

The politics of environmental governance and development in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

In September 2013 the Chinese president Xi Jinping for the first time unveiled the ambitious plan of starting a new era of development later came to be known as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI has ushered a new development paradigm of "Chinese development model" (Yongnian 2009; Cheng 2012) that is infrastructure lead development based on increased natural resource extraction. The BRI consist of six economic corridors, maritime silk routes and reinvigoration and expansion of traditional (land) silk route. The BRI is a global scale development intervention that is targeting three continents Asia, Africa and Europe and 47 countries through a network of roads, railways, maritime routes and ports.

The global spree of infrastructure development has raised concerns about the environment. At the second Belt and Road Forum in 2019, China has shown commitment to transform the Belt and Road Initiative (the BRI) into a green development project. This commitment comes in response to questions raised by several environmental groups and NGOs. The transformation of the BRI into a green BRI would be achieved through the greening of finance and other green projects. Similar environmental concerns have also spread to the BRI recipient countries. In response to the concerns environmental governance is being restructured which has implications for the broader environment-development debate in the BRI.

By examining the case of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a BRI hallmark project, and few other countries we will explore "How is the Chinese development restructuring environment-development politics in the developing world?". The conversation on the environment in Pakistan illustrates a case of changing environmental governance. Therefore, we will aim to explore the restructuring of environmental governance in Pakistan and implications of BRI on the changing environmental landscape and contextualizing it in the broader debate on environment-development in the BRI.

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