

Global South Responses to China's BRI Projects:

A Case Study of Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway Project

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China's rise as a global power in the 21st century, marked by its economic growth and political influence, has been exemplified through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI has extended China's geoeconomic and geopolitical influence across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe. While existing literature predominantly focuses on China's actions, this study shifts the spotlight to Global South nations' responses and strategic policies, particularly Indonesia, in the context of China's BRI projects. Drawing upon in-depth interviews, literature review, and social media analysis, this research examines how Indonesia has actively shaped the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway project within the BRI framework to pursue its objectives and interests. The study's findings highlight that the Indonesian government, in alignment with the principles of the BRI, is actively utilizing the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway project to advance its New Developmentalism approach under President Jokowi's administration. This approach embodies a narrow perspective of development by focusing on infrastructure and economic growth while ignoring political and environmental considerations. Concurrently, the project has encountered resistance from local communities, underscoring the contrasting interests between the government and the public and adding a nuanced layer to the dynamics of the BRI. This case study sheds light on the complex interplay of interests and power dynamics within the context of China's BRI projects in the Global South. It underscores the importance of considering the responses and agency of host nations and local communities in shaping the outcomes of BRI initiatives.

Keywords: *Global South, China, Indonesia, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Jakarta-Bandung High Speed Railway*

Introduction

In the last two decades, new donors and actors have been participating in global development cooperation regimes with new ideas, narratives, and strategies (Kragelund, 2015; Zimmermann & Smith, 2011). China has emerged as one of the largest and most prominent Southern donors among the new

donors (Mawdsley, 2018). China has distinctive strategies and features, such as combining aid, trade, and investment (Yu, 2017) and emphasizing infrastructure development (Jiang, 2019). The Chinese style of development cooperation can be observed in establishing Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI), which have included projects in 154 countries

across Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America, and the South Pacific (Tiezzi, 2023). Under the BRI umbrella, China has established itself as a donor and provider of infrastructure projects and forged close cooperation with predominantly Global South countries (Damura et al., 2019).

The majority of the studies on the BRI are China-centered, focusing on China's strategy, as well as the political and economic dimensions of the initiative and its global implications (Calabrese & Cao, 2021; Chan & Song, 2020; Yang & Van Gorp, 2023; Yu, 2017). A small but growing number of studies try to pay attention to the other side of the BRI, namely the host or recipient countries, by focusing on the benefits, impacts, and risks associated with the BRI projects (Calabrese & Cao, 2021; Yang & Van Gorp, 2023). Moving beyond China-centric analyses and spotlighting the recipient's agency, this case study highlights that understanding development cooperation requires examining both sides' perspectives. This study explores how the Indonesian government navigates BRI projects to align with its economic and political objectives.

This study contributes to Global South literature by focusing on the recipient's side of BRI's projects. Southeast Asia has received more attention regarding China's increasingly assertive foreign policy. This region is pivotal in the new Maritime Silk Road under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Indonesia is now China's top export destination and a primary recipient of foreign investment through the BRI (Anwar, 2019). In 2019, the Indonesian government

offered around 30 projects worth USD91 billion involving China's BRI (South China Morning Post, 2019). Notably, Indonesia leads as the biggest BRI investment recipient at USD 5.6 billion, almost double that of the second-largest recipient, Peru (USD 2.9 billion) (Nedopil, 2023), emphasizing the need for scrutiny and attention to Indonesia's experience and role under the BRI cooperation.

This study focuses on one of the most notable BRI projects, namely Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway (HSR) or 'Whoosh' to connect the capital city with Indonesia's third biggest city and the capital of West Java in just 45 minutes (Salim & Negara, 2016). The 'Whoosh' HSR was finally launched in October 2023 (BBC Indonesia, 2023).

In fostering the strategic relations between the two countries, China and Indonesia employ a "mutual benefits" discourse by highlighting shared visions and economic benefits. For Indonesia, the High-Speed Railway (HSR) project is envisioned to solve transport bottlenecks and stimulate economic development between Jakarta and Bandung, two of Indonesia's biggest cities. For China, the project is an example of high-speed rail diplomacy (Chan, 2016) and a flagship project for Southeast Asia to showcase China's capabilities in building quality HSR to compete with Japan's technology (Jiang, 2019).

However, the project has encountered many problems since its inception, namely, 1) land acquisition, 2) project construction, and 3) project funding (Tetama et al., 2022). The problems related to the local communities affected by the project have met with community protests against the project's

construction (Negara & Suryadinata, 2018). Moreover, the project has suffered from multiple delays and cost overruns, so the Indonesian government has to bear the additional cost through the state budget. In such situations, local communities and NGOs have used counter-hegemonic discourse against the dominant discourse produced by the government and its proxies that are often put forward to support the project (Plummer, 2019).

This study puts forth three arguments. The core argument is that the HSR project, as an example of the Sino-Indonesian development cooperation project, has been discursively represented to have material benefits for Indonesia. The Chinese and Indonesian governments have promoted the 'mutual benefits' discourse and linked the project to 'modernization' and 'connectivity' – a common discourse promoted by Global South under South-South solidarity. Indonesia has leveraged the project to advance its development agenda based on state-driven economic growth and infrastructure development, often referred to in scholarship on Indonesia as 'New Developmentalism' (Warburton, 2016, 2018).

Second, the support and opposition towards the project are influenced by the level of trust in the government and its proxies (the local governments and companies involved) and the perceived accountability of both, as well as the ground experiences of the communities living near the project that are affected by its implementation. Although the local communities generally support the project based on national development, they have also criticized some aspects of project

implementation, which have lowered the levels of public trust and the accountability of the governments and their proxies.

Third, this study asserts that despite having fragmented voices, local communities can generate their own discourses. They can challenge and contest the hegemonic discourse of the state by assembling informal groups and promoting their causes through mass media campaigns and social media.

This study consists of four parts. The first part introduces the background, research gap, and main arguments. The second part elaborates on the case study methodology and the methods employed for data collection and analysis. The third part contains the results and discussion and is divided into two main steps. The first step discusses the landscape of development cooperation and BRI as part of China's development cooperation initiative. The second step brings forward the discussion on the discursive representations of the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway project. It concludes with the research's findings compared to other literature and provides suggestions for further research.

Methodology

The author conducted qualitative research with a case study approach. The research attempts to answer how the project is shaped by a specific case of development cooperation under the BRI umbrella, how the government uses the project to advance New Developmentalism in Indonesia, and how the local communities perceive the project. The case study strategy was adopted in this study because it is well-suited to investigate

a phenomenon within its real-world context holistically (Gerring, 2017), utilizing prior theoretical propositions and multiple sources of evidence for data triangulation to create a comprehensive picture of the dynamics in question (Gerring, 2017).

In addition, the data is collected from a literature review of secondary sources, semi-structured interviews with local communities and NGOs, and social media. The researcher collected three types of materials: secondary data from public documents, articles, books, news reports, and other written materials; in-depth interviews with local communities and NGO representatives; and community comments on social media platforms (Instagram). The data is then triangulated for the analysis.

The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Rail (HSR) Project spans eight cities, 29 subdistricts, and 95 villages in West Java (Kadarisman, 2017). Three specific neighborhoods were chosen for interviews with local communities – Tipar Complex in West Bandung District, Margawangi Complex in Bandung City, and Darangdan Subdistrict in Purwakarta District. Selection criteria included accessibility, project impacts, and the community's willingness to participate, as advised by the environmental NGO WALHI Jabar.

Interviews with the local communities were conducted online from February to March 2021. This study conducted additional interviews in October-November 2023 to capture the community's responses regarding the HSR's public trials after launching. WALHI Jabar provided community contacts

and a local assistant who helped connect with the neighborhood's chiefs. Snowball sampling was employed to identify initial interviewees and make further connections. The semi-structured approach allows flexibility to guide the interviewees and develop new themes that may arise during interviews.

The interviews, conducted via Zoom and lasting 30 to 70 minutes, involved 24 respondents (seven women and seventeen men). Seventeen respondents came from the three neighborhoods, while seven respondents were representatives of NGOs, CSOs, and the general public, including WALHI Jabar, Universitas Padjajaran, *Komunitas Pohon Indonesia* (Indonesian Tree Community/KPI), Transpod Podcast, and Jakarta City Transportation Council. Pseudonyms were assigned for anonymity, except for well-known figures.

In addition to interviews, social-media comments on the Instagram accounts of the West Java governor during 2018-2023, Ridwan Kamil (@ridwankamil), and the official account of PT. KCIC (@keretacepat_id) related to the Jakarta-Bandung HSR were analyzed. Using Export Comments services (<https://exportcomments.com/>), 290 pertinent comments were gathered and exported to a .CSV file. Among these, 59 comments originated from @ridwankamil, and 231 were contributed by @keretacepat_id, spanning from May 2019 to March 2021. The comments are then analyzed based on the sentiments (positive, neutral, and negative).

The collected data is analyzed using a subset of qualitative data analysis, namely Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), for

analyzing literature, policy documents, interviews, and social media comments. Interviews and social media comments are analyzed to find patterns and themes in how the local community perceives the project. The data will then be in the analytical framework that critically evaluates development cooperation and community engagement processes.

Results and Discussion

Development Cooperation

'Development cooperation,' as a concept and practice, has undergone significant transformation in recent decades. The transformation is characterized by two interrelated trends: the proliferation of emerging actors and a paradigm shift that brings new discourses and conceptual frameworks for development cooperation (Chaturvedi et al., 2021; Zimmermann & Smith, 2011). "Emerging donors" or "new donors" are commonly used to describe donors outside the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD-DAC) (Manning, 2006). The OECD-DAC members are commonly viewed as traditional donors due to their prominent contributions to shaping international development and foreign aid paradigms.

However, "emerging donors" is a contested term because some actors providing development aid have been giving foreign aid for decades. For example, China has been giving foreign aid to Africa since the 1950s, albeit on a much smaller scale and value than it does at present, which is why scholars ar-

gue that "Southern donors" might, therefore, be more appropriate to accurately capture their position in the Global South (Woods, 2008).

As mentioned above, the second trend is a shift in the paradigm employed in the development cooperation discourse. The emerging donors, predominantly from the Global South, bring new narratives and conceptual frameworks for development cooperation in which they emphasize fostering cooperation and mutual benefits. As they are coming from the Global South, it symbolizes the renewal of the South-South partnership that has existed since the 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia (Gray & Gills, 2016). Moreover, the emergence of new donors also provides the recipients with more alternatives to access funding and leverage to negotiate with traditional donors.

Indonesia's engagement in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) provides a unique perspective on development cooperation. It underscores the paradigm shift from traditional donor-recipient dynamics towards South-South-based partnerships emphasizing mutual benefits and solidarity. Seeing development cooperation through Indonesia's lens offers a more nuanced conceptualization. This case highlights that understanding development cooperation requires examining both sides' perspectives to reduce bias and balance information. Analyzing Indonesia's role in the BRI enriches our contemporary understanding, urging scholars to rethink and revise theoretical frameworks to capture the complex dynamics of development cooperation better.

China's Approach to Development Cooperation

Different points of view exist in the literature regarding the rise of China as an essential player in development cooperation, whether as a norm-maker, norm-taker, or norm-shifter, each of which is discussed further below (Kratz & Pavličević, 2019). Several scholars, such as Woods (2008) and Manning (2006), argue that China has circumvented existing Western-led institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, and developed alternative institutions and strategies, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-led development finance institution, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (Woods, 2008; Manning, 2006). China's approach is likened to a 'silent revolution' to overthrow traditional donors' regimes and establish an alternative model to development (Woods, 2008). China has, therefore, created new arrangements and invited other countries to join Chinese-led initiatives in order to create the appearance of disrupting the development paradigm.

Although China has used the language of the partnership while dealing with other countries, its top-down actions, which accord more closely with "development association" than "development cooperation," contradict such language. With the establishment of the BRI and new financial institutions such as AIIB and the New Development Bank (NDB), China is rising to a more prominent position on the global stage, taking advantage of the United States' relative decline in economic power and influence

and merely filling gaps within development cooperation field. Thus, China's new institutional arrangements serve its interests first and foremost, similar to the development practices of traditional donors like the U.S. or other DAC donors (Dreher et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, some studies have shown that China is shifting the existing norms in development aid and that the convergence process occurring between Northern and Southern donors produces a 'two-way socialization' in which the actions of each donor influence the others (Kratz & Pavličević, 2019). China and other Southern donors follow the existing rules while establishing different strategies from DAC donors, which in turn prompt the DAC donors to the norms embodied by the actions of Southern donors (Mawdsley, 2018).

One of the manifestations of China's development cooperation is the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). BRI is a part of China's foreign policy and development cooperation strategies to extend and assert its influence within the global sphere. BRI does not deal with a single project but a network of projects that engage a myriad of actors across the world. A BRI project is any project under the BRI umbrella, although the projects may each demonstrate unique characteristics and may or may not have different configurations. It has been argued that China deliberately keeps BRI as vague as possible to ensure that any project they work on abroad could fall under the Belt and Road Initiative (Yu, 2019; Buckley, 2020).

Many scholars argue that BRI is used as China's geopolitical tool to gain influence and power in a world where China is challenging the US and Western hegemony (Yu, 2017; Yu, 2019). Others think that BRI is using economic means to reach political ends, as it is discursively represented and articulated in economic terms (e.g., trade connectivity, development, and financing) (Damuri et al., 2019; Lams, 2018; Zeng, 2019). BRI comprises six economic corridors, including the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), China-Mongolia-Russia, China-Indochina, Central Asia, and Africa. BRI projects tend to have loose schemes and flexible arrangements, so the host countries could tailor the projects according to their needs and interests (Chan & Song, 2020).

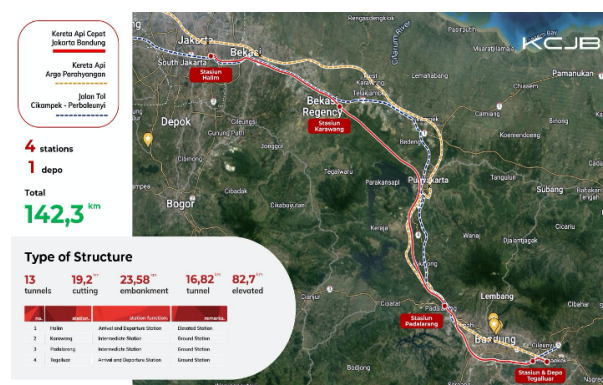
Discursive Representations of The Jakarta-Bandung High Speed Railway Project

The Indonesian government has long been developing plans to revitalize railway tracks across Java, the most populous island in Indonesia with more than 150 million inhabitants. In 2014, the central government finally announced the construction of the Jakarta-Bandung HSR project, beginning in the western part of Java in Jakarta, with an option to continue to Surabaya, the capital of East Java (Negara & Suryadinata, 2018).

The Jakarta-Bandung HSR project was eventually awarded to China after bidding wars between Japan and China in 2015. The Jakarta-Bandung HSR is projected to be another transportation option between two of Indonesia's largest cities, offering high-

speed journeys of 350km/hour at top speed and 40 minutes of travel time over 142.3 km (Negara & Suryadinata, 2018). A map of the HSR routes and its stations is shown below.

Figure 1: Map of High-Speed Railway routes and its stations



Source: KCJB

The HSR project is a chance to showcase China and its companies' capabilities and capacity to fill infrastructure gaps in BRI countries. The Jakarta-Bandung HSR project is also the first Chinese-backed HSR project in Southeast Asia under the BRI (Kratz & Pavličević, 2019) that came to fruition. From the Chinese perspective, the project is an opportunity to achieve "win-win cooperation" and show its capabilities to construct a high-speed railway and its supporting infrastructures in Indonesia. Indonesia also utilizes the Jakarta-Bandung HSR as a New Developmentalism agenda under the Jokowi administration (Warburton, 2018), focusing on infrastructure and economic growth (Guild & Chen, 2021). Moreover, the HSR project is discursively represented by the government and its proxies – local governments, KCIC, and SOEs companies under KCIC – as a symbol of 'modern infrastructure,' signaling tightening cooperation with China and

bringing many benefits.

In addition, the infrastructure strategy also stems from what Warburton (2016; 2018) calls 'New Developmentalism' in Indonesia. In the period in the late 1990s, throughout the recovery from the financial crisis, even though there were factional splits among political classes on whether to pursue liberalism or protectionism, to a degree, Indonesia pursued a more liberal economic agenda by opening up the economy, particularly in trade and investment policies (World Bank, 2020). New Developmentalism is vital in state-led development and focuses on economic growth while retaining some aspects of neoliberalism (Bresser-Pereira & Carlos, 2016).

Related to the Jakarta-Bandung HSR project, the Government of Indonesia has hailed the project as one of the landmarks of Jokowi's administration. Through multiple communication channels, either via mass media or social media, state officials portray the HSR project as having positive benefits, while the negative impacts are rarely mentioned (The Jakarta Post, 2020). Similar discourses are also used by the KCIC consortium and the Indonesian companies within the consortium (WIKA, KAI, PTPN VIII, and Jasa Marga). Two significant benefits are portrayed in the text and other forms of representation used by the state and the associated joint venture: transportation and economic benefits. Regarding transportation benefits, the project is portrayed as a promise of 'connectivity' and 'modernization.' 'Connectivity' discourse is used throughout policy and project documents. In the policy

documents, 'connectivity' is the main frame to describe infrastructure provision (Ministry of National Development Planning, 2020, 2019; Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs, 2011).

Meanwhile, the 'modernization' discourse relates the project to Indonesia and Southeast Asia's first High-Speed Railway. KCIC's former president director framed the HSR project as a 'dream comes true'. The language used by the government and KCIC demonstrates that the high-speed railway is envisioned to show 'progress' and 'modernity.' The project is also connected to Jokowi-era 'New Developmentalism' (Warburton, 2016; 2018) – emulating China's success – by underpinning state nationalism, export-led economic growth, and infrastructure-led economic growth. Moreover, the government also has the means and capabilities to promote the discourse of 'benefits,' 'progress,' and 'modernity' through officials, mass media, and official social media accounts.

Regarding economic advantages, the government and affiliated entities openly discuss the possibility of generating employment, establishing new economic hubs through developing Transit-Oriented Developments (TODs) and High-Speed Rail (HSR) stations, and the potential for increased revenues. As discussed above, the Chinese-backed HSR project has been positively portrayed by the Chinese and Indonesian governments by showing its positive impacts and potential contributions to economic growth and infrastructure development.

Responses of the Local Communities

Across the qualitative sample, all respondents supported the overall HSR project in terms of its contribution to national development, except two from NGOs, namely WALHI and KPI (*Komunitas Pohon Indonesia/Indonesian Tree Community*). The support for the project is an extension of the support for national development as planned by the national government. Some of the respondents also listed the benefits promoted by the government through mass media.

"I support this project because the national development may have been planned. There is medium-term development and long-term development. It has been discussed from a scientific perspective by the government. Broadly speaking, I agree and will not obstruct it" (Interview, Endah, 2021).

On the other hand, the in-depth interviews conducted for this research illustrate that communities have mixed feelings about the project implementation – particularly those that live near the construction sites. The respondents living near the construction sites, such as those in the Tipar Silih Asih Complex in Bandung City and Darangdan, Purwakarta District, have refused to receive the relatively small monetary compensation offered by KCIC in return for agreement to continue the project construction without complaint. Instead, people in these regions have asked the KCIC to buy their houses or rice fields at market price so they can move elsewhere.

"The point is we support any government project, still support it. But I ask for the safety of the citizens. The government's goal to develop this is for the welfare of the community. If we are disadvantageous, then it is not a development, but destruction. Harming society is not the goal of development. That is all for me. So, we do not even want to hamper, slow down or oppose national development. We do not mean it. But, we, the community, also deserve justice. The ultimate goal is the well-being" (Interview, Herman, 2021).

Across the interviewees, the closer they were to the site, the more they opposed the project implementation given the disadvantages they experienced, while at the same time not necessarily rejecting the broader goal of infrastructure development per se. There are three perceived disadvantages, as discussed by the respondents, namely livelihoods, pollution, and disasters. First, the project has adversely impacted the local community's livelihoods. In Kompleks Tipar Silih Asih, eight consecutive tunnel blasts in September-October 2019 cracked their houses, roofs, and roads, affecting the groundwater as the soil shifted. The respondents in Kompleks Tipar who have experienced explosions explained the current situation.

"Because from the results of the LAPI ITB and the geological team stated that this land had cracked underneath and there is a [soil] movement beneath the mountain towards the village" (Interview, Sony, 2021).

"Houses can collapse at any time"
(Interview, Akbar, 2021).

Figure 2: The effects of tunnel blast on residents' houses in *Kompleks Tipar Silih Asih*



Source: residents' documentation

In Margawangi, Bandung City, project activities have harmed residents' livelihoods through excessive noise pollution, vibrations causing structural damage, and groundwater contamination, rendering it unusable for household needs. Environmental risks are also a primary concern, as the project lacks a proper Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or AMDAL in Indonesia. The AMDAL was only shared with local NGOs and communities upon request, with no public consultation, resulting in a lack of transparency and information.

Approximately 38% of respondents, including retirees and self-employed individuals, face income instability due to the project. They fear displacement because their homes or rice fields have been damaged. All respondents in the three neighborhoods are prepared to relocate but await proper compensation. Additionally, around half of the

Margawangi and Darangdan respondents worry about potential health issues and electronic device damage from electromagnetic radiation associated with the HSR.

Respondents generally exhibit low trust in the government and affiliated companies, leading to increased opposition to the project. Suspicion toward ethnic Chinese and China, rooted in historical anti-Chinese sentiment and Suharto-era conditioning, is still prevalent (Anwar, 2019). During interviews, many doubted China's motives and viewed Chinese companies as cunning and deceitful. Concerns about China's debt-trap diplomacy and the predominance of Chinese workers in the project, with locals mostly in low-level positions, also emerged. The local communities were growing wary and taking matters into their own hands by creating informal groups, speaking to mass media, or posting their opinions on social media (Plummer, 2019).

In addition, WALHI, an environmental NGO, has contended that the project violates environmental regulations meant to protect the local community. The project's hasty inclusion in government plans lacked proper public consultation, raising concerns about legal breaches and the marginalization of local rights. Additionally, WALHI and KPI emphasize the lack of urgency and importance in implementing an HSR line on Jakarta-Bandung and developing TODs near the stations.

A more comprehensive picture emerges from the social media. Analyzing 340 comments on the Instagram accounts of the then-West Java Governor, Ridwan Kamil (@

ridwankamil), and KCIC (@keretacepat_id) accounts shows a slightly different story. On KCIC's account, the comments were dominated by positive sentiment (45%), followed by neutral (32.5%) and negative sentiments (22.5%). Meanwhile, on the @ridwankamil account, the majority of the comments have positive sentiment (52.5%), followed by negative (33.9%) and neutral ones (13.6%).

Table 1: Sentiment Analysis of the Instagram Comments

Sentiment	@keretacepat_id	@ridwankamil
Positive	104	31
Neutral	75	8
Negative	52	20
Total comments	231	59
Positive %	45.0	52.5
Neutral %	32.5	13.6
Negative %	22.5	33.9
Total %	100.0	100.0

Positive comments are associated with the support for the project. At least three major themes emerged from the discourse analysis on social media (Table 1), namely support for the infrastructure development, support for the HSR, and support for the governor of West Java, Ridwan Kamil. On the Instagram account of Ridwan Kamil, the former West Java Governor, the project is represented as “the first high-speed railway in Southeast Asia,” connected to “4 new urban areas” and “creating new jobs.” Ridwan Kamil stated that the available jobs also employ local people, such as those from the Cipeundeuy Subdistrict.

Moreover, the then-governor alleviated concerns over China's debt trap by saying the project is under a B2B scheme without using state budgets. The governor reproduces a similar framing that Minister Luhut has said regarding the debt-trap concern (The Jakarta Post, 2020). The positive comments are primarily in line with the discourse produced by the Indonesian government.

On the other hand, the negative comments are primarily associated with the project's perceived disadvantages, risks, and impacts. Many commenters expressed concerns about being ‘victims’ of the project due to floods, traffic jams, and risks of disasters such as landslides and earthquakes. Concerns regarding the Chinese debt trap and the build quality of the HSR were also shown. They also countered Ridwan Kamil's narrative on local employment, saying that most workers there are Chinese.

The neutral comments encompassed diverse themes, namely the job opportunities or recruitment process at the KCIC, the general knowledge of the project, the design of the HSR, and other aspects of the HSR, with no apparent positive or negative sentiment.

Problematization of Jakarta-Bandung HSR Project

Indonesia's infrastructure priorities often prioritize company profits over quality and the environment, as seen in HSR and TOD projects (Walhi Jabar, 2019; Kadarisman, 2017). The local community and NGOs' voices are disregarded without proper public consultation, resulting in marginalization and rights violations (Walhi Jabar,

2019). The government employs increasing violence and power, breaching laws meant to protect against development's adverse impacts, exemplified by Law No. 2 of 2012 on Land Acquisition in the Public Interest during Jokowi's tenure (Aziz, 2016).

The Indonesian government prioritizes profit over comprehensive urban planning for Jakarta-Bandung. Their actions reflect a profit-focused approach, including omitting the HSR project from development plans and altering regulations to accommodate it. This willingness to bend the rules for financial gain is evident in the government's land use changes. (Walhi Jabar, 2019). Also, transparency and accountability are lacking in the national and local governments and KCIC. Local communities needed to be more informed about project benefits and risks, relying on media and community leaders for information. The absence of proper public consultation and site assessments before project initiation further compounds the issue.

Alternative Narratives and The Hegemonic Discourses

In this section, the author explores the hegemonic discourses, alternative narratives, and power dynamics among the actors relevant to the Jakarta-Bandung HSR project—the hegemonic discourses and opposition to such discourses related to the production of discourses and power struggles. Members of local communities and CSOs contest the discourses produced by the government and its proxies. Examining and analyzing interviews and social media reveal three strands of alternative discourses.

The Hegemonic and Alternative Discourses

The emergence of hegemonic and alternative discourses reveals the power struggles between two sets of actors. On the one hand, the first actors set the narratives of development cooperation by framing the project as beneficial and contributing to national development, especially in West Java province. On the other hand, the second actors produce their discourses based on the perceived risks and disadvantages that have been felt. Although the second set of actors does not reject the overall project, they challenge limited public participation spaces and the negative impacts of project construction near their sites.

Production of Hegemonic Discourses and Power Struggles

This project sheds light on the imbalanced power relations between the Indonesian government and its collaborators, on one hand, and the affected communities on the other. Drawing on Michel Foucault's analysis of truth and power, certain discourses shape "regimes of truth" that dominate how people understand and organize their world (Foucault, 1980, 2002). Through official messaging amplified by mass media, the government and its allies try to establish a dominant narrative that frames the project as a symbol of national progress. This hegemonic discourse, crafted by those in power, conveniently masks the negative impacts on local communities, obscuring the realities on the ground.

While the government wields control over knowledge production and the “regimes of truth” (Escobar, 1995), local communities are not simply passive recipients. Operating through informal groups and social media, they find alternative ways to voice their aspirations and counter the dominant narrative. Despite limited formal avenues for participation, these grassroots movements, driven by shared experiences and local knowledge, prove quite effective. They have not only pushed for public consultations but also challenged the project’s trajectory through meetings and negotiations with various stakeholders, including the KCIC consortium, government officials, and NGOs.

This decentralized power and locally-grown knowledge empower communities to self-govern and generate “counter-conducts” that challenge the existing order, both in action and discourse. As Foucault points out (1991), these “counter-conducts” are intertwined with the history of governmentality itself, forming a continuous dialogue between control and resistance. In the case of the Jakarta-Bandung HSR project, two key forms of “counter-conduct” have emerged: the formation of informal groups and the use of social media to express dissenting views and concerns. These acts of dissent also reflect a desire for self-improvement and community-driven governance.

By creating space for alternative public interests and critiques of government and project practices, these “counter-conducts” have transformative potential. For local communities, they offer tools to mitigate project risks and advocate for fair compensation and

greater participation. For the government and project implementers, they necessitate strategizing in the face of dissent and addressing community demands. This dynamic interplay between the dominant discourse and counter-hegemonic narratives showcases the varied ways in which power is exercised and contested.

Alternative Discourses Produced by the Local Communities

The local communities are fragmented into two stances: supporting or opposing the project. Within the local communities this study interviewed, most respondents support the project for the more significant objective of national development but reject parts of the implementation and construction process near their neighborhoods. It is also interesting to note that while the local communities affected directly by the project voiced more negative views towards the project, the people who do not live near the construction project and have experienced ‘Whoosh’ HSR during trial sessions have predominantly positive views.

The support for the project derived from three factors: trust toward the government and China, national development, and perceived progress or advancement. Satrio, a Jakarta City Transportation Council respondent, actively supports the project and has experienced public trials. He firmly believes that Indonesia urgently needs the modernization of its transport infrastructure and a high-speed railway to connect various Indonesian cities. Similarly, Dini, a respondent who has experienced public trials, also

holds a positive outlook on the High-Speed Rail (HSR) project. Both respondents see the HSR as a significant step towards advancing Indonesia's railway infrastructure, emphasizing speed, comfort, and modernity as top priorities.

On the other hand, those who oppose the projects have produced alternative narratives to counter-hegemonic discourse based on similar concerns regarding infrastructure projects and South-South Cooperation worldwide. At least three strands of discourses regarding the Jakarta-Bandung HSR emerge from interviews and social media analysis: 'development for whom,' 'Chinese debt-trap,' and 'disrupted livelihoods.'

First, concerning the government's strategy in dealing with the local communities, a discourse arose from the local communities questioning who would benefit from the development project. Local communities are questioning the government's approach to engaging them in the development project, challenging the official narrative the government and KCIC presented.

While the government emphasizes 'modernization' and 'connectivity,' local communities and environmental NGOs argue that the benefits are skewed towards specific groups, including those near stations, frequent Jakarta-Bandung travelers, and the middle to high classes. Social media comments dismiss the High-Speed Rail (HSR) project as "*unfaedah*" (useless). The construction plan indicates that the project passes through only three neighborhoods, and the nearest stations are 30-45 minutes away. Residents prefer private vehicles, giving good

access to toll highways and national roads. Even upon completion, locals may stick to private transport, rendering the HSR ineffective in addressing traffic congestion and enhancing connectivity.

Moreover, locals challenge official claims of material benefits like job creation and economic growth. Critics argue that the project primarily serves state and business interests, neglecting broader public concerns and local geography and demography contexts. For example, local job opportunities are limited to 'low-level positions,' while 'high-level positions' are occupied by Chinese workers. Observations reveal that most Chinese workers are residing in closed enclaves, perpetuating racial stereotypes and anti-Chinese sentiments. The Jakarta Post (2023) observed that the Chinese staff operates the HSR as the local staff still needs necessary training during the first year of operation. Thus, the discourse produced by local communities challenges the official discourse on who will benefit and what benefit the local community gains from such development.

Other discourse that repeatedly emerged from interview respondents and social media commenters is how the project has "disrupted livelihoods," including noise and groundwater pollution, traffic jams, damaged houses and rice fields, and health risks. For example, the respondents from Kompleks Tipar narrated the project as "destroying their close-knit neighborhoods," they "no longer feel safe and comfortable." As told by the respondents, the damages from the construction have shaken up their homes and the

community that have lived in the neighborhoods for years and now have to move out due to irreparable damages.

Agung, a neighbourhood chief (Ketua RW) from Kompleks Tipar, and Gustav, a community leader from Kompleks Margawangi, expressed concerns that the residents are “anxious and restless” about the current situation and their future. On social media, some commenters complained that the project had disrupted traffic and caused floods in some areas near the project sites. Most respondents and commenters blamed KCIC and associated companies for damaging their livelihoods. They deemed the local governments “powerless” to demand compensation and put sanctions on KCIC and associated companies that have produced the damages. Thus, the local communities prefer to deal with their problems through informal groups as they have a low level of trust in government officials and agencies.

Concerns about China's debt trap due to cost overruns and increased interest rates are also mentioned, alongside concerns regarding Indonesia's debt sustainability and growing dependence on China (The Jakarta Post, 2020). As one user on social media commented, this project is none other than a “Chinese money trap” that only benefits China in the long run and traps Indonesia into ever-growing dependence on China. Critics also voiced concerns over the government's intervention to use the state budget to cover cost overruns. The Chinese proposal was initially projected to be cheaper than the Japanese one. However, the cost overruns and ballooning debt interest from 2% to 3.4%

eventually make it more expensive than the Japanese proposal (BBC Indonesia, 2023). The discourse of the debt trap in Indonesia echoes similar concerns for Chinese-backed projects in other countries, such as Kenya and Laos, that threaten the debt sustainability of both countries (Onjala, 2018; Westerman, 2019).

The ground experiences shared by the respondents reveal the diversity of views and alternative discourses produced by the local communities in West Java. It is not an isolated case but part of a broader trend. The expansion of South-South Cooperation and Southern donors, coupled with their increasing prominence on the global stage, has attracted public scrutiny. Social movements and NGOs have joined numerous countries to advocate for common causes. These include addressing the shared experiences of marginalized communities as disposable victims and advocating for fair compensation for the loss of their lands, ecosystems, and livelihoods (Mawdsley, 2019). However, the fragmented voices and perceptions within the local communities make it difficult to counter the dominant discourse produced by the government and its proxies.

The Hegemonic Discourses Reiterated

In response to the alternative narratives presented by local communities, the government and its affiliates reiterate the discourse emphasizing the “mutual benefits” while countering the “debt-trap” narratives. One respondent, Hilman, an employee at WIKA (a part of the KCIC Consortium), concurs that the project will bring numer-

ous advantages to Indonesia, including the advancement of train technology and job opportunities for residents. Their support is rooted in trust and the belief that the government and China will deliver a high-quality HSR. Additionally, their support for the project extends to a broader notion of national development. Thus, those favoring the project promote the hegemonic discourse set forth by the government and its proxies.

In pursuing Indonesia's New Developmentalism agenda (Warburton, 2018) through the Jakarta-Bandung HSR, the government and its proxies promote hegemonic discourses that subsumed those advanced by local communities. These discourses align with the government's and capitalists' interests in achieving the twin economic growth and infrastructure development goals under President Jokowi's administration. Indonesia's New Developmentalism coincides with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) objectives, enabling the Indonesian government to pursue its developmental agenda through Sino-Indonesian development cooperation. Hence, the principles of "mutual benefits" and "solidarity," which are fundamental to South-South Cooperation, primarily serve the interests of business and political elites who directly benefit from the project.

The findings also underscore the convergence and divergence of multiple voices within local communities and the state government. Various perspectives and discourses on Chinese-led development cooperation have developed and been perpetuated within recipient countries over the years. This research has demonstrated how multiple actors

within a recipient country express their concerns and have various interests that may or may not align with the hegemonic discourses. The hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses advanced by the actors in this project highlight how a Global South country actively shapes its objectives and destinies.

Conclusion

The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway (HSR) project is hailed as a signature infrastructure project for Indonesia and China. At the center of this project are hegemonic discourses and alternative views presented by two sets of actors. The first set of actors comprised both Chinese and Indonesian governments, the KCIC consortium, and West Java local governments. The second set of actors comprised local communities affected by the project and local environmental NGOs, or those that oppose the project for various other reasons identified in the previous chapters. The former actors act upon the conviction of "mutual benefits" that will be reaped by both countries and justify the construction of the HSR project in the name of 'modernization' of transportation and increasing infrastructure and people-to-people 'connectivity.'

On the other hand, the local communities and NGOs have experienced damage to their lands and houses and environmental degradation. Furthermore, this article shows unequal power relations between the government, its proxies, and local communities. The government and its proxies could produce a hegemonic discourse through various channels, via speeches, officials' statements,

official texts and documents, and mass media and social media accounts of the company and elected government officials.

This study found that there are many perspectives and multiple realities to uncover in the future. First, in the development cooperation field, this study calls for a more in-depth analysis dealing with China or other countries, especially considering the nature of South-South cooperation. Second, the views expressed by the BRI project's local communities and recipient countries highlight the importance of public participation and people's voices for development projects. It warrants further discussion on the meanings and manifestation of South-South cooperation based on mutual benefits and solidarity among the Global South.

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