CHINA'S GLOBAL OVERLAND LOGISTICS INFRASTRUCTURE AND ITS ROLE IN EXTERNAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS

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Abstract. *This article analyzes China's global overland logistics infrastructure and its role in external economic relations. It examines the main overland corridors developing under the Belt and Road Initiative, including the New Eurasian Land Bridge, the China-Central and West Asia Economic Corridor, the China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor, and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The article also shows how these transport and logistics networks help China diversify trade routes, strengthen energy security, and build new economic links across Eurasia.*

Keywords: China, logistics infrastructure, Belt and Road Initiative, New Eurasian Land Bridge, CCAWAEC, CIPEC, CPEC, external economic relations, Central Asia, ASEAN.

Introduction

In the modern system of international relations, transport and logistics infrastructure has become one of the key factors that shape a state's economic capacity, foreign trade opportunities, and geopolitical influence. From this perspective, China's policy of building global overland logistics networks has not only an economic meaning but also a strategic one. Through the Belt and Road Initiative, Beijing is trying to create a new transport and communication space connecting Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.

The aim of this article is to analyze China's global overland logistics infrastructure, identify its main routes and transit states, and assess the role of these corridors in external economic relations, trade diversification, and energy security. Using the main overland routes of the BRI as examples, the study explains the geoeconomic strategy of China.

China's Entry into Global Competition

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a new field of geopolitical and geoeconomic competition appeared in the international system. In this competition, China rose to a central position because of its economic capacity, industrial output, and foreign trade opportunities. In particular, its accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001 supported the rapid expansion of Chinese exports. As the center of gravity of the world economy gradually moved toward Asia, Beijing began to view logistics infrastructure as a strategic tool for expanding its global influence.

In 2013, in speeches delivered in Kazakhstan and Indonesia, Xi Jinping introduced the ideas of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. After the publication of the document Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road in 2015, these directions were brought together within one political and strategic platform. In this way, China's overland logistics infrastructure became one of the central pillars of its external economic policy.

Main Overland Corridors of the BRI

New Eurasian Land Bridge

The New Eurasian Land Bridge is one of the most important logistics routes connecting China with Europe by land. It links the industrial centers of eastern and central China with European markets through Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, and Poland. The China-Europe Railway Express trains operating along this route became even more active after the announcement of the BRI. In 2024, 20,022 freight trains ran on

this network and transported more than 2 million TEU containers, which shows the real economic capacity of the route. The geoeconomic value of this land bridge lies in the fact that it gives China a faster and relatively safer access to European markets. At the same time, inland cities such as Xi'an, Chongqing, and Chengdu have become more deeply connected to international logistics chains. Although the risks related to northern routes increased after the Russia-Ukraine war, the New Eurasian Land Bridge still remains one of the central elements of the Eurasian transport system.



Figure 1. **"Poland as a hub of the Silk Road Economic Belt," by A. Jakubowski, K. Kowalczyk, T. Komornicki, and A. Miszczuk, 2020, *Asia Europe Journal*.**

The China-Central and West Asia Economic Corridor is an important route linking China with West Asia, the South Caucasus, and European markets through Central Asia. Starting from Urumqi and the wider Xinjiang region, this corridor connects with Iran and Türkiye through Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. After 2022, the growing demand for alternative routes

in Eurasia further increased the geopolitical importance of this corridor. The most important practical component of this corridor is the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway. In 2024, an intergovernmental agreement on the project was signed and the next stage of construction was launched. This line will connect western China with Central Asia through Andijan and then with Iran and Türkiye. Its importance lies in the fact that it gives China access to western markets without full dependence on routes passing through Russian territory.

This corridor is also vital from the point of view of energy security. The Central Asia-China gas pipeline starts at the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan border and reaches Khorgos through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. By 2024, more than 500 billion cubic meters of gas had been delivered to China through this pipeline, confirming that this route supports not only trade but also Beijing's long-term energy stability. Its connection with the Iranian ports of Bandar Abbas and Shahid Rajaee also makes this corridor one of the key overland gateways to the markets of the Middle East and Africa.



***Figure 2. The Belt and Road Initiative and the role of debt in the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor*, by N. van Twillert and S. Halleck Vega, n.d., ResearchGate.**

China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor

The China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor is one of the most active and most operational overland routes within the BRI. Its geographical base lies in Yunnan Province and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of China. From these areas, routes extend toward Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, and Singapore, aiming to connect railways, highways, ports, and border logistics centers into one system. The practical success of this corridor can be seen in the China-Laos Railway. This 1,035-kilometer line, opened in 2021, connected Kunming with Vientiane and gave Yunnan direct railway access to ASEAN markets. By May 2025, the total freight volume transported on this railway had exceeded 60 million tons, of which more than 13.9 million tons were cross-border shipments. These figures show that the route has developed into a real regional trade artery. The strategic importance of this corridor is not limited to growing trade with ASEAN. In 2024, China-ASEAN trade reached 982.3 billion U.S. dollars, confirming the depth of China's southern economic links. At the same time, the plan to connect Yunnan with ports on the Indian Ocean through the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor supports China's strategy of reducing dependence on the Strait of Malacca. Therefore, CIPEC is a complex geoeconomic instrument that combines trade, logistics, and energy security.



***Figure 3. Sustainable urbanization in the China-Indochinese Peninsula economic corridor*, by J. Fu, 2016, ResearchGate**

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is one of the most strategic BRI routes in South Asia. It stretches from Kashgar in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region to the port of Gwadar in Pakistan, linking China with the Arabian Sea. This multimodal route of about 3,000 kilometers combines transport, energy, industrial zones, and logistics infrastructure. The geostrategic importance of CPEC lies in creating an alternative outlet for China close to the Indian Ocean. A large part of China's foreign trade and energy imports still passes through the Strait of Malacca. For this reason, CPEC is often interpreted as a tool that can reduce Beijing's 'Malacca dilemma.' Since Gwadar is located near the gateway to the Persian Gulf and outside the Strait of Hormuz, it has both commercial and strategic importance.

The first phase of CPEC mainly focused on energy and transport. By 2024, 14 energy projects had been launched under the corridor, creating nearly 9,000 MW of capacity. However, coal still holds a high share in the corridor's energy architecture,

which raises questions about its environmental and economic sustainability. For this reason, the CPEC 2.0 phase gives more attention to special economic zones, industrial cooperation, export-oriented production, and technology transfer. Current geopolitical processes, especially U.S-China competition, India-China rivalry, and instability in the Middle East, have increased the strategic value of CPEC. At the same time, security problems in Balochistan and around Gwadar, the structure of debt, and the distribution of local benefits remain the main risks for the corridor. Even so, CPEC remains one of the most important components in China's effort to build a connected land-sea logistics space.

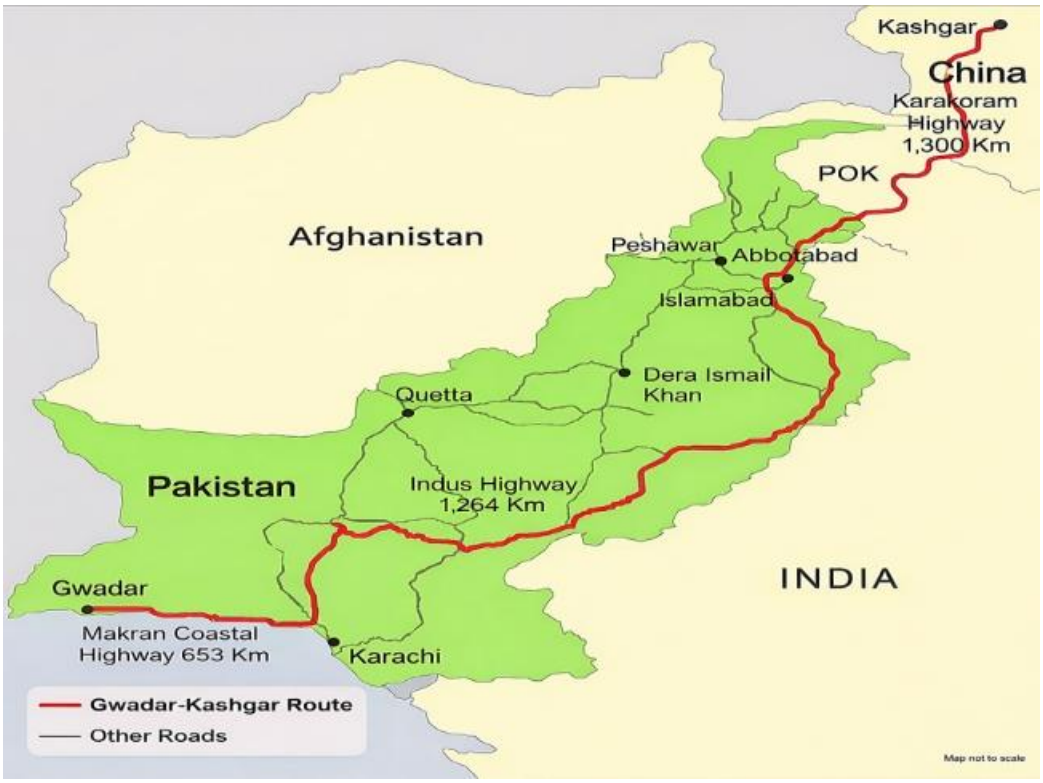


***Figure 4. China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), map, impact, full form*, by Vajiram & Ravi, 2025, Vajiram & Ravi (https://vajiramandravi.com/upsc-exam/china-pakistan-economic-corridor/**

Conclusion

In conclusion, China's global overland logistics infrastructure has become one

of the key pillars of Beijing's external economic strategy in the context of modern geoeconomic competition. The overland corridors developing under the Belt and Road Initiative are not simple transport lines. They are complex macro-regional systems that combine trade, energy, industrial cooperation, and geopolitical influence. The analysis shows that the New Eurasian Land Bridge, the China-Central and West Asia Economic Corridor, the China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor, and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor are located in different geographic spaces, yet they are united by one common goal. This goal is to diversify trade routes, reduce transit time, strengthen energy security, and build new economic links across Eurasia. However, these corridors create serious risks along with major opportunities. Security problems, political instability, growing debt burdens, and great-power competition continue to affect the sustainability of some routes. Therefore, the future of China's global overland logistics projects will be determined not only by the number of roads built, but also by whether these corridors become stable, mutually beneficial, and politically resilient systems.

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