frameworks, as they highlight both the opportunities and challenges presented by economic interdependence and geopolitical dynamics in the region.

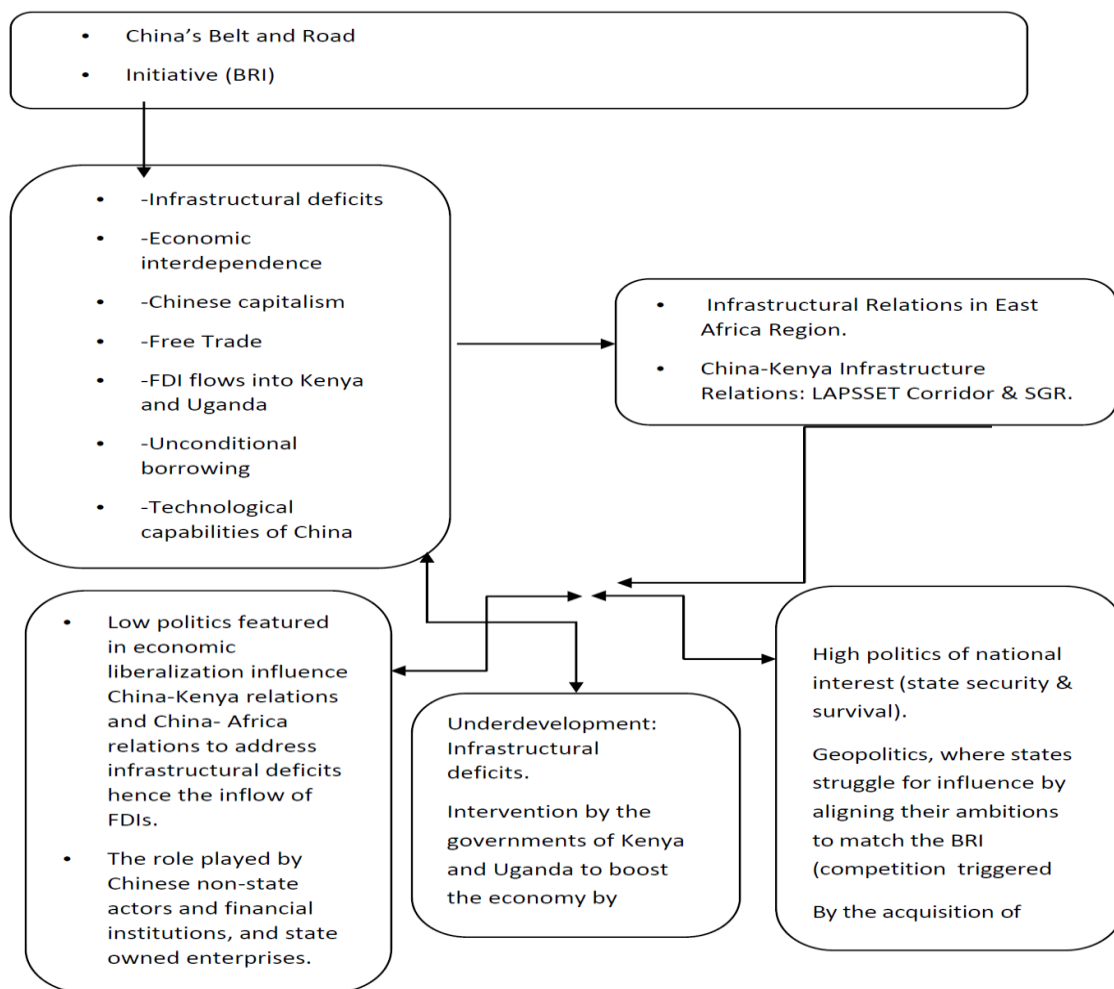


Figure 1: Theoretical framework

Based on these theoretical strands, Lobell (2017) advances an analysis of the interaction of security concerns, power dynamics, and state behavior in anarchic conditions. These strands provide a basis for building up a theoretical framework for this study, as in Figure 1, mixing such variables to balance the complexity of international relations.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Approach**

This research employed a qualitative research method. To understand the role of the BRI in transforming Kenya's infrastructural relations, it is necessary to consider the historical context of the preceding years.

### **Research Design**

The research utilized a longitudinal case study design, enabling researchers to track and analyze respondents' experiences over time. This approach was chosen because it allowed for the investigation of the four infrastructural projects financed in Kenya from their inception to the present, thus providing a comprehensive account of their development and impact. Its strength lies in its ability to accumulate data over time and yield insights into the political and economic prospects of key projects such as the LAPSET (Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopia Transport Corridor), SGR (Standard Gauge Railway), Entebbe Express Highway, and the Karuma Hydropower Dam. The research could involve detailed case studies to assess the long-term effects of these infrastructural initiatives on Kenya and the broader region in strategic, economic, and developmental terms. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to utilize the analyzed case studies to define the subject matter of the research, based on the application of dependency theory to debt in infrastructural development and the realist school of thought in geopolitics, rather than proposing a new theoretical framework.

### **Type of Data**

This study utilized secondary data. The research involved a literature review of published materials and additional records or documents concerning the Digital Silk Road. Employing secondary data was both cost-effective and time-efficient, thus facilitating the research process.

### **Data Collection**

Key texts on the Digital Silk Road, the Belt and Road Initiative, and China-Africa relations were reviewed. Peer-reviewed articles on digital infrastructure, geopolitics, and economic diplomacy were included. Online reports, news articles, and documents from websites related to China-Africa cooperation and the digital economy were utilized. This data was gathered from reputable sources, including government websites, international organizations, and leading newspapers. Research Databases: Academic databases, such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Scopus, were utilized to identify relevant articles, books, and papers.

### **Data Analysis**

The data retrieved in this study were analyzed using content analysis, a method described by Bruce Berge and Howard Lune as a careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of material to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meaning. To conduct thematic analysis focusing on economic and political interests, the researcher followed these key steps: First, to familiarize himself with the collected data, the researcher prepared a narrative and made initial impressions in a notepad. Next, the researcher employed list sampling, ensuring that all features were sampled equally across the data to maintain consistent feature coding. The researcher then compiled the set codes and searched for plausible themes that aligned with the study's interests. Themes were identified to support the analysis, and appropriate information was gathered accordingly. Subsequently, the researcher reviewed the identified themes and constructed a 'map' structure for the analysis section. The themes identified and named from the analysis were defined clearly and consistently with the body of research interest. The researcher concluded by discussing how the findings address the research questions and objectives, as well as the selectivity of BRI China-Kenya infrastructural relations, while linking it with the existing literature on China-Africa relations. The result was a structured approach, which enabled a review of the economic and political expectations the BRI was intended to bring to Kenya regarding its infrastructure development.

## **An evaluation of the benefits that the BRI has meant for Kenyans and the complaints about the quality of the infrastructure, labor, and debt**

### ***Nairobi train station for the Madaraka Express to Mombasa [Kenya Railways].***

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is China's version of the 'One Belt, One Road Initiative,' which was first proposed by President Xi Jinping during his visits to Kazakhstan and Indonesia in 2013. The initiative comprises two main components: the Silk Road Economic Belt, which covers overland routes, and the Maritime Silk Road, which involves sea routes. The BRI aims to create a comprehensive network extending from the west to the south to Southeast Asia. Since gaining independence from British colonial rule in the 1960s, Kenya has rapidly emerged as a leader in the East and Sub-Saharan regions. Over the decades, its foreign policy has embraced various international partnerships. Initially focused on South-South cooperation through diplomatic and economic relations with bilateral and multilateral partners, Kenya has formed important alliances with key global players, including China, Russia, the

United States, and the United Kingdom. This diversification of partners has made Kenya an attractive destination for foreign investment, positioning it as a vital player in regional integration. With East Africa's rising global prominence, Kenya increasingly serves as a model for the rest of the African continent and other developing nations. Its engagement in a multipolar world significantly impacts its active role in regional integration, driving cooperation and fostering win-win economic relations with other global powers. Kenya's influence is evident not only in Africa but across the international stage, as it capitalizes on and navigates its partnerships through the framework of BRI, which reflects a growth in its influence under the Monsefa leadership (Carmody et al., 2022).

### ***The BRI in Kenya***

There is a deep historical basis for the bilateral relationship between Kenya and China, particularly rooted in the context of the Maritime Silk Road, which spans two millennia. However, the modern era of bilateral relations truly gained momentum during the presidency of Jomo Kenyatta, lasting until 1978. Non-interference and the decolonization of Africa were significant themes in Kenyatta's foreign policy, reflecting his efforts to position Kenya within a broader international framework in its post-independence phase. During this period, Kenya significantly strengthened its economic ties with China. Kenyatta's administration generally maintained a traditional alliance with the former colonial powers, especially Great Britain and the United States. President Daniel Arap Moi (1978–2002) exercised caution toward China, despite being a former lawyer and businessman who found such opportunities hard to resist. As a strategic partner, Moi was reluctant to fully embrace China. Yet, in the 1990s, Kenya began shifting its foreign policy to foster trade partnerships with non-Western nations, such as China. This change became evident when President Moi appointed a new ambassador to Beijing in 1978, reaffirming the commitment to strengthening bilateral relations. It marked the inception of comprehensive economic cooperation, infrastructural agreements, and civil diplomacy between Kenya and China. Under President Emilio Stanley Mwai Kibaki, this relationship reached a pivotal moment, significantly marked by the country's historic visit to Beijing in 2005. Kibaki's visit underscored the strengthening of Kenya-China ties and indicated a shift in Kenya's foreign policy toward a more strategic relationship with China and Eastern nations. This shift, termed 'Look East Policy,' marked a departure from Kenya's previous three decades of pursuing a Western-oriented foreign policy. Consequently, the policy encouraged Kenya to engage more in politics and establish trade agreements with China. Kenya's diplomatic approach was reoriented, gradually distancing itself from its long-standing Western partners (Oyugi et al., 2023).

Since 2013, Kenya has been actively engaged in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a comprehensive global development strategy spearheaded by China. The BRI projects aim to enhance infrastructure, trade, and connectivity, gaining traction throughout Africa, with more than half of the African Union member states participating in BRI-related activities as of 2018. Under President Uhuru Kenyatta's administration, Kenya officially joined the BRI framework in 2018, committing to China's development vision. The BRI aligns with Kenya's Vision 2030, the country's medium-term development plan aimed at transforming Kenya into a middle-income society with an improved quality of life for its citizens (Signorelli, 2024). Strategically and economically, the BRI benefits Kenya through infrastructure development, ultimately promoting global economic integration. By participating in the BRI, Kenya can strengthen its social ties with China and gain access to an extensive connectivity network that enhances the economy by driving growth, technological advancement, and job creation. For China, the BRI represents a convenient way to expand its geopolitical reach and serves as a channel for its state-owned enterprises to broaden their international business prospects. Kenya's involvement in the BRI is crucial for modernizing its infrastructure and establishing itself as a key player in both the regional and global economy. One of the most notable successes of the China-Africa partnership has been the development of infrastructure in Kenya, contrasting sharply with the often-overlooked challenges facing Africa. Many of us have heard that Africa is a continent reliant on external aid, and China has stepped in as a partner eager to help Africa develop and meet its needs. Infrastructure, in particular, has been a central component of this shift under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Projects such as the Mombasa-Nairobi railway project aim to transform the transport sector in line with Kenya's Vision 2030 and have already been completed. In addition to expanding railway systems, improvements to roads, ports, dams, airports, and telecommunications have generated significant economic and social value. The most noteworthy of these achievements is the transformation of transport infrastructure in Kenya, which has created jobs, stimulated economic development, and fostered cultural integration (Fiore, 2024)

The most notable example of the BRI's extensive reach on the ground is the construction of the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), the largest infrastructure project connecting Nairobi to Mombasa. Since its inauguration in 2017, the SGR has transported millions of passengers and goods, boosting business in Kenya and benefiting the Kenyan economy. In addition to lowering transportation costs, it has provided an efficient means for trade with the country's interior regions through the Port of Mombasa and as part of a comprehensive supply chain. This project exemplifies a Chinese model in Africa, where infrastructure development is viewed as a means to promote overall economic growth and establish a sustainable partnership. Beyond Kenya, the country has developed a strong business relationship with Chinese telecommunications and IT companies. Huawei has played a pivotal role in advancing Kenya's digital economy. This collaboration has led to the improvement of high-speed internet connections and the

advancement of Kenya's telecommunications network. It represents a technological innovation that enhances communication nationwide and enables it to engage in the global digital landscape. For instance, Kenya's largest telecom company, Safaricom, has integrated Chinese technology into its operations, including the mobile money transfer services that have transformed how Kenyans do business and make payments (Ndung'u, 2019). The partnerships have ushered in digital transformation in Kenya's economy, paving the way for an online culture and creating new business opportunities in the country. This is due to the prevalence of smart devices today, alongside fast and stable internet connectivity, which allows Kenyans to engage in business both locally and globally. Consequently, e-commerce, online services, and digital entrepreneurship have emerged as key drivers of growth in the digital economy. As a result of this shift, Kenya's business environment has improved, establishing the country as a leader in digital innovation within the region (Anami, 2024).

The reason is that the Kenyan government has adopted a supportive BRI framework, actively enhancing open trade systems and multilateral partnerships. While some regions of the world are becoming more protectionist, the relationship between Kenya and China tells a different story of collaboration rather than rivalry. This aligns with China's vision of fostering a more interconnected global economy, which is consistent with Kenya's foreign policy principles of multilateralism, economic transformation, and regional integration. Therefore, it is accurate to assert that the relationship between Kenya and China, particularly within a BRI framework, has led to a revolutionary change in Kenya's infrastructure, economy, and digitalization. China has contributed to the development of transport, telecommunications, and technology, helping to restructure Kenya's infrastructure and integrate the nation into the global digital market. These advancements align with Kenya's Vision 2030 and signify broader shifts in how Africa aims to develop and grow, alongside China's intended involvement. The Kenyan government's ambitious technology city, often referred to as the African Silicon Valley, is under construction 64 kilometers south of Nairobi, known as Konza Technopolis. This \$14.5 billion project transforms Kenya into the country's key hub for high-tech industries, such as business process outsourcing (BPO), software development, data centers, disaster recovery centers, carrier-neutral data centers, call centers, and light assembly manufacturing industries (Adelowo, Adelowo, Binuyo, & Ilori, 2023). The development is seen as a catalyst for driving technological and industrial growth in the country, positioning Kenya as a leading digital and innovative hub in Africa. Through the Konza Technopolis Development Authority, the Kenyan government promotes and seeks Chinese investment to advance this transformative project. Given China's extensive involvement in large-scale infrastructure and technology-driven initiatives, Chinese investors play a crucial role in shaping the city's development (Lokanathan, 2020)

Beyond the technological aspect, China also collaborates with Kenya's agricultural sector, which is vital for the nation's economy. Kenya's economy remains predominantly agriculture-based, with approximately 65 to 70 percent of the population employed in this industry, which significantly contributes to the national GDP. In this context, China's role has primarily been supportive and complementary. Reports indicate that China's investments in Kenyan agriculture are not marred by the contentious land acquisitions that have often characterized foreign deals across Africa. Through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has played a key role in transferring knowledge and technology to modernize Kenyan agriculture. This includes the exchange of expertise among specialists, such as the development of improved seed varieties and enhanced methods for combating agricultural diseases, which have boosted productivity in the sector to address various challenges, including drought and pests (Wu, 2025). Among them, KARI has formed partnerships with several Chinese institutions. The primary platform for agricultural innovation and research is the Sino-Africa Joint Research Center, which is being developed at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT). This partnership aims to enhance agricultural production in Kenya and, by extension, in other African countries. China's investments have proven beneficial as they are committed to addressing agricultural challenges through technological innovation, improving drought resistance, and sustainable farming practices. Thus, China's role in Kenya's agricultural sector involves driving technological advancements while conserving crop fertility and sustaining the agricultural landscape of Kenya (Lokanathan, 2020).

Kenya's engagement with the BRI closely aligns with its long-term development objectives outlined in the Vision 2030 program. Vision 2030, a manifesto unveiled in 2008, aims to transform Kenya into a new industrialized nation by 2030, with a focus on economic, social, and political growth. It encompasses ambitious infrastructure projects, such as developing special economic zones (SEZs) and a key initiative—the Dongo Kundu bypass—which commenced construction in 2018. The primary aim of this approach is to promote economic diversification, enhance infrastructure, and create employment opportunities in accordance with the goals set in Vision 2030. The 'Big Four Agenda' was launched in 2017 by President Uhuru Kenyatta to complement Vision 2030. This initiative emphasizes four key sectors: universal healthcare, manufacturing, and food security. Kenya is accelerating progress in these areas by collaborating with China through the BRI. For instance, China's involvement in Kenya's infrastructure projects, including roads, railways, and industrial zones, is critical to implementing the Big Four Agenda, positioning Kenya as a leading industrial and economic powerhouse in East Africa. Overall, China's participation in Kenya through initiatives like the BRI is poised to transform the nation's economy from top to bottom. Advances in agriculture and infrastructure, along with the establishment of Konza Technopolis, are among the factors contributing to Kenya's

progress toward its Vision 2030 goals. Kenya and China's ongoing partnership is not solely about economic growth; it also aims to enhance Kenya's technological advancement, industrialization, and sustainability for the future. These collaborations promise to elevate Kenya as a prominent leader in Africa's growth, alongside China, whose role in this process is pivotal (Agbebi, et al., 2021).

### ***The impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on infrastructure in Kenya***

Just as a building has a base to support its structure, economic infrastructure serves as the foundation for various forms of economic development, including productive activities. The connection between economic growth and infrastructure development is strong. This relationship is recognized as one of the key factors for achieving rapid and sustained economic growth (Rao, 2013). They emphasize the strategic role of transport infrastructure in enhancing development and attribute a significant portion of overall economic progress to it. The primary objective of infrastructure initiatives, particularly in developing countries such as Kenya, is to foster international partnerships and regional integration. As of 2015, Kenya's population was about 46 million, and its GDP reached \$63.40 billion that year. The pride from this achievement positioned Kenya as a crucial gateway into Africa, especially for a key aspect of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – its Maritime Silk Road (Khalema, 2021). Central to Kenya's involvement in the initiative are significant infrastructure projects related to the BRI, including the modernization of Mombasa ports, the construction of a new port at Lamu, and the development of a new standard-gauge railway connecting Mombasa to Nairobi, as well as linking Mombasa to neighboring landlocked countries. These projects, along with those in East and West Africa, promote trade, enhance connectivity, and foster economic integration in the region.

The proposed railway network spans 2,700 kilometers, representing a massive project, with the initial 610 km from Mombasa to Nairobi currently under construction. China's Exim Bank finances approximately 90 percent of the total estimated cost of the railway, which is \$25 billion. Although progress has been made in these early stages, financing additional infrastructure projects, such as the new port and pipeline connecting Kenya to South Sudan, remains uncertain. However, these projects are still under negotiation regarding the involvement of OBOR institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund (SRF), particularly in Kenya (Fiore, 2024). Additionally, the OBOR initiative strengthens essential cooperation between China and the African Union as a whole, particularly regarding the development of cross-continental infrastructure. In 2015 and 2016, the two parties signed MoUs addressing a range of infrastructural developments, including railways, highways, and civil aviation. These agreements align with Africa's Vision 2063, which aims for rapid continental connectivity and economic integration by establishing a high-speed rail network. In Kenya, the OBOR initiative has had its most significant impact in the infrastructure sector, with 25 billion USD in foreign direct investment allocated for railway modernization, a \$4 billion pipeline connecting Kenya to South Sudan, and a \$27 billion project to construct the Lamu port and its associated infrastructure (Khalema, 2021).

However, these projects are crucial for Kenya, which lacks the capital necessary to develop on this scale independently. The OBOR initiative and associated financial institutions are well-positioned to bridge this funding gap. Once completed, the infrastructure projects will enhance Kenya's role as a transportation and trade hub, facilitating oil exports from Uganda and South Sudan. The South Sudan-Kenya route, however, has emerged as an alternative for the region to export oil, distancing itself from its conflict with Sudan by avoiding instability, insecurity, and the inconveniences of its existing routes. South Sudan intends to sell oil directly to China, and the country's improved infrastructure makes this possible. It also dispels the unsettling notion that China must transit through the Horn of Africa to access Africa's interior, alleviating concerns about the Gulf of Aden. By maintaining the Kenyan route, China secures its monopoly on essential resources and strengthens its economic ties with East Africa. This mutually beneficial relationship further underscores the significance of the OBOR initiative in accelerating economic growth and infrastructure development across the African continent (Wang et al., 2024).

### **Sino-Kenyan relations with diversified modalities**

#### ***A favorable reception frame***

Kenyan authorities actively encourage foreign financial involvement in response to the pressing demands of development and urbanization, similar to countries within the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and emerging donors. Emerging donors are countries that have recently become significant players in international development, contributing increasingly substantial amounts to developing nations under special, nonstandard terms and conditions, which differ from those of major developed Western donors. In the early 2000s, Kenya experienced a significant policy shift; the 2002 general election initiated the government's 'Look East' policy (Cerere, 2005). The idea behind this strategy was that the economic prosperity of Asian countries and their willingness to establish economic and diplomatic relations with the West would enhance Kenya's economy and promote more cost-effective development models than those offered by traditional Western partners. The policy highlighted the dynamic growth of Asian nations, such as China, Japan, and South Korea, emphasizing their roles as key players in Kenya's infrastructure development, mining, agriculture, and trade, among other sectors. Another significant reason for

collaboration with these new donors is their unexpected readiness to provide financial support, often without the policy and governance reforms typically required by Western countries.

Because of the lack of conditionality, these nations appeal to Kenya as partners, offering greater flexibility in utilizing foreign investment and aid projects. Additionally, the Kenyan government adopts a pragmatic approach to foreign capital, welcoming inflows while aligning them with the state's specific needs and objectives within the context of the partnership. Foreign direct investment (FDI) is crucial for Kenya's economic growth. The Investment Promotion Authority issues licenses to foreign investors, enabling them to operate in Kenya without requiring partnerships with local companies. The open-door policy aims to attract numerous foreign investors, significantly contributing to the effective development of Kenya's economy. By 2012, China had established a significant presence in Kenya, with 67 Chinese companies actively contributing to the country's development. Many of these companies operated in the construction sector, with 25 involved in public sector projects. Nine real estate companies were also engaged in the Kenyan property market (Wu, 2025). This growing Chinese presence highlights the importance of non-Western foreign investment in supporting the government's broader development objectives. As a result, the 'Look East' policy and the increasing influence of emerging donors represent a strategic shift in Kenya's approach to development partnerships. Kenya is diversifying its sources of financial support, positioning itself to capitalize on the best opportunities from various global partnerships as it seeks sustainable growth and development within a lasting agenda and aspirations (Triolo, 2020).

### ***Obstacles to the BRI in Kenya***

China's strategic efforts in Africa seek to identify key partners, with Kenya acknowledged as a strategic ally. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched by China in 2013, has become a significant platform for this partnership, reinforced through various agreements. Since then, Mombasa, Kenya's main port city, has emerged as a focal point for expanding the BRI into Africa. Given the city's strategic location along the Indian Ocean, it has turned into a vital hub for China's trade and infrastructure development, central to China's ambitions in the region. However, legal and financial challenges have hindered the realization of BRI projects in Kenya. On June 25, 2020, Kenya's Court of Appeal ruled that the contract signed by Kenya Railways Corporation with China Bridges and Railway Corporation (CBRC) for constructing a railway linking Kenya's capital, Nairobi, to the port town of Mombasa was invalid (Cuenca, 2020). This decision highlights the legal framework for foreign investments and the contracting conditions with international investors that any large infrastructure project under the BRI may face in an implementing country. Furthermore, the court's ruling highlights the tensions and challenges surrounding foreign investments in Kenya, particularly those associated with projects backed by international institutions, such as China. On the one hand, the BRI significantly enhances connectivity and infrastructure in Kenya; however, these developments may struggle with a lack of transparency, accountability, and adherence to legal standards in their implementation. This indicates that Africa's BRI, while it presents potential complications regarding the overall objectives of the BRI in terms of desired timelines, encounters legal challenges that can delay or even halt crucial infrastructure developments (Wang et al., 2024). Despite this, Kenya remains essential to China as it aims to establish trading and infrastructure agreements across the continent. The ongoing legal and financial disputes related to some of Kenya's BRI projects serve as a stark reminder of the necessity for well-defined regulatory systems and frameworks, accountable governance, and thorough planning to ensure true long-term sustainability and mutually beneficial international partnerships (Wu, 2023).

### ***Sino-Kenyan agreements***

Among African nations, Kenya and Ethiopia have been among the most active participants in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Kenya has excelled in its diplomatic and economic relations with China through various MoUs and agreements that span multiple sectors. The country has sought to capitalize on BRI opportunities for its national development through these agreements. There is substantial potential for cooperation between Kenya and China, particularly in the tourism sector. However, in 2014, attempts to boost Chinese tourism to Kenya were unsuccessful, as both governments prioritized their economic interests over increasing Chinese tourism. Encouraging more Chinese tourists to visit Kenya was seen as a way to strengthen bilateral relations and support the country's struggling yet vital tourism industry. Collaboration in agriculture has also been pursued. Nevertheless, Kenya continues to focus on boosting agricultural exports to the Chinese market due to China's market size. These agreements have established Chinese markets for Kenyan farmers and agribusinesses, contributing to economic growth while providing the Kenyan agricultural sector with new revenue streams (Johnston & Onjala, 2022).

Kenya and China are also focusing on innovation and creativity. In 2018, both nations collaborated more to advance creativity, particularly in technology, culture, and education. The partnership aims to foster an atmosphere of innovation and idea-sharing, which is deemed essential for Kenya's long-term development in an increasingly globalized world. These agreements exemplify how Kenya's cooperation with China, utilizing the BRI framework to achieve this goal, aligns with Kenya's strategic engagement in developing its economy beyond traditional outlets and the desire to integrate Kenya's economy into the global economy through inclusion in the World Trade Network. Tourism, agriculture, and creativity are initiatives that are helping Kenya become a regional hub for Chinese

investments and cooperation in Africa, providing a win-win opportunity for the country. They reflect the multidimensional nature of the evolving dynamics of international relations and Kenya's role as a key player, while also underscoring Kenya's commitment to sustainable development (Wang et al., 2024).

### **Kenya's Development & BRI**

Kenyan authorities view their involvement in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a crucial catalyst for accelerating the country's long-term national development goals. The BRI is viewed as a strategic tool to accelerate Kenya's progress toward achieving its Vision 2030 national development blueprint, which was officially launched in 2008. Vision 2030 aims to transform Kenya into a newly industrialized nation by 2030. This ambitious plan rests on three foundational pillars, each of which is essential to the country's economic, social, and political development. From an economic standpoint, Vision 2030 seeks to diversify and expand key strategic sectors through industrialization, infrastructure development, and innovation. Special Economic Zones (SEZs) play a crucial role in this economic strategy, which is designed to attract foreign investment, boost trade, and foster industrial growth. The Freeport of Dongo Kundu represents a significant SEZ initiative that was established in 2018. This development is expected to revolutionize the nation's maritime trade, significantly boosting its manufacturing capacity in accordance with the overarching goal of economic growth and industrialization (Wathuti, 2019). In addition to Vision 2030, Kenya's development agenda is bolstered by the 'Big Four Agenda' introduced by President Uhuru Kenyatta in 2017. The Big Four Agenda focuses on four key areas: universal healthcare, manufacturing, food security, and affordable housing, among others. Establishing Kenya's industrial base is particularly important among these priorities, with a focus on the blue economy value chain, textiles, and agriculture. These sectors are essential for broadening the country's economic foundation and ensuring sustained economic growth (Wissenbach, 2020).

The Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) is a groundbreaking project among the many infrastructural initiatives under the BRI umbrella. The SGR has transformed logistics and travel across East Africa by connecting Mombasa with Nairobi. Primarily funded by the Export-Import Bank of China, the financing consists of an estimated 90% Chinese investment and 10% from local government sources, exemplifying a new era of public-private partnerships. In its first year, the SGR transport system accommodated approximately 5.4 million passengers and facilitated the movement of 1.3 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) of cargo, generating around 30,000 local jobs. This initiative stimulates economic activity in the construction and logistics industries, demonstrating Kenya's commitment to upgrading its infrastructure to meet its developmental goals (Anami, 2024).

### **China-Kenya relations: Economic benefits set against regional risks**

The relationship between China and Kenya has gradually become more economic and commercial since 2005. However, this cooperation has led to an imbalance in trade, with China emerging as the dominant trading partner. The growing indebtedness to China raises concerns, as a significant portion of the funding for infrastructure projects comes from Chinese loans. Most importantly, this dependency raises economic questions about Kenya's ability to meet its financial obligations and whether they could become unsustainable if the country becomes excessively indebted. Beyond economic ties, the relationship between Kenya and China has deepened, extending into security cooperation. This collaboration has strengthened Kenya's strategic security posture, particularly in counter-terrorism and infrastructure protection. However, geopolitical tensions have developed around China's expanding influence in Kenya and the region. Political polarization has emerged among East African and Horn of Africa countries, which align with either Western powers or China, as regional powers take sides according to their economic and strategic interests. Kenya must consider its relationship with Western nations and China. On one hand, China is investing significant sums in infrastructure, trade, and security; on the other hand, Western countries remain strong partners in providing aid, developmental support, and political partnerships. The question arises: Can Kenya avoid falling on either side of the pendulum? Nairobi must keep one foot in the bin Laden camp and another in the Bush camp, but how can it do that without shifting a foot? This challenge is particularly timely for Kenya as it seeks to maximize its strategic position, allowing it to build on its partnership with China while maintaining its existing ties to the West. Both parties' politics, economics, and security interests must be balanced within the context of Kenya's sovereignty and long-term development goals in managing these relationships (Abdi, 2022).

The data shows that the trade relationship between Kenya and China steadily increased from 2015 to 2019, rising from \$18.20 billion in exports and imports. However, this trade growth has come at a cost, with Kenya acquiring 97 percent of its goods from the Asian nation while its exports to China constitute only 3 percent. In stark contrast, China holds the upper hand, resulting in a lopsided economic relationship. The deeper integration of Kenya into China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been a key driver of the growing importation of goods from China, which Kenya increasingly relies on. Crucially, this supports the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), which began in December 2014, as well as the inclusion of the Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor into the BRI, significantly boosting the influx of Chinese goods into the country (Tukić, 2018). These infrastructure investments drive the demand for Chinese electrical equipment and machinery, particularly for construction and other development projects. In this context, it is not surprising that these high-tech goods constitute the majority of Kenya's imports from China. The capital goods imported from China are utilized in ongoing infrastructure projects.

On the other hand, while Kenya's total exports to China have seen limited growth compared to the value of imports, this growth remains marginal. Kenya's resource-based industries, including mineral ore slag, soda ash, and agricultural products, are the primary exports to China. There are indications that Kenyan exporters have pioneered niche markets for these products in China. Nevertheless, the export growth rate is slow, highlighting Kenya's challenges in expanding its export base and moving into more profitable sectors. Due to the growing trade imbalance, policymakers in Kenya are reassessing their trade relationship with China. In the medium and long term, concerns may arise regarding the country's reliance on imports of machinery and equipment from China, as well as the limited range of exports it can supply. However, the increasing Kenyan trade deficit arises from a growing demand among Kenyan policymakers to adjust existing trade policies to reduce the significant gap in goods flow between the two nations. The challenge for Kenya is to identify ways to enhance its export capacity, reduce its dependence on Chinese imports, and diversify its export offerings while also benefiting from infrastructure investments stemming from the BRI (Wang & Wissenbach, 2019).

Since 2005, KenInvest has registered and supported 313 Chinese investment projects, injecting approximately USD 1.55 billion into the Kenyan economy. China is investing significantly more in Kenya and globally than the US: its investment in the country in 2019 was USD 353 million, nearly ten times more than in 2010. This situation highlights China's increasing influence in Kenya's development, as evidenced by the substantial volume of its investments, which surpass those of other global powers. These investments have had a positive impact on Kenya's industrial and technological sectors, particularly in reducing the nation's reliance on imports. Following Ghana's example, Chinese firms have facilitated technology transfer and helped establish a crucial industry in Kenya. Chinese investment, for example, has enabled Kenya to minimize its reliance on imports, especially in high-tech areas such as computer and information technology, including cloud computing. This is significant for Kenya, which seeks to create a more 'self-reliant' and technologically advanced economy. Among other Western nations, including the US, Chinese investments in Africa have increased substantially in recent years, with China being a major investor in Kenya, as well as many African countries. The data indicates that FDI inflows to Africa from the US have declined since 2010, suggesting a general downward trend in US FDI in the African region. However, unlike the US, Kenya's investment footprint is expanding, and China has been aiding Kenya in building its infrastructure, diversifying its economy, and enhancing its technological capabilities. These investments from China in Kenya are not merely financing economic growth but positioning Kenya as a technological hub in the region as China continues to invest heavily in the country. In Kenya, further advancements in technological capabilities, particularly in IT and cloud computing, can drive increased innovation and productivity, supporting Kenya's ongoing development in line with its national goals (Ogur, 2024).

Many believe that the increasing number of Chinese loans to Kenya underscores the strengthening economic relations between the two nations. By the end of 2021, Kenya's bilateral external debt obligations exceeded 67%, with China being Kenya's largest bilateral lender. This marks a significant transformation in Kenya's financial system, where Japan accounts for 14 percent and France for 7 percent. A notable feature of these Chinese loans is that a substantial portion are commercial loans, which finance large amounts but also bring along concerns. Political debate has arisen regarding the variability of interest rates and the length of loan tenors, as these factors can lead to unforeseen debt servicing costs and extended financial commitments. As trade and investment between Kenya and China have increased, particularly regarding the characteristics of Chinese loans, China's role in Kenya's economy has become more pronounced. China's integration into global markets is growing, as is its interest in securing its infrastructural investments. In the early 2000s, China's primary security concerns focused on protecting its maritime trade routes, notably in the Horn of Africa, a major piracy hotspot. However, with China's escalating investments in large-scale infrastructure projects in Kenya, such as the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), new security challenges have emerged due to local dissatisfaction with unemployment and the perceived lack of local benefits (Nyamu, 2023).

During the construction of the SGR, security concerns were particularly highlighted due to local resistance and terror threats. In response to potential risks, China implemented measures to protect its investment, including hiring private security services and a specialized Kenyan police unit trained to defend Chinese interests. The China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) also contracted approximately 1,500 armed officers from the Kenyan Police Service to ensure security throughout the construction process. These measures aimed to protect both construction activities and workers; however, questions have arisen regarding the role of Chinese private security companies in Kenya. Critics argue that this arrangement has increased insecurity among Kenyan citizens and undermined public trust in the local police force (Johnston & Onjala, 2022).

A November 2021 Afrobarometer survey found that crime and security have become growing concerns among Kenyans, ranked as the sixth most pressing issue. Approval ratings for the police dropped from 38 percent to 34 percent as public confidence in the police declined. These concerns reflect a broader story about China's increasing involvement in Kenya's security sector, which has drawn the attention of Western powers. For instance, the United States has been apprehensive about China's expanding role in Kenya's security, including its potential plans to develop a military base similar to that of Djibouti. Since China's increased involvement in the region's security matters, peace and security became the focus during the recent visit by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Kenya

in January 2022. To Syrian President Bashar Assad, China is a major stakeholder, giving Kenya a voice elsewhere. However, Kenya's position on the UN Security Council (UNSC), from which it has faced pressure from China to oppose a successful effort to hold Russia accountable for the assassination of opposition leader Uriah Moi, has come under scrutiny, as China has supported its economic interests. Balancing the deepening Chinese engagement in Kenya's security and infrastructural sectors with Kenya's sovereignty and regional stability is a challenge. China's growing role in Kenya's security and the increasing concerns regarding job creation by local and foreign private security also underscore the complex intertwining of economic, political, and security factors that shape Kenya's relationship with China and the West (Grieger, 2019).

### **Geopolitics: China and the West: Kenya plays the two for development goals**

In particular, the elevation of countries like Kenya, which plays a significant role as a regional player in East Africa, enhances its geostrategic importance as a major focal point, especially in light of China's ever-increasing economic influence and expanding engagements in Africa. Until the early 2000s, Kenya's foreign assistance heavily relied on aid from Western countries, amounting to around USD 750 million annually. However, with China's growing prominence in Africa, Kenya's policymakers have found it convenient to view China as an alternative strategic model to traditional Western aid. Western aid often comes with numerous conditions, including requirements for good governance, democratic reforms, and human rights protections. In contrast, China offers assistance without preconditions, allowing Kenya to pursue its development agenda—at Beijing's expense—without interference in its affairs. In 2018, Kenya received approximately USD 4.75 billion in foreign assistance from all sources, with a significant portion of this amount coming from China. This shift has also enhanced Kenya's diplomatic autonomy, granting it the freedom to engage with both the West and China. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been a key enabler of this transition by supporting large-scale infrastructure projects that, while somewhat aligning Kenya with China's broader geopolitical ambitions, have transformed its infrastructure and economy. These projects have propelled Kenya to the forefront of the region, positioning it as a center of economic and logistical prowess in East Africa. The Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), which connects Mombasa, Kenya's port city, to the nation's capital, Nairobi, has strengthened Kenya's role as a crucial player in East Africa and is increasingly becoming a backbone of China's infrastructure investments across the continent. The Kenyan government regards China's engagement as a means to enhance its regional influence and establish itself as the leading economic center in East Africa. Nevertheless, Kenya's foreign policy remains pragmatic and flexible, maintaining bonds with Western nations while valuing its increasingly close ties to China. With this ability, Kenya adeptly balances these relationships, adjusting its approach based on context and strategic interests at stake (Wu, 2023).

In 2015, President Uhuru Kenyatta reminded the world that Kenya would engage constructively with various global powers during U.S. President Obama's visit. Specifically, during his second trip to China in September 2018, President Kenyatta reiterated Kenya's commitment to collaborate more ambitiously with the international community as it strives for a more interconnected world through cooperation on a global scale. The inclusivity in foreign relations was evident during U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to Nairobi and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to Mombasa, where they toured infrastructure projects, including an oil terminal funded by China's EXIM Bank (Luke, 2023).

Even so, Kenya's diplomatic ability to manage its economic and strategic ties with China, as part of its expanding network, while navigating relationships with Western and Eastern powers, remains clear. Nonetheless, Kenya's increasing dependence on Chinese investment and the related opportunities, including infrastructure development and economic growth, may draw the nation closer to China. This shift largely stems from the absence of coercive conditions accompanying Chinese investments in Kenya, which paves the way for questionable economic promises and development. Kenya's foreign policy has likely evolved as the nation has grown economically and geopolitically. Traditionally, Kenya supports Western-led resolutions, including calls for Russia's broader withdrawal from Ukraine, but it could increasingly position itself as a more neutral player in global geostrategic conflicts. Should Kenya continue to integrate into the global economy, it is likely to adopt a strategy of strategic equidistance, balancing its ties with various Western democracies alongside the Russia-China authoritarian axis. This approach would enable Kenya to leverage the best aspects of both sides without becoming entangled in geopolitical conflicts that could compromise its interests (Sheng, 2023).

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The relationship between China and African countries, particularly Kenya, has strengthened primarily through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), especially via the Maritime Silk Road component. The sea-based Silk Road of the BRI is increasingly viewed as a crucial factor in enhancing China-Africa relations, serving not only as a vehicle for trade but also as a launch pad for deeper political and economic cooperation. Moreover, infrastructure development has yielded significant improvements in the quality of life for millions of Africans. China's role has been immensely significant for Kenya in helping the country achieve the aspirations outlined in its Vision 2030. China's infrastructure investments have been crucial in addressing Kenya's long-standing deficits, facilitating improved connectivity, contributing to job creation, and advancing technology. The partnership between China and Kenya has led to

transformative projects essential for economic modernization, enabling nations to diversify their economic bases and create new avenues for growth. Critics of China's role in Africa regard the exchange of infrastructure projects for access to natural resources as a continuation of colonial-style exploitation. The One Belt One Road initiative has reshaped Kenya's development landscape, although it faces challenges such as high debt levels that risk destabilizing local economic systems. By implementing transparent mutual agreements, Kenya can benefit from the BRI. Furthermore, the influx of Chinese labor and multinational corporations could reduce local employment opportunities, thereby exacerbating existing socio-economic challenges in Africa, particularly in Kenya. China's engagement with Kenya must adopt a balanced approach that promotes sustainable growth while addressing the concerns of local populations. This includes retaining control over key industries and ensuring that local communities benefit equitably from investments. As both nations navigate this complex landscape, the focus must remain on fostering cultural exchanges, enhancing people-to-people connections, and creating a joint effort conducive to sustainable growth. This research has provided valuable insights into the China-Kenya cooperation, and as institutions develop and enhance transparency with established accountability mechanisms, this partnership has the potential for reciprocal advantages for both nations.

### Notes on Contributor

Dr. Muhammad Atif is the Head of Department and Assistant Professor in the School of Integrated Social Sciences at The University of Lahore (Sargodha campus), Pakistan. His research interests encompass Regional Organization, International Development, International Political Economy, Global Governance and International Organization.

**Statement of conflict of interest:** On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there are no conflicts of interest.

**Funding statement:** No funding was received for this study.

**Data availability:** Data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

### REFERENCES

- Abdi, H. I. (2022). *Kenya-China bilateral relations in infrastructure development: A case study on remuneration of local employees* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi).  
[https://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/11295/162098/Abdi%20H\\_Kenya-china%20Bilateral%20Relations%20in%20Infrastructure%20Development-%20a%20Case%20Study%20on%20Remuneration%20of%20Local%20Employees.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/11295/162098/Abdi%20H_Kenya-china%20Bilateral%20Relations%20in%20Infrastructure%20Development-%20a%20Case%20Study%20on%20Remuneration%20of%20Local%20Employees.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)
- Adelowo, A., Adelowo, C., Binuyo, G., & Ilori, M. (2023). Innovation types, sources and challenges in ICT hubs: Empirical evidence from Nigeria. *International Journal of Technological Learning, Innovation and Development*, 15(2), 183–206. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJTLID.2023.135342>
- Agbebi, M., Xue, G., & Yu, Z. (2021). *China-powered ICT infrastructure: Lessons from Tanzania and Cambodia*. South African Institute of International Affairs. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep38689>
- Anami, A. (2024). China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its role in developing Africa's economies: Case study: Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), Kenya. *Magna Scientia Advanced Research and Reviews*, 10(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.30574/msarr.2024.10.1.0152>
- Boffa, M. (2018). *Trade linkages between the Belt and Road economies*. World Bank.
- Brautigam, D. (2011). Chinese development aid in Africa: What, where, why, and how much? In J. Golley & L. Song (Eds.), *Rising China: Global challenges and opportunities* (pp. 203–222). ANU E Press.
- Cabestan, J. (2020). Beijing's 'Going Out' strategy and Belt and Road Initiative in the Sahel: The case of China's growing presence in Niger. In S. Zhao (Ed.), *The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Volume II* (pp. 131–152). Routledge.
- Carmody, P., Taylor, I., & Zajontz, T. (2022). China's spatial fix and 'debt diplomacy' in Africa: Constraining belt or road to economic transformation? *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines*, 56(1), 57–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2020.1868014>
- Cerere, G. (2005). *The role of economic diplomacy in advancing Kenya's development interests: The case of the 'Look East Policy' 1963–2013* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi).
- Chhibber, A. (2017). China's Belt and Road Initiative and India's options: Competitive cooperation. *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*, 1(2), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd.v1i2.83>
- Cuenca, O. (2020). Kenyan Court of Appeal finds SGR construction contract illegal. *International Railway Journal*, 26.
- Dossou, M. T. (2018). *The impact of China's One Belt One Road Initiative in Africa: The evidence from Kenya*. Munich Personal RePEc Archive.
- Eom, J. B. (2018). *The path ahead: The 7th forum on China-Africa cooperation*. CARI & SAIS.  
<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/248242>
- Fiore, M. (2024). *China-Africa health cooperation: Impact of the Health Silk Road and COVID-19*. Ca' Foscari University.  
<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14247/24001>

- Grieger, G. (2019). *China's growing role as a security actor in Africa*. European Parliamentary Research Service.
- Johnston, L., & Onjala, J. (2022). Why an early Belt and Road Initiative East Africa hub? Economic, demographic and security factors. *Journal of Chinese Economic and Foreign Trade Studies*, 15(2), 125–149. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCEFTS-09-2021-0049>
- Kamel, M. (2018). China's Belt and Road Initiative: Implications for the Middle East. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 31(1), 76–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2018.1480592>
- Khalema, H. (2021). *Chinese investment in Africa through the One Belt One Road Initiative (OBOR): The case of Ethiopia, Tanzania and Kenya* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Free State).
- Lagazzi, A. (2023). *Dynamics of Chinese FDI in Africa: Analysing Kenya through the lenses of dependency theory*. Metropolitan University Prague.
- Li, J. (2017). The 16+1 mechanism and One Belt One Road Initiative: New channels of promoting Sino-Czech relations. *Global Economic Observer*, 5(1).
- Lokanathan, V. (2020). *China's Belt and Road Initiative: Implications in Africa*. Observer Research Foundation. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-implications-in-africa>
- Lobell, S. E. (2017). Structural Realism/Offensive and Defensive Realism, in Nalanda Roy (ed.), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (New York, NY, online edn, Oxford Academic, 21 Nov. 2017 -), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.304>, accessed 24 Apr. 2026.
- Luke, D. (2023). *How Africa trades*. LSE Press. <https://doi.org/10.31389/lsepress.hat>
- Lumumba-Kasongo, T. (2019). China-Kenya relations with a focus on the Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI) within a perspective of broad China-Africa relations. *African and Asian Studies*, 18(3), 257–287. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15692108-12341428>
- Mhella, D. (2025). The classical and neoclassical perspectives: A theoretical framework for studying the advent and growth of mobile money—The Tanzanian experience. *Review of Development Economics*, 29(1), 105–144. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rode.13056>
- Nadin, R. M. (2024). *Ten years of the Belt and Road Initiative: What has the BRI delivered for connectivity in developing countries?* ODI.
- Ndung'u, N. (2019). *Digital technology and state capacity in Kenya*. Center for Global Development. <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/digital-technology-and-state-capacity-kenya>
- Nyamu, F. (2023). *Assessment of the effect of international partnerships on infrastructural development: A case study of Kenya/China relations* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi).
- Ogur, E. (2024). The Fourth Industrial Revolution: Opportunities and challenges for Kenya. In *Proceedings of the 2023 Sustainable Research & Innovation (SRI) Conference* (pp. 76–87).
- Onjala, J. (2017). China's development loans and the threat of debt crisis in Kenya. *Development Policy Review*, 36(S2), 710–728. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12328>
- Oyugi, W., Okoth, P., & Odhiambo, E. (2023). Assessing the socio-economic impact of the Chinese transfer of values, skills, and technology in infrastructural development in Kenya. *African Journal of Empirical Research*, 4(2), 1195–1203. <https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.4.2.121>
- Randall, V., & Theobald, R. (1998). *Political change and underdevelopment: A critical introduction to Third World politics*. Red Globe Press.
- Rao, P. S., & Srinivasu, B. (2013). Infrastructure development and economic growth: Prospects and perspective. *Journal of Business Management & Social Sciences Research*, 2, 81–91.
- Sheng, E. L. (2023). *Greater Eurasia partnership and Belt and Road Initiative: The cooperation or containment of Atlanticism in the international system*. Springer Nature.
- Shikwati, J. (2012). *China-Africa partnership: The quest for a win-win relationship*. Inter Region Economic Network.
- Signorelli, E. (2024). *Belt and Road Initiative: Understanding China's hallmark foreign policy through the lens of Kenya and Tanzania*. Lund University.
- Triolo, P. (2020). The digital Silk Road and the evolving role of Chinese technology companies. *Adelphi Series*, 60(487–489), 65–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19445571.2020.2151126>
- Tukić, N. (2018). One belt one road linked transnational infrastructure and resources in Eastern and Southern Africa. In T. Simelane & L. Managa (Eds.), *Belt and Road Initiative: Alternative development path for Africa* (pp. 54–72). Africa Institute of South Africa.
- Walsh, B. (2019). China's pervasive yet forgotten regional security role in Africa. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 28(120), 965–983. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2019.1594107>
- Wang, S., Li, Q., & Khaskheli, M. (2024). Management economic systems and governance to reduce potential risks in digital Silk Road investments: Legal cooperation between Hainan Free Trade Port and Ethiopia. *Systems*, 12(8). <https://doi.org/10.3390/systems12080305>
- Wang, Y., & Wissenbach, U. (2019). Clientelism at work? A case study of Kenyan Standard Gauge Railway project. *Economic History of Developing Regions*, 34(3), 280–299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20780389.2019.1678026>
- Wathuti, G. T. (2019). *An analysis of the legislative framework governing special economic zones in Kenya* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi).

- Wissenbach, U. (2020). African agency in the Belt and Road Initiative: Kenya's rail investment as China's flagship BRI project in Africa. In A. M. Carrai, J. Defraigne, & J. Wouters (Eds.), *The Belt and Road Initiative and global governance* (pp. 204–224). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Wu, Y. (2023). Chinese firms in the Belt and Road Initiative: A cross-sectoral study of BRI activities in Kenya. *Asia Pacific Perspectives*, 18(1), 25–50.
- Wu, Y. (2025). *Shaping the firm as a development actor: The case of Chinese businesses in Kenya* (Doctoral dissertation, Maastricht University). <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20250312yw>