

The Belt And Road Initiative (BRI) Project Implementation in Education Sector: Indonesian Case

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Received: 21 February 2024; Revised: 20 August 2024; Accepted: 21 August 2024

Abstract: Indonesia and China continue to develop their cooperation, especially through the BRI project. This project aims to strengthen people-to-people bonds and is considered a soft power diplomacy strategy. It includes cultural and educational exchange programs that are popular among students worldwide, including those from Indonesia. Through literature studies, it has been found that many Indonesian students and Santri view this cooperation positively, and it has changed their negative perception of China. One of Indonesia's largest Islamic organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), closely cooperates with China in the education sector. However, they do not link this cooperation with the issue of discrimination against the Uyghur people in China. On the other hand, many Kiai from NU have different perspectives on the BRI project, particularly concerning China's ideology and Indonesia's history of communism. This paper aims to comprehensively explain the implementation of the BRI project in the education sector and the views of Indonesian students, Santri, and Kiai as representatives of Indonesia's educational image worldwide.

Keywords: BRI Project; Education Action Plan for Education; Indonesia.

How to Cite:

Romadhoni, M., Octastefani, T., Mustofa, M., & Yen, A. (2024). The Belt And Road Initiative (BRI) Project Implementation in Education Sector: Indonesian Case. *Journal of Governance*, 9(3), 411–426.
<https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.31506/jog.v9i3.24395>



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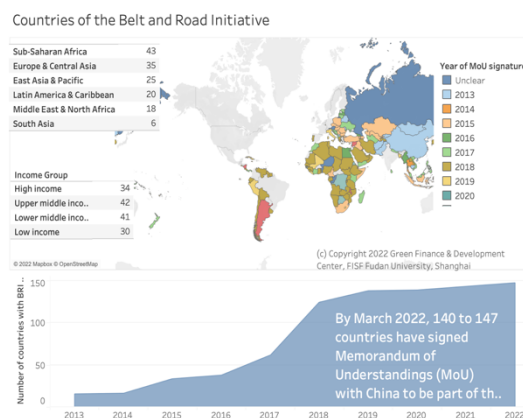
Introduction

Indonesia has been a friend of China for 72 years since Soekarno established diplomatic relations on June 9th, 1950. However, the relationship was strained in 1965 due to the communist-backed rebellion known as the G30S PKI (Setiani, 2022). After 23 years, the two countries restored diplomatic ties in 1990 through a joint communiqué signed by their foreign ministers, Ali Alatas and Qian Qichen (Times, 1990). Since then, the bilateral relationship has been dynamic, depending on the presidential administrations. During Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's presidency from 2004 to 2014, cooperation between Beijing and Jakarta increased, with 23 Memorandums of Understanding signed across various sectors, such as manufacturing, trade, and investment, as well as science and technology, making China an important partner for Indonesia (Kementrian Energi dan Sumber Daya Mineral, 2013). Under President Jokowi, Indonesia has moved closer to China, particularly through the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) project. A total of 66 bilateral agreements have been signed, covering areas such as infrastructure, science and technology, culture, law enforcement, tourism, education, health, environment, and anti-terrorism (Yuliantoro, 2020; Lalisang & Candra, 2020).

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a project led by President Xi Jinping. It aims to recreate the historical Silk Road and promote trade and cultural exchange. The project seeks to enhance connectivity, partnerships, and energy security (Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, nd). As of early 2022, 147 countries have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China for the BRI. The initiative is prevalent in various regions (see figure 1),

including Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, Central Asia, East Asia & Pacific, Latin America, Caribbean, the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia (Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, nd). It encompasses countries of different income levels. The BRI's primary goals, as announced by Xi Jinping, include fostering people-to-people bonds. This aspect of the initiative is considered a soft power tool. Nye (2008) classified a country's soft power into three resources: political values, foreign policies, and culture. He defines *culture* as the set of practices that create a value of life for a society. A successful relationship between people-to-people bonds between countries depends upon the people's friendship based on mutual understanding (NDRC, 2021). Successful people-to-people bonds depend on mutual understanding and can impact international policymaking.

Figure 1
"Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative" (2022)

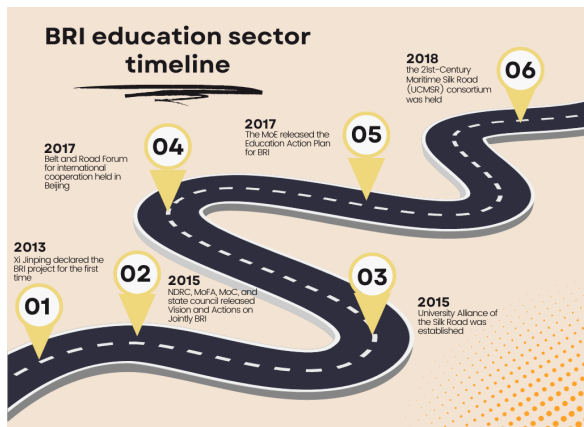


Source: Green Finance & Development Center, 2022.

Note: Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

In recent years, soft power diplomacy has increased, especially in academic and cultural exchanges. The education sector has become an important part of the BRI. President Xi Jinping first mentioned the Silk Road Economic Belt in September 2013 and later proposed the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st Century. In March 2015, the National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture, and State Council released their “Vision and Actions” for the BRI. Two months later, the education sector gained prominence with the initiation of the University Alliance of the Silk Road. The Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2017 further emphasized the importance of education, leading to the release of the Education Action Plan for BRI. In 2018, the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road consortium was established at Xiamen University (*BritCham Report: Education on the Belt and Road, British Chamber of Commerce in China | Beijing, 2019*). Figure 2 shows the timeline of educational sector development under the BRI project.

Figure 2
BRI Educational Sector Development timeline



Adapted from The British Chamber of Commerce in China. (2019).

Note: BRI Educational Sector Development timeline

Cooperation and direct action are needed to achieve the goal of people-to-people bonds in the Belt and Road countries. This can be done through educational exchanges and training. According to Shengly (2019), an associate professor from China Foreign Affairs University, “exchanges at the best count as ‘fast food culture’, providing a shallow and superficial experience. Only through education and skills training can we achieve deeper cultural understanding and carry out a long-term and meaningful strategy” (The British Chamber of Commerce in China, 2019, p. 22). President Xi also emphasized the importance of cultural and educational exchanges in the BRI (Cheng, 2019). The Ministry of Education published an Education Action Plan in 2017; education “serves as a bridge to closer people-to-people ties, whereas the cultivation of talent can buttress the efforts of these countries toward policy coordination, connectivity of infrastructure, unimpeded trade, and financial integration along the routes.” (Xinhua Silk Road, 2020, para. 2). Last, the explicit form of educational cooperation under the BRI project that the Chinese government provided is “academic exchanges, BRI scholarships, cooperation in jointly running schools, joint labs and research cooperation, entrepreneurship training, and skills development” (The British Chamber of Commerce in China, 2019, p. 23). However, there have been limited studies on the implementation and consequences of the BRI project in the education sector in Indonesia. This paper aims to address this gap and provide updated information on the BRI project collaboration, particularly in education.

Method

A qualitative approach was used in this study. It uses literature reviews to collect data by reading resources, especially from mass media, websites, and educational platforms. The authors also watched a few YouTube videos and took notes to obtain up-to-date information and perspectives on BRI projects in the Indonesian educational sector. One of the most important is watching the video from the Educational and Cultural Attaché of the Indonesian Embassy (KBRI) of the People's Republic of China in Beijing with CNN Indonesia. By watching this video, the authors have better understood Indonesia's contribution to the BRI collaboration since this 50-minute video provides in-depth and up-to-date information on the educational setting in China after the pandemic. However, the authors realized the weakness of data collection through video. Thus, it is crucial to analyze the literature and other resources to consider the accountability of the literature. By doing this, sorting the literature is necessary to identify the essential attributes of materials. The literature review can be defined as "an interpretation of a selection of published and unpublished documents available from various sources on a specific topic that optimally involves summarization, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of the documents" (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010:173 in Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012). Despite this complex process, the authors use other materials from multiple sources as the main resources, such as journals, books, book chapters, and official government websites, which can be accessed in either English or Indonesian. In addition to reading and exploring detailed and in-depth information, the paper was written in consultation, and all

authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript.

Result and Discussion

According to the MOE's publication of the Education Action Plan for the Belt and Road Initiative, The vision of the BRI project includes people-to-people ties, cultivating supporting talent, and achieving common development. Thus, this paper will discuss and classify the findings of implementing the BRI project in Indonesia's education sector following this BRI project's vision.

People-to-people Ties

A. Scholarship and Educational Exchanges

The BRI scholarship is provided by the central government, local authorities, and universities in China. It covers most expenses and attracts hundreds of thousands of applications each year. Indonesia has been awarded the "Chinese Government Scholarship" and the "One Belt, One Road Scholarship." Currently, over 15,000 Indonesian students are studying at Chinese universities, with an annual increase of 10% (News. Detik, 2018). The two countries also signed a MoU for 200 maritime and vocational education scholarships (dikti-kemendikbud, 2021). This is why many Indonesian students are interested in studying in China. According to Yuniarto (2020), China is a popular destination for Indonesian students, especially in fields like technology, agriculture, health, and Chinese language and literature. They believe they will gain valuable knowledge and learn Mandarin, the second most popular language in the world. Indonesian students studying in China currently rank seventh after Korea, the United States, Thailand, and Russia (Kompas Cyber Media).

The scholarship is beneficial to Indonesia as it allows Indonesian students to study in China for free, regardless of their political interests. These students can contribute to Indonesia's development by gaining knowledge in various fields. For example, education students can understand the Chinese education system, economics students can analyze China's economic growth, technology students can observe advancements in Chinese technology, and political science students can study China's political ambitions. Additionally, students will have the opportunity to compare their experiences in China with those in Indonesia and may even have the chance to work in China before returning home. This long-term educational exchange will benefit the Indonesian government and foster a sense of nationalism in the Indonesian people, similar to how South Korea sends its students to America to rebuild their nation.

B. Language and Culture

The cultural sector in Indonesia provides a convenient setting for China to propose their BRI project. Under the BRI project, China and Indonesia have conducted several cultural exchange collaborations in Indonesia. In 2015, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs held a maritime culture festival and exhibition. Several booths containing Chinese cultural exhibitions were provided at this exhibition. In 2016, Chinese Film Week was held in Jakarta. The embassy in China organized this event and invited several political elites from both countries to attend. In addition, the China Film Association (CFA) has offered collaboration on restoring old films under the BRI project, as reported on the Antara news page. The two films being restored are "Lewat Djam Malam" by Asrul Sani in

1954 and "Tiga Dara" by Umar Ismail in 1957. Moreover, three Indonesian films will also be screened in Beijing: "Cek Toko Sebelah," "Kartini," "Sweet 20," and "Galih and Ratna" (Antara, 2018).

There were also several photo exhibitions and general lectures with the theme "one belt, one road" in collaboration with the Consulate General of the People's Republic of China (PRC) Surabaya. In 2017, the Consulate General of the People's Republic of China (PRC), in the Surabaya office, introduced the idea of "one belt, one road," which aims to strengthen cooperation between the two countries (ANTARA, 2017). In 2018, the State University of Malang organized a photo exhibition. A total of 100 photos illustrating the traditions, culture, natural beauty, and technological innovations of the People's Republic of China (PRC) were displayed in the hall of the *Graha Rektorat* State University of Malang (UM) in order to provide a general overview of China's current conditions to Indonesians (UM, 2018). Petra Christian University also invited Wang Jiaping, Vice Dean of the College of International Education, Zhejiang Yuexiu University of Foreign Languages, to give a general lecture at the international day event on the topic of conforming to "One Belt, One Road" assisting international students in March 2018 (UKP Surabaya, 2018).

Chinese acculturation has been rooted among Indonesian people and ingrained in the native culture in some areas, such as food (Bakso, Lumpia, Siomay), dance (Tari Baris Cina), musical instruments (Gambang Kromong), and language (Hokkien: Cepek, gopek, seceng, engkong, wa, and kyai). This could make cultural exchange well-developed between China and Indonesia. Moreover, they have made massive efforts to introduce their culture overseas through

their embassy and Confucius institutes. Therefore, all elements involved in the cultural exchange must work towards strengthening the culture of the Indonesian nation as a whole to prevent Indonesian culture from being crushed by Chinese culture. Instead, it will become a boomerang for the Indonesian people. By doing so, the Indonesian nation's identity will be preserved without compromising its cultural identity.

Cultivating Supporting Talent (Institution-to-Institution)

A. Confucius Institutes

A primary objective of the Confucius Institute (CI) is to promote the spread of Chinese capital, ideas, culture, and people worldwide. Currently, there are approximately 511 institutions located in 140 countries. Additionally, there are 17 Confucius institutes in Indonesia, located in Jakarta, Bandung, Malang, Surabaya, Makassar, Pontianak, and some cities in Bali. Aside from teaching Mandarin, these institutions also actively promote Chinese culture in various aspects. For example, the Confucius Institute of the State University of Surabaya (UNESA) and the State University of Malang (UM) held several activities to support cultivating talents, such as holding singing, speech, talent, photography, dubbing, composing contests, and message contests commemorating the 70th anniversary of Indo-China diplomatic relations with the Mandarin language. Additionally, UNESA-CI is offering scholarships to Mandarin teachers in 2022 (UNESA, n.d.). Meanwhile, in collaboration with CI, UM provides free Mandarin classes with Native Chinese teachers (OIA-UM, 2018). For the Chinese government, the presence of CI is fascinating because it creates a positive image that is extremely difficult to achieve (Rakhmat & Pashya, 2020). It is

often viewed as a symbol of China's power and influence.

While many scholars regard the existence of CI throughout the world as a propaganda tool for the Chinese government, this Chinese cross-border language and culture promotion organization has proliferated along with the increasing mobility of Chinese capital and people worldwide (Theo & Leung, 2018). In this regard, CI has attracted considerable suspicion and even rejection compared to similar institutions in other countries, such as England's British Council, Germany's Goethe Institute, France's Alliance Française, and the American Corner. Therefore, Indonesian people, especially students, must remain vigilant and careful to avoid being easily provoked by propaganda and to consider the advantage of what CI offers Indonesia.

B. University Cooperation

Chinese and Indonesian universities have established several collaborations. In 2015, China established the University Alliance of the Silk Road (UASR). As part of this alliance, Xi'an Jiao Tong University and the University of Indonesia offer a virtual Silk Road University Alliance Summer Camp. The program includes lectures on Frontier Science & Technology, Chinese Language courses, and sessions where international students can share their experiences. Additionally, in 2014, thirteen Chinese universities started offering Bahasa Indonesian courses. These universities include Peking University, Yunnan University, Beijing International Studies University, Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, and Shanghai International Studies University. Apart from language studies, students also learn about Indonesian politics, culture, and

economics. According to Huang Yue Min, a lecturer in the Indonesian language and literature department, there is a shared mission between Indonesia and China, especially since President Jokowi expressed his desire to develop the maritime silk road. This creates excellent potential for a strong partnership between the two countries. The number of people interested in this field is significant and continues to grow. The Chinese are increasingly showing interest in Indonesia every year (Indo-China embassy, n.d.).

Peking University China has a student exchange program with the University of Indonesia twice a year. The program is for undergraduate and graduate students (OIA-UI, n.d.). Yogyakarta State University (UNY) and Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) also hosted visiting scholars. The goal of the collaboration is to increase bonds between people and exchange ideas (Sasing-FBS-UNY). The Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) has collaborations with universities in China as part of the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (UCMSR). One of the collaborations is the Tsinghua University Nuclear Master Program and Scholarship (TUNEM), sponsored by the Chinese government. They collaborate on joint research, the exchange of materials and publications, and the exchange of faculty members and researchers (Partnership-ITB, n.d.). The universities in Indonesia can benefit from these collaborations, including teacher and student exchanges, shared resources, learning facilities, scientific activities, and overseas classes. Cooperation between universities helps develop skills for students, teachers, and stakeholders. A strategic plan for cooperation is necessary to set clear goals and targets, minimizing obstacles at different levels. Cooperation with strategic partners facilitates the

development of knowledge and skills for students and teachers (Wijaharta et al., 2021).

C. Technical and Vocational Education (TVET)

China has a strong commitment to vocational education and has established Luban Workshops worldwide. These workshops are named after a mythical inventor called Lu Ban. The Luban Workshop aims to globalize Chinese technology by introducing Chinese technology standards to train students. One of the schools collaborating with the Luban Workshop in Indonesia is the state vocational high school 2 Ponorogo in East Java. They signed a cooperation agreement with the Vocational Education Center School in Dongli District, Tianjin. Together, they built a Luban workshop, which was inaugurated in 2017. The workshop specializes in automotive engineering and maintenance, electronic technology application, and Chinese culinary arts. So far, 460 Indonesian students have received education from the Luban Workshop, and 1,748 students have undergone skills training. Additionally, the workshop has provided teacher training sessions for vocational schools in East Java, benefiting 48 local teachers. This collaboration between the state vocational high school in Ponorogo and the Luban Workshop is a positive sign for improving vocational education in Indonesia. China's rapid development in technology, business, and the economy allows graduates to acquire up-to-date knowledge from China (Luban workshop, n.d.). Furthermore, developing countries along the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) need TVET to enhance employability and increase income. It is important to find win-win solutions between China and these countries (Guping & Hao, 2019). For

example, if Indonesian vocational students excel after graduation, they could have priority access to learning Chinese Mandarin. This would enable them to work or pursue higher education in China. Simultaneously, the Luban Workshop can serve as a platform to select and recruit students from Belt and Road countries for future BRI infrastructure projects in their own countries. This way, both parties can benefit from the BRI project without any social inequality or jealousy between Chinese and local workers.

D. Achieving common development

1. Capacity Building

In Indonesia, an institution has established the “Belt and Road” Talent Development Program. Tanoto Foundation donated to the Belt and Road Initiative to create a talent fund. The institution has launched two programs: the International Master of Public Administration in the Belt and Road Initiative (IMPA-BRI) Program and the International Master of Public Administration for Future Leaders (IMPA-Future Leaders) Program. These programs have partnered with Tsinghua University to offer a one-year master’s degree program. The goal is to enhance cooperation between countries along the Belt and Road initiative and nurture promising talents for the nation (Tanoto Foundation, n.d.). Several Islamic schools and boarding schools in Indonesia have collaborated with the Chinese government. For example, Al-Risalah Lirboyo Islamic boarding school in Kediri sent 60 students to Hangzhou for a 12-day summer camp. This school also provides a Mandarin course taught by a Muslim from Xinjiang, China (Ar-Risalah., n.d.). Moreover, Nurul Jadid Probolinggo Islamic Boarding School has been offering scholarships to Chinese universities since

2010. Consul General Xu Yong met with Abdul Hamid Wahid, the head of Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, to discuss potential cooperation (Surabaya.China-consulate, nd). It is surprising to see this cooperation, as some Muslim communities are critical of China due to the humanitarian issues involving Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang. The government in Indonesia supports different forms of cooperation in education. In 2021, the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology of Indonesia collaborated with the Embassy of Indonesia in Beijing and the ASEAN-China Center to host a webinar. The webinar was titled “Akselerasi Kolaborasi Perguruan Tinggi Indonesia dengan 100 Perguruan Tinggi Tiongkok Top Dunia” and aimed to foster knowledge exchange between Indonesian universities and the top 100 universities in China, as stated by Nizam, the Director General of Indonesian Higher Education, Research, and Technology (dikti-kemendikbud, 2021). The government has been supporting the cooperation between Indonesia and China in the education sector, which has a direct impact on the Indonesian people. Both countries are committed to further developing various types of education-related cooperation.

2. Joint Research

China and Indonesia have established numerous research collaborations. For instance, they formed a Joint Committee Meeting (JCM) in the field of science and technology cooperation. In 2017, they made agreements to strengthen this cooperation, including the establishment of a joint laboratory in biotechnology and high-temperature gas-cooled reactor (HTGR) technology transfer, as well as port constructions (Hadi, 2017). In 2019, Indonesia and China agreed to collaborate on high-speed train technology research.

They signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) at the Thematic Forum on Silk Road of Innovation: The 2nd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing. The collaboration aimed to enhance human resources and science and technology capabilities for high-speed trains (Setyorini, 2019). Moreover, in 2021, the Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment, Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi witnessed the signing of the “Two Countries Twin Park” cooperation project in Parapat, North Sumatra. This project covers various sectors, including research. The Indonesian government is also preparing a 500-hectare area in Humbang Hasundutan, North Sumatra, for the development of a research center focused on herbal and horticultural medicine (Junida, 2021). Additionally, in 2019, Indonesia and China agreed to establish the Sino-Indonesia Industrial Cooperation research center, known as the Industrial Research Institute. It was founded by Fujian Polytechnic Normal University in Fuqing, South China. The initiative was supported by the Fujian Provincial Government to promote the development of the “Two countries, twin parks” collaboration, which began in early 2021. China is currently the top country in the world when it comes to scientific publications, controlling 20.67% of all research publications (McCarthy, 2019). On the other hand, Indonesia is ranked 19. However, with increased cooperation in this field, Indonesia has the opportunity to make innovative contributions that will benefit society globally. As the relationship between the two countries strengthens during the Jokowi administration, there is potential for even closer collaboration in the future.

Pros and Cons Among Intellectuals

A. Overseas Indonesian Students

The BRI project has both pros and cons for Indonesian students. A study by Fadilah (2020) examined their perspectives on studying in China. Some students believe that the project will have a positive impact on Indonesia. They think that if the Indonesian government follows the project guidelines, it can benefit from educational facilities. However, there are concerns about a debt trap. Some students see this as skepticism and fear of the unknown. Another group of students is worried about the negative consequences of the project for Indonesia. They argue that Indonesia should not be satisfied with China’s offers, as they have caused harm to other countries. It is still uncertain whether China can dominate the world, as international cooperation and investment are driven by economic considerations. The students’ perspectives are influenced by the debt trap issues in other countries and the diverse views of China. Despite benefiting from the BRI project through scholarship programs, students have differing opinions on its overall impact.

B. Muslim intellectuals

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia, has played a significant role in enhancing cooperation between China and Indonesia, particularly in relation to the BRI project. NU Chairman, KH Said Aqil Siroj, was invited to the Chinese embassy in 2017, where they discussed the possibility of collaboration. This led to the exchange of Indonesian and Chinese students. They also discussed establishing an NU organization branch in China (PCINU), which attracted many NU students (NU., n.d.). In 2020, KH Said Aqil Siroj conducted another online meeting to explore further collaboration. As a result, the Chinese

government agreed to offer scholarships specifically to students who wished to study in China (Republika, 2020). The collaboration between the NU University Association (LPTNU) and the Chinese Government Scholarship (CGS) has been ongoing since 2017. It involves sending lecturers to pursue master's or doctoral studies, particularly in science and technology (NU., n.d.). Applicants must have a recommendation from a NU institution or university and be willing to promote the values of wasathiyah (moderation), tasammuh (tolerance), and tawazzun (balance). As a result of these efforts, China has prioritized allowing students to study in China under the NU organization (Akoy, 2021).

The Islamic students, mainly from NU, have a positive view of cooperation between China and Indonesia. Around 500 students are currently studying in China. In 2022, the Ministry of Education of the PRC organized a forum on development and China-Indonesia people-to-people exchange. Ahmad Syaifuddin Zuhri, a student and Chairman of PCINU, stated that students play a crucial role in strengthening bilateral relations by fostering people-to-people ties. They build relationships with local and international Muslim communities. Most students believe that the Uyghur issue is not discrimination but an attempt to quell rebellion. They believe that Western media has evidence to support this claim (NU., n.d.). Despite this, students promote a positive image of China on social media, portraying a peaceful environment for students. They actively share information through seminars, discussions, media, and communication in both Bahasa Indonesia and Chinese Mandarin. This aims to reduce negative perceptions between the two countries. The Indonesian Ministry of Religion and Ministry of Foreign Affairs

support sending students to China to promote Indonesia's contributions to world peace (Santri For World Peace, Goes to China) and address the stigma associated with Islamic education (Kemenlu, n.d.). This effort also aims to promote a positive image of China and Islam among Indonesian and Chinese people.

In 2019, a union of Kiai or Cleric from various NU Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia met at the Darussalam Wanaraja Islamic boarding school in Garut, West Java. They unanimously rejected the BRI project, believing it would harm Indonesia and make it a Chinese colony. They were concerned about the communist ideology behind the project and the debt traps imposed by China on other countries (Hidayatulloh, 2019). The information above explained that some Kiai opposed the BRI project collaboration, while others supported it. It is unclear if Santri and Kiai have directly benefited from the collaboration, such as scholarships or student exchanges. Some associate the collaboration with discrimination against Uyghur Muslims. Ma'ruf Amin, the Vice President of Indonesia, and Kiai Said Aqil, chairman of NU, have responded to the Uyghur issue. They do not see the cooperation between China and Indonesia as bribes, but they condemn China's actions against the Uyghurs. NU will continue to question the Uyghur issue and express concerns about Muslim relations in China (Iqbal, 2019).

Conclusion

Despite China's efforts in hard and soft power, there are still many individuals and groups who oppose the BRI project. However, students in the education sector have a positive view of this collaboration, as it has changed their perception of China. Promoting a positive image of one's

country as a form of soft power has evolved in recent years. Among Muslim intellectuals, there is a serious debate about communist ideologies, the debt trap, and China's national image. However, most Santri agree with China-Indonesia cooperation because they follow the advice of a Kiai, who is a role model in society. China's soft power approach through the BRI project will help change the negative perceptions of China-Indonesian perspectives, especially among students. This will have a positive impact on China's reputation in the future.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is not solely driven by the government. Chinese educational institutions, including universities, have also played a role in speeding up the process. There are examples of cooperation between China and Indonesia that show this. However, Indonesia needs to take a more active role in this cooperation and influence China to avoid unintended consequences like falling into a debt trap. Additionally, Indonesia must strengthen its national identity to avoid being overwhelmed by China. To achieve this, it is crucial for Indonesia to remain non-aligned and balance its bilateral cooperation. This will alleviate concerns about modern colonialism held by many parties in Indonesia, including the Kiai. This paper addresses the gap and provides updated information on the BRI project collaboration, especially in education.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their appreciation and gratitude to Professor Yung-Yung Chang (National Dong Hwa University Taiwan), who guided them in writing this manuscript and provided support and suggestions.

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