

Opportunities and Challenges of Socio-Cultural Cooperation in China's Belt and Road Initiative in Indonesia

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Abstrak

Selain pengembangan hubungan internasional, perdagangan dan pembiayaan infrastruktur, China Belt Road Initiative (BRI) juga mencakup upaya pengembangan hubungan antar manusia melalui pertukaran bidang sosial dan budaya antara negeri Tiongkok dengan negara lain. Hubungan antar manusia dan pertukaran sosial-budaya ini belum banyak diskusi pada kajian-kajian China BRI sebelumnya, misalnya, soal migrasi penduduk atau tenaga kerja, hubungan pariwisata, hubungan pendidikan, dan pertukaran kebudayaan. Semua sektor tersebut berpotensi meningkat secara jumlah dan skala kerjasama akan lebih banyak dimasa depan. Makalah ini hendak melihat sejauh mana hubungan kerjasama tersebut telah berkembang di Indonesia. Selanjutnya, problem apa saja yang menjadi kendala, sejauh mana peran penting hubungan antar manusia dan pertukaran sosial-budaya ini, dan hal-hal apa saja yang perlu ditindaklanjuti untuk memperkuat relasi antar bangsa Indonesia-Tiongkok.

Kata Kunci: China BRI, infrastruktur, sosial-budaya, interkultural.

Abstract

In addition to developing international relations, trade and infrastructure financing, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) also includes efforts to build human relations and socio-cultural exchanges between China and other countries. Human relations and socio-cultural exchanges have not been widely discussed in previous China's BRI studies, such as labor migration, tourism relations, education, and social and cultural exchanges. All sectors have the potential to further increase in the amount and larger scale of cooperation in the future. This paper examined the extent to which this cooperation has developed in Indonesia. Furthermore, what are the constraints, to what extent are the critical roles of human relations and socio-cultural exchanges, and what matters should be followed up to strengthen relations between Indonesia and China?

Keywords: China's BRI, infrastructure, socio-cultural, intercultural.

INTRODUCTION

The revolution of China's global interconnectivity through the silk road and maritime road policies, currently known as China's Belt and Road Initiative (hereafter abbreviated as BRI), aims not only to connect China with Asian and European countries physically but also to build a platform for cooperation and promote international connectivity in five aspects: cultural exchange (promoting people-to-people cooperation); policy coordination (planning and supporting infrastructure development policies); facilitating connectivity (building physical and non-physical infrastructure facilities); investment and

(facilitating cross-border investment and supporting the chain of cooperation); and financial integration (improving financial coordination and bilateral financial cooperation) (Yinquan, 2015). Hence, BRI refers to economic activities (trade and infrastructure development) to encourage human relations to form deep interaction and connectivity, resulting in community formation accompanied by the hybridization of shared socio-cultural interests (Dellios, 2017). In this regard, the Chinese government has taken several steps of cultural internationalization and social integration through the BRI platform, including

cultural priority strategies, implementing cultural go-out policies; disseminating cultural teachings/concepts; actively building multicultural silk road forums; and creating a cultural festival (Li, 2017).

This cooperation between nations within BRI is intended to create a 'collaborative space for human relations in one socio-cultural meeting'. Cooperation between nations within BRI presents a road map on how all countries can play a cooperation strategy to be integrated into one unified cooperation in the world. BRI's collaboration is carried out using soft power diplomacy in foreign and humanitarian aid activities, tourism, and education expansion through student and cultural exchanges and opening branches of Confucius institutes worldwide. Through the BRI, China persuades many countries to follow its initiatives and deepen relations between its nation and culture and other countries along the BRI corridor (Dellios, 2017). On the other hand, this initiative is also a strategy to strengthen China's influence in the Belt Road and Maritime region (country) while incorporating all internal and external economic, political, cultural and security interests into China's influence (Mitrovic, 2018). In theory and practice, this BRI becomes an instrument and an international diplomacy framework to 're-globalize China/globalization', the glorification movement of China's rise, and 'refocus' attention on China (Korwa, 2019).

However, several factors can hinder China from realizing its "dream". One thing that often arises is the perception or difference of views on BRI and the Chinese government in carrying out their international economic diplomacy policies and perspective on the people of other countries. For example, knowledge about BRI for the general public in Indonesia seems not well understood. Within the government alone, many stakeholders do not fully understand China's current economic developments and the positive or negative impacts of BRI on local communities and the region. In other side, in Chinese society, most of them "turn out" only recognize Indonesia as a beautiful jungle of archipelago, not as a country with the largest economic activity in Southeast Asia or as one of the economic powers of the G-20 (Yuniarto, 2019).

Within the framework of the BRI cooperation, China tries brings the idea of strengthening relations between the people of China and other countries while at the same time building a prosperous world for humankind. The main questions of this study are: To what extent have socio-cultural activities and human relations run in the implementation of BRI cooperation, and what factors have become obstacles and efforts that can support cooperation, especially, between Indonesia and China? Based on research questions, this paper begins by describing the social and cultural cooperation between China-Indonesia occurring in the collaborative relations under BRI. Some activities covered in these social and cultural aspects include educational missions, cultural exchanges, tourism, and employment. Furthermore, the sub-chapter deals with the obstacles faced in Indonesia-China relations in BRI. Then, it discusses the intercultural learning model as a framework for inter-community relations (people-to-people exchange) that BRI wants to build.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of previous studies entails several interesting issues related to socio-cultural in BRI practices: 1) The Silk Road's role in the past was crucial in building the civilization community of China-Central Asia-Europe and trade between regions. China's strategy to use the Silk Road dubbed "One Belt, One Road" is a cultural strategy to strengthen China's new political-economic trade by carrying the spirit of "the glory of the silk road" (PwC's, 2016); 2) The long historical relationship between China and Southeast Asia has enhanced economic and cultural cooperation. This cooperation is considered more beneficial if countries in the region can take advantage of China's economic development to create mutually beneficial relationships (Gong, 2018); 3) Meanwhile, China's investment in Southeast Asia still leaves social and legal problems indicating different cultural perspectives (habits) in arranging cooperation between the two parties and the public's response to projects in BRI (Mitrovic, 2018); 4) Through the BRI collaboration project, there is a growing tendency for the exchange of migrant workers, students,

tourists, and cultural exchanges between China and cooperating countries (Kanak, 2016; Muttarak, 2017). It is definitely will further build cultural cooperation between the people. On the other hand, it will also raise anti-Chinese attitudes due to the problems raised, such as labor imbalances and Chinese tourism dominance (Negara and Suryadinata, 2018); 5). Chinese culture (the nature of peace, harmony, openness and prosperity) seems to play an essential role in initiating BRI and achieving China's dreams (prosperity and strength of China, rejuvenation of the country, happiness for Chinese society and revival of traditional Chinese culture) (Hayati, 2014). Practically and theoretically, the socio-cultural context in BRI, especially in the relationship between Indonesia and China, has not been largely studied. This paper will fill in the gaps in these references.

RESEARCH METHOD

This paper is a series of studies conducted by the author between 2018 and 2019 through thematic research activities at the Research Center for Area Studies, Indonesian Institute of Sciences (PPW-LIPI). Data collection was carried out through literature studies and in-depth interviews. Literature studies were conducted in Indonesia and China by collecting secondary data in libraries and online scientific journals. The author performed in-depth interviews with researchers or lecturers from government agencies and NGOs in charge of this issue. Moreover, a small workshop (Focus Group Discussion) explored the theme being studied, including various government or academic institutions in charge of China's BRI issues. Research sources comprised the Academy of Chinese Culture, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Chinese Institute of International Studies, Directorate of the Asia Pacific and Africa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta. Beijing, Shanghai and Jakarta were places to collect field data and literature.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Observing the development of BRI cooperation in recent years, Southeast Asian countries and China have started to develop cooperation in developing economic infrastructure—particularly roads and railways—required to expand trade relations. Malaysia's and Singapore's governments welcomed the construction of a fast railroad connecting the two countries using the public-private partnership (PPP) scheme. Projects implemented under China's railway diplomacy scheme indirectly explore Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Indonesia. The development of the road and rail sectors is followed by plans for developing digital economic infrastructure and ports in a bilateral scheme in the maritime sector, such as Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia (Wicaksana, 2017). In Central Asia, China and Pakistan have signed a deal worth USD 46 billion, an estimated 20% of Pakistan's annual GDP (CNN, 2016). Apart from Pakistan, Djibouti, Maldives, Mongolia, Laos, Montenegro, Tajikistan, Sri Lanka, and Kyrgyzstan are small countries that have collaborated in infrastructure development with China within the BRI framework (Antara News, 2018).

INDONESIA - CHINA IN BRI COOPERATION

At the 2019 Belt and Road Forum meeting, Indonesia offered 23 development projects under the BRI mechanism with the Chinese government and companies worth USD 64 billion. The two countries have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation through a business-to-business (B-to-B) scheme between the two countries' companies. This initiative cooperation agreement resulted in infrastructure development projects in four provinces of Indonesia: Bali, North Kalimantan, North Sumatra, and North Sulawesi (Antara News, 2019). Infrastructure investment funding under the BRI framework covers three sectors of transportation, industry and tourism. The project targets include the construction of ports, airports, trains and cruise ship terminals. Indonesia and China have drawn up a Framework Agreement for cooperation in Kuala Tanjung, North Sumatra, as the first project. Pelindo I, an Indonesian state-owned company, signed a Head of

Agreement regarding partnerships in the development of the Kuala Tanjung Port together with representatives from the Dutch Rotterdam Port Authority and Zhejiang Provincial Sea Port Investment & Operations Group Co., Ltd of China on November 14, 2019 (Tempo, 2019).

In addition to the four BRI-related projects, other collaborative projects comprise the Jakarta-Bandung fast train, Medium Size Power Plants in several locations in Java, the mining sector in Central Kalimantan, the Special Economic Zone in Jonggol-West Java, Integrated Industrial Zone in Ketapang, replanting of oil palm in Sumatra, and the Meikarta Integrated Industrial Estate in Bekasi-West Java. Investors from China are also building smelters (steel smelting) and power plants. Of the several collaborations, the value reached USD 91 billion. Several projects ready to run include the Kayan Hydroelectric Power Plant (PLTA) project with an investment value of USD 1.5 billion, investment in the waste treatment of USD 3 billion, PLTA Salo Pebatua of USD 560 million, development of a Special Economic Zone (KEK) covering an area of 31,000 hectares worth USD 9. billion, and an integrated fishing industry project on Seram Island, Maluku worth USD 150 million (Bhaskara, 2019). The total investment value reached USD 14.21 billion in the five projects.

There are three essential things why the Indonesian government gave infrastructure development to Chinese investors. First, the development of transportation and logistics infrastructure, energy infrastructure, water management infrastructure (for irrigation and public consumption), and information and communication technologies (ICT) infrastructure is significant for the Indonesian economy and useful for increasing Indonesia's competitiveness. In this regard, the Chinese side is willing to contribute. Second, infrastructure development must overcome the current shortage of raw materials (cement, iron, and asphalt) in Indonesia. The Chinese side has experience in the above industries. Third, infrastructure problems in many sectors act as a barrier to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and increase industrial growth. In other words, Indonesia needs more investment in infrastructure, and at the same

time, China offers what Indonesia needs (IDI, 2016).

China assists Indonesia in facilitating large and small scale infrastructure development through joint BRI and Non-BRI projects. This assistance is expected to help with the sale and transportation of energy raw materials and the relocation of the manufacturing industry – all of which are relevant to Indonesia's export interests. On the other hand, assistance to Indonesia has strengthened China's position as a business partner for the long term. Indonesia certainly benefits from BRI by building physical infrastructure and easing the government's burden on national development. It is also hoped that there will be a transfer of knowledge about technology from China to Indonesia. All of these have been built on economic cooperation carried out in partnership with China. The idea of the Maritime Silk Road, which China initiated, is in accordance with the domestic vision of Indonesian President Joko Widodo regarding a sea toll, wanting to strengthen the maritime area with Chinese assistance in infrastructure development.

The expansion of Chinese investment in Indonesia, on the other hand, is expected to accelerate the leap of Indonesian trade or investment cooperation in China. Indonesia's investment and trade growth in China is still low, and its value is still relatively small (and a deficit). Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), in July 2019, the increase in Indonesia's non-oil and gas exports to China was USD 469.7 million. Meanwhile, imports from China in July 2019 increased by USD 1.5 billion. Indonesia still imports goods such as garlic, air conditioning machines, pears, frozen meat, and cell phones from China (Musyaffa, 2019). It is the "key concern" in establishing economic cooperation relations with China, namely the trade deficit. The Indonesian government seeks to reduce the trade deficit by encouraging outward investment in Indonesia (Ariyanti, 2013). The domestic investment ratio is currently almost overtaking foreign investment (PMA) with a ratio of 1: 2. The actual value of the domestic investment was recorded at IDR 33 trillion, while the flow of foreign direct investment reached IDR 73 trillion. For example, domestic investment abroad (based in Singapore and Hong Kong) increased by about 40% -50%. One of the

projects being developed in China is the apartment business run by the Ciputra Group in the city of Shenyang, with a total land area of 300 hectares. Ciputra Group has developed a cluster of landed houses of 35 hectares for the first phase. Housing in this project is marketed with prices starting from USD 100,000 - USD 300 million. In this project, the plan is to build landed houses, apartments and commercial centers within the next five years (Puspa, 2018).

Not only cooperation in infrastructure development and trade-economic as described above, Indonesia and China are also developing several socio-cultural cooperation.

Tourism Sector

Indonesia needs at least USD 20 billion to develop the tourism sector – including the promotion of 10 tourist destinations dubbed “New Bali”. Thanks to Indonesia’s participation in the BRI, opportunities for investment from China are wide open. Indonesia is currently trying to attract 20 million foreign tourists, and it is expected that the role of Chinese tourists will reach half of the target (Yuniar, 2018). However, in Indonesia, the tourism sector still faces many obstacles, including poor infrastructure and services, lack of skilled tourism workers, a weak environment to maintain the private investment, and poor coordination between agencies, especially in monitoring and preserving natural assets and culture.

There are several reasons why China’s role is highly expected in infrastructure investment in the tourism sector development. China is a country contributing to foreign tourists. Through the development of the tourism economy, the Chinese government wants to improve the quality of tourism routes around the world. According to China Cruise Shipping, the BRI development project offers the most massive collection of tourism resources, meaning that if it is successful, it will unite around 80% of the world’s cultural heritage elements, involving more than 60 countries and 4.4 billion people. The National Tourism Office of China said that if the infrastructure route is built, it is estimated that it can “transport” 150 million Chinese tourists per year. Tourism sector

that if the infrastructure route is built, it is estimated that it can “transport” 150 million Chinese tourists per year. Tourism sector investment spent USD 200 billion in Road Belt countries during the “China’s 13th Five-Year Plan” (2016-2020).

In reciprocity, China will also attract 85 million tourists from countries related to the Belt Road project to travel to mainland China. Outside tourists bring in about USD 110 billion in domestic tourism revenue. The number of tourists to China departing from domestic ports in Asia has jumped from around 20,000 in 2006 to 2.14 million in 2016. This fantastic number makes tourists to China fill 40% of the tourism shipping market in Asia. Currently, eight international cruise ports have been built in Shanghai, Tianjin and Sanya to increase demand for tourism travel by shipping to and from East Asia and Southeast Asia (Prodjo, 2016).

Labor Sector

As long as the project under the BRI scheme is implemented, the number of migrant workers from China continues to go to Indonesia. In February 2020, the number of Chinese work permit holders jumped 30 percent to 40,357 (Saputri, 2020). Quite a lot, even though in 2019 the number of workers from other countries did not increase significantly, Japan (13.8 thousand), South Korea (9,686), India (6,895), Malaysia (4,667), Philippines (2,910), Australia (2,600), America States (2,556), United Kingdom (2,133), Singapore (1,880), others (15,902). Chinese workers have carried out several infrastructure development projects in several locations in Indonesia.

There are rumors on Indonesian social media stating that 10 to 20 million Chinese migrant workers are currently working in Indonesia. The rumors are politically motivated because they raise suspicions that Chinese migrant workers will take over local people’s jobs. The Indonesian Minister of Manpower denied the 10-20 million number, saying that the number of Chinese workers in Indonesia mostly worked in Chinese-owned construction companies. Lack of knowledge about China is one of the causes of this fear. Chinese workers may live in Indonesia, but the impact of Chinese labor on the

Indonesian labor market can be said to be relatively minimal (Negara, 2017).

Meanwhile, Indonesian workers also migrated to China mainland (excluding Hong Kong and Taiwan). Unfortunately, they are categorized as illegal migrant workers. In 2016, the Indonesian Embassy in Beijing repatriated at least 40 Indonesians working illegally in China's areas. Local officials found evidence of Indonesian migrant workers working illegally in Beijing, Hebei, Tianjin, Chongqing, Shanxi, Liaoning, Xian and Shandong (The Jakarta Post, 2016). According to the Indonesian Embassy report, Indonesian migrant workers generally arrived in China on tourist visas via Hong Kong, Shanghai and Guangzhou. This report explains that China has never accepted migrant workers from any country, including Indonesia. In China, it is illegal for an individual to recruit foreign workers according to the Ministry of Labor and Social Security regulations. As a result, whenever foreign workers work in China in the individual area (domestic worker), they are directly (categorized) as illegal workers. Therefore, China repatriates illegal migrant workers from Indonesia and other countries, such as the Philippines.

Educational Exchange

To improve bilateral relations in the world and build BRI as massive cooperation strategy, the Chinese government announced that 30,000 scholarships would be awarded to students from BRI collaborating countries (Laruelle, 2018). Under the initiative's project, China has established 81 educational institutions and 35 cultural centers in countries along the Belt Road countries. In the first half of 2018, China spent more than 270 million Yuan or approximately USD 39.3 million, on Silk Road scholarships (GIVnews, 2015). According to the Indonesian Ambassador's statement to China, China is one of the main destination countries for young Indonesians to continue their education. Currently, the number of Indonesian students at Chinese universities has reached $\pm 15,000$ people, with an annual increase of $\pm 10\%$ (News. Detik, 2018). Indonesians to continue their education. Currently, the number of Indonesian students at Chinese universities has reached $\pm 15,000$

people, with an annual increase of $\pm 10\%$ (News. Detik, 2018). The majority of the study is in the language department. The ten countries most preferred by Indonesians to continue their education are Australia, United States, Malaysia, Japan, Germany, UK, Netherlands, Singapore, Egypt, and China. According to the Chinese Service Center Exchange (CSCSE), the number of Indonesian students in China increased by 10 percent per year during 2010-2015. Most of them studied the Chinese language and literature, the number of students entering other study fields, such as industrial technology, industry and medicine, increased. In the future, it is hoped that more Indonesian youths will come to China to study technology, agriculture, health and others, in addition to the Chinese language and literature. Studying in mainland China provides a great opportunity to learn the world's most popular language, "Mainland Mandarin" or "Putonghua", as it will provide additional benefits for future career development and advancement (GIVnews, 2015).

Under the BRI cooperation scheme, Indonesia and China also collaborate between universities and universities (U2U), for example, Peking University and Universitas Indonesia (UI), Tsing Hua University and Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB). Moreover, Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) also collaborates with Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY). Bilateral cooperation in the development of traditional medicines is also considered a scientific cooperation program that is a priority for the two countries, strengthening cooperation between nations in the future. In the transportation sector, Indonesia's interest in studying technology and the management of 'fast trains' is also shared by Chinese experts. For example, cooperation between the Indonesian national research institute (BPPT) and partners in China, such as the Nanjing Railway Technology Institute and the Chinese HTGR (high-temperature gas-cooled reactor) research center at Tsinghua University (Syaputra, 2017).

Bilateral scientific cooperation has also begun to be carried out between the Non-Ministerial Research and Development Institute (LPNK) and research institutes from China. It was carried out at the Science and

Innovation Cooperation Forum, held on November 27, 2017, by the Ministry of Research and Technology of Indonesia and China. In this activity, the two countries agreed to sign seven collaborations in the science and technology sector and build two joint national level laboratories and one technology transfer center. In this forum, a Plan of Action on Science, Technology and Innovation Cooperation was launched for three years (2018-2020) as a guideline for the implementation of cooperation between the two parties and the launching of three ongoing collaborations: (i) Joint biotechnology laboratories, with focal points –it is the Agency for the Assessment and Application of Technology (BPPT); (ii) the laboratory together with the high-pressure coolant gas reactor, the focal point is the National Atomic Energy Agency (BATAN); and (iii) the center for technology transfer, with the focal point of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) (BPPT, 2019).

Cultural Exchange

China supports countries along the 'Belt Road' route to apply for world culture development projects and related research, besides seeking bilateral agreements between governments in cultural heritage. So far, China has signed the MoU with 34 countries, including Indonesia, France and Italy (CRI, 2018). The two countries' governments actively coordinate and cooperate through exchanges of performances, exhibitions, and training in the arts, museums, cultural heritage, and culinary. One of the agreements made in the cultural exchange cooperation was holding the Second Session of the Deputy Prime Minister Level of Socio-Cultural Exchange Mechanism between China-Indonesia, in Guiyang in August 2018. To encourage the Road Belt initiative's connection, socio-cultural exchanges between countries are required to strengthen the ASEAN Community. This event aims to foster an "open and exclusive environment". Under the coordination built at the meeting, Indonesia-China within this one year has achieved several cooperation results in the following areas: education, science and technology, culture, health, sports, tourism, youth and media (CRI, 2018).

Some examples of offers for Indonesian-Chinese cultural cooperation are: (1) in the field of film, China is willing to assist in restoring old Indonesian films by the China Film Association (CFA) through the Road Belt project scheme, currently in the stage of determining the film title and setting the format of the film restoration. CFA has a studio equipped with the latest technology to restore 200 film titles in one year, while Indonesia, represented by the Creative Economic Agency (Bekraf), can only restore five films a year. Apart from high-tech tools, CFA also has a repository for ancient films. CFA stated its willingness to restore cheap ancient films for Indonesia. For example, for a film title restored in China, it costs around IDR 600 million and only takes about two weeks, while Indonesia spends IDR 4 billion on five films a year (Ilmie, 2018).

There is also collaboration in photography exhibitions; for example, on February 6-9, 2018, the Mandarin Language Center of the Universitas Negeri Malang held a photo exhibition with the theme "One Belt, One Road". A total of 100 photos depicting traditions, culture, natural beauty, and technological innovations from China were exhibited. The photo exhibition was motivated by the idea of a 21st-century maritime economic pathway that increases the dependence of one country on one another so that the cooperation between PRC and Indonesia through this route is inevitable. Thus, the political and trade relations are also growing; the two countries can accept and give each other. It is hoped that this collaboration can continue and develop to create people of the same fate in the future. The photo exhibition showed the socio-cultural and technological developments in China so that Indonesian people, in general, could get an overview of China's current conditions (UNM, 2018).

COOPERATION CHALLENGES

Conceptually, BRI is a product of inclusive collaboration and is a 'tool' for building relationships between communities. This initiative is expected to build a framework of economic cooperation without questioning ideology, religion or political attitudes. The Chinese government is only the originator of this

initiative and hopes for other countries' active participation. According to the Chinese embassy staff in Jakarta, the Chinese side cannot influence or dictate other countries' infrastructure development programs. However, relations between nations are related to the success of building economic relations in the fields of investment and trade, in which there are social, cultural, or political dynamics that influence relations. These three things can intersect with each other and significantly affect the sustainability of cooperation between each country, consisting of various socio-cultural-political elements that can then be affected and lead to disharmony. The difference in perspective in seeing the context and toward a nation can be one of the triggers for the emergence of disharmony, even social unrest.

There are several challenges (obstacles) in the BRI Indonesia-China cooperation relationship. First, related to the understanding of BRI objectives. In Indonesia, BRI is seen as an infrastructure investment in loans for various projects related to the Silk Road and Maritime Route programs. Indonesia considers BRI to be infrastructure projects financed by capital (loans) from China while prioritizing repayments with loan interest (Negara and Suryadinata, 2018). Meanwhile, China, in the context of economic cooperation, does business in a "smoother" way, namely through a win-win solution scheme. The investment cooperation pattern (loan) in infrastructure is accompanied by other exchanges, such as providing educational scholarships or tourism cooperation. China uses this pattern to build more intimate relations with all countries. However, there seems to be quite a large gap in terms of the perspective of BRI cooperation. On the one hand, investment is a purely economic issue related to debts, while on the other hand, the cooperation is given a transparent, inclusive and equal 'frill'. The meeting point of the two views lies in the placement of infrastructure connectivity to improve the welfare of the community through the relationship between nations (p-to-p connection), expected to bridge differences in views on both sides. It seems that Indonesia and China are still taking a cautious stance and looking for ways to build closer cooperation. The BRI scheme cooperation points mentioned above

are one of the efforts made.

The second obstacle deals with the conditions of social and political life in China and Indonesia. For Indonesia, the China issues that often become problems are Communism and religious ideology, population and labor migration, and economic and territorial threats. Meanwhile, for China, the history of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and coup movement in Indonesia associated with the Chinese Communist Party, Islamic extremism problem, Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Issues, and the Anti-Chinese Movement, are the subject of problems that hinder relations between countries.¹

The third obstacle concerns economic regionalism and control of resources between China and other countries that trigger conflict or enmity. The problems that arise here include fears of over-control of the South China Sea area by China—of which the claim to territorial sovereignty remains unsolved, the dominance of Chinese products and currency controlling the mainland areas of Southeast Asia directly adjacent, political instability in various countries that can lead to inconsistencies in foreign policy; all of which can potentially undermine cooperation. In addressing these problems, history showing the spirit of freedom of mobility for humans and goods cannot be practiced today. In this case, China can take the past spirit without maintaining the relationship between humans and current cultural relations.²

The fourth obstacle is internal problems in China and Indonesia, including corruption, low quality of manufactured goods, social injustice, energy dependence, separatism and narcotics trafficking, as well as conflicts between religions and others. Some of these issues can become obstacles to build cooperation. Both Indonesia and China are struggling to improve the quality of human resources and domestic production to compete at the global level. Trade competition and bureaucratic transition are still points of concern in building cooperation between Indonesia and China. This internal condition greatly affects the success rate of the cooperation program. The cooperation agreement agreed upon at the elite (central, executive) level has not been implemented optimally at the implementing level (local government) because the BRI cooperation program is not

yet fully understood. Moreover, the local-international security situation can become a “disruption” to BRI’s cooperation program’s success.³

The fifth obstacle is related to public perception. According to a survey conducted by the Global Times in 2013/14, showing the view of China as a country, namely “too confident” and “arrogant”. Furthermore, the poll also said, “the closer you are to China, the more likely you are to be viewed negatively like China”. The poll was conducted in 14 countries, with 14,400 respondents (Ilhamdatha, 2017). Not only surveys at the global level, at the country level, some surveys also show references to views on cooperation with China. The National Survey Media Institute (Median) released the results of a 2017 survey related to public perceptions of threats from abroad. As a result, people see China as the country that most threatens Indonesia today. China is in the first position (22.7%), followed by the United States (14.1%), Malaysia (7.8%), Israel (3.2%), and Myanmar (1.7%), which are in the top five. There were several reasons given by respondents regarding concerns about China: China controls the economy in Indonesia (31.2%), Chinese products are too dominant in Indonesia (23.7%), and the communist factor (7.5%).⁴ Apart from the Median, the 2017 CSIS Indonesia National Survey on the millennial generation’s views seeing Indonesia’s development at home and abroad reveals that the view of economic cooperation with China is considered unfavorable. The economic cooperation with Saudi Arabia is considered more beneficial for Indonesia (27.4 percent), while cooperation with China is perceived as detrimental for the Indonesian economy (32.8 percent). Indications of adverse cooperation with China can be seen from the many low-quality products coming from China, the issue of Chinese labor taking the role of local labor, and the issue of the attitude of tourists and investors from China who are rude and do not know the local culture (CSIS, 2017). From the three examples above, it can be said that China has a negative image problem both in cooperation and attitude or behavior.

The Chinese government is aware of the conditions regarding this perception. Through the ministry of trade and foreign affairs, the Chinese government builds up its

soft power. It began to conduct diplomacy with its neighboring countries. One of them is by holding a Training Course for Development Countries (TCDC) program. This program has been implemented since 2000, but it has been more intensively carried out in recent years. This program aims to introduce Chinese culture and language, the advancement of industry and trade, and educational cooperation. So far, this program has invited many countries in the world, especially Africa and Asia. Gradually, China began to build a positive image for officials in Asian and African countries to know and inform the public about China’s development in their country.

Based on the explanation above, two important issues can be raised regarding the implementation of BRI in Indonesia: 1) negative knowledge of the people of each country has become a cause for the emergence of a bad image of each country, and 2) lack of adequate understanding of the local government and the public regarding socio-cultural factors in implementing BRI practices.⁵ In the context of improving the program of human relations (p-to-p connection), China and Indonesia must learn about each country’s socio-cultural conditions before determining steps to remove the social and political barricades between them, including differences in ethnicity and religion, cultural friction, work ethics, and perceptions.

SOCIO-CULTURAL LEARNING IN BRI: THEORY AND PRACTICE

BRI cooperation in Indonesia is still early, but relations with China are long and can reach new heights. Socially, the relationship between Indonesia and China is constrained in social and cultural understanding. One thing that must be developed more broadly is the mutual understanding between the two countries—as stated by President Xi when declaring BRI: “*The interaction between the state and the state lies in the mutual trust between people*” (国之交在于民相亲, 民相亲在于心相通) (Liju, 2016). In building mutual trust in BRI, the author emphasizes the importance of intercultural learning/understanding⁶, which can be used as the basis for this new two-way exchange strategy. If we want to understand others

people, we have to understand their culture and how they represent their world. Theoretically, through intercultural understanding, one can learn how to see things through others' eyes and how to add to their knowledge in our vocabulary to develop efficient intercultural communication competencies as a guide for individuals or members of a group when visiting other countries (Julan, 2018). Intercultural understanding considers both taking and giving as an essential strategy for dealing with cultural differences and formulating appropriate acculturation among the various countries involved in BRI (Xintian, 2004).

In today's globalized world, change is accelerating, but relations are 'closer' and cooperation between countries is increasingly intense. The actors involved are expected to learn and understand the world outside themselves. Sometimes we understand other nations limited by the knowledge we have. Learning the culture of other nations can help gain new knowledge that may be different from what has been previously thought (Lowe, 2006). The idea of learning or cultural-based understanding integrates aspects of knowledge about a society in getting to know each other, both individuals and a nation. One form of cultural learning is the accumulation of various knowledge about attitudes and behaviors, for example, in business behavior, where each country has different habits. Cultural learning can make a nation and an individual not isolated from a culture different from theirs. Besides, it increases the appreciation of foreign cultures. This culture-based learning is constructivist learning (Alexon, 2010).⁷ For example, Mandarin language education and the exchange of socio-cultural activities can bridge cultural communication between Indonesia and China.

Several academics have offered cross-cultural understanding/ideas useful in building relationships between people in the BRI collaboration. Dai and Cai (2017), in their study of Cross-Cultural Management within BRI, suggested three tentative ways in the intercultural strategy: (1) Investigating local markets and identifying cultural differences [between host and target countries], (2) Fostering intercultural communication competence among employees across cultures, and (3)

Acculturation with local communities by making innovations based on cultural fusion. In implementing the p-to-p connection within the BRI framework, Wu and Ruan's (2018) article on Cross Cultures concluded that it is necessary to build a human resource management system based on cultural differences in the company's transnational operations, build training mechanisms scientific about corporate culture, in which employees can identify the characteristics of the company, and build a perfect personnel system in terms of talent management and incentive systems.

Kang et al. (2018), in the *Harmony in Diversity* under BRI study, also suggested identifying cultural differences that exist, "to have special cultural training, field studies, situational dialogue and role-playing to break cultural barriers and eliminate slavery role". Moreover, since intercultural dialogue is the most crucial issue if humankind and society are to be safe, Dai and Cai (2017) insisted, "[in order to] be well received in the host market, state actors, managers, and employees must be acculturated, and globalization to the host culture must be fully committed to a mutual benefit based on two cultural backgrounds". All kinds of strategies and competencies above are beneficial because thanks to China's Road Belt Initiative, the world is more connected than ever before. According to Julan (2018), the importance of intercultural understanding also lies in developing skills for cultural navigation (seeing the direction of cultural developments/trends in society).

The location of BRI is along the road through Asia, Europe, Africa, where the four major civilizations are located, and involves 65 different countries in their customs, religious beliefs and cultural traditions, and different values, customs, and behaviors. Therefore, Kang et al. (2018) classified cultural diversity into three types: different basic values, different life habits, and professional knowledge. Kang et al. (2018) emphasized that "intercultural understanding is important because local communities' basic values are difficult to change. However, differences in living habits can be reduced through cultural exchange, although it will take time; the differences brought about by management styles and management skills can also be overcome by learning from

each other, which is quite easy”.

The above examples can prevent conflicts between cultures from becoming more intense and help—particularly in the relationship between China and Indonesia—in resolving cultural conflicts and facilitating convergence and integration between different cultures, between Indonesian and Chinese people. With cross-cultural understanding and knowledge of different Chinese and Indonesian cultures and the communication skills of state officials, companies, or local communities in the host country can be improved. Thus, socio-cultural issues in building human relations between China and Indonesia can be minimized, and relations can be continuously improved.

On the other hand, the issue of understanding the culture between the two countries is not only the obligation of the state (government) to play a more active role, but individual actors also have an essential role in helping relations between nations. Papp (1988) explained that the types of personal or group relationships also play an important role, although their depth cannot be measured in international relations. Activities between countries such as student exchanges, teaching or research in a country, short and long-term labor migration, tourism activities and cultural activities result in personal level interactions between citizens of one country and citizens of another country. In this context, individuals and groups can play various roles in contemporary international relations and transmitting culture or exchanging values. Individuals and groups can be involved in policy formulation and implementation, even in economic diplomacy matters. For example, foreign students in a country can be categorized as ‘actors’ in international relations because they migrate to other countries and interact with local citizens and other people from various countries to play a significant role in promoting the culture of their country and destination country, in the place where they live or visit (Paramitaningrum, 2013).

For instance, in a group interview with Indonesian students from Nanchang City, a student stated that learning Chinese culture was a result obtained in addition to graduation questions, he said that,

“China and Indonesia have good economic relations. There are Chinese companies with projects or open branches in Indonesia. So, I looked for a job at one of these companies. However, as many have reported on social media (print), Chinese companies have several Indonesian problems, such as language, communication and religious differences. With the experience of studying in China and getting to know their culture, I can help solve this problem. I am quite familiar with China because I studied for five years in Nanchang and understand Indonesia, especially Jakarta, where I was born. So, I can be a bridge connecting Chinese work culture with my country.” (CL, 27 years old, female, a former student from Nanchang University and working for a Chinese Trader Company).

The interview excerpt above is an excellent example of how students grow to be professionals in their fields and become actors who can bridge cooperation between Indonesia and China. This interaction is mediated by the education sector, providing knowledge and experience about other cultures. It can improve human relations with other humans. Therefore educational exchanges must receive more attention.

BRI is concerned with the needs of the state, which can overcome the significant and urgent interests of creating jobs, tourism, migration, and education for its citizens in all areas passed (Kanak, 2016; Muttarak, 2017) in Indonesia. Through projects under the BRI scheme, more and more migrant workers, students, tourists and cultural exchanges continue to move as they seek a better life or find new opportunities elsewhere. It means that BRI can link infrastructure and sustainable job creation, providing tourism services and human mobility. Because most relations between countries start and are built due to interactions between people. Therefore, countries in the Road Belt region (especially Indonesia) must build relationships between people for the long-term period regarding the ambition of the BRI program, namely, increasing economic integration, legal finance, and improving human relations.

Road Belt project executor agencies such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund also have the potential and power to bring

non-infrastructure investment and new approaches to the private/public sector non-government partnership model into the BRI program. Infrastructure development, both hard and soft, is essential because it can create a space for connectivity between China and Indonesia in a more effective and efficient human relationship. This non-infrastructure cooperation initiative further strengthens the private and public sectors by creating a positive spill-over effect beyond the physical development projects agreed upon initially. With the migrant workforce's growth, tourism, and educational exchanges between China and Indonesia, the two countries' relations could "lead to a more flexible pattern of relations". The problems that become obstacles in BRI are likely to be resolved with these examples of people-to-people connections. Thus, the relationship between nations and humans should not be seen only as the mobility of people for work, study and vacation, and as part of human cultural exchange, which helps understand the cultures between countries and the continuation of relations between them. This strategy can balance relations between countries if a hard infrastructure project fails halfway through.

CONCLUSION

The bilateral relationship between Indonesia and China in the current BRI era indicates a potential development trend in the economic, social, and cultural fields. Chinese investment through BRI in Indonesia can reach a new level, namely bilateral relations based on equality, harmony, and mutual benefits. However, it is still too early to see the real implications of China's cooperation and Indonesia in BRI for society's welfare. It takes time and a process to reach that stage. Several challenges must be resolved for the Road and Belt Initiative to be successful, namely reducing the psychological barricades emanating from existing socio-cultural perspectives, including ethnic differences, cultural friction, religious diversity and perceived work ethics.

ENDNOTE

- ¹ Interview with CST, researchers of CSIS Jakarta, October 2018.
- ² Focus discussion minutes (FGD) P2SDR-LIPI and The Academy of Chinese Culture, April 2018.
- ³ Interview with XL, researchers of NIS CASS Beijing, April 2018.
- ⁴ The survey was held on September 14-22, 2017, with 1,000 respondents from all Indonesian citizens categorized as voters. The sampling method was carried out randomly (multistage random sampling), and quality control was conducted on 20% of the existing samples. The margin of errors in the survey was +/- 3.1% at the 95% confidence level. This survey was published on November 15, 2017 (Detiknews. 2017).
- ⁵ Field notes from focus group discussion with Deputy for Asia and Africa, Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jakarta, April 2018.
- ⁶ Interculturalism refers to the idea of a view that "culture is more fluid than ever before and that the interconnectedness of the world demands interactions between and within cultures to build trust and understanding, and that a high level of cultural skills of navigation will be needed to people to accept and support the change process". See details of Ted Cantle's writing, "Interculturalism as a new narrative for the era of globalization and super-diversity", in Martyn Barrett (ed.), *Interculturalism and multiculturalism: similarities and differences*, Strasbourg: Council of, 2013, 1-19.
- ⁷ In addition, cross-socio-cultural understanding is an effort to bring two different cultural elements, mutually assimilating to one another by understanding how humans who come from culture behave, speak, think and other things according to their culture. Cross-socio-cultural understanding will ultimately result in the awareness that people from different cultures can better understand and interact better, provide opportunities to work together with people of different ethnicities directly, and recognize the accuracy of diverse cultural views, and realize that differences in value do not have to be a conflict between groups (Sterling, 2018).

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