GLOBAL SOUTH
R E V I E W

Editor's Note

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The current conjuncture in global politics is marked by immense turbulence and fragmentation. The genocide in Gaza continues to unfold, painfully illustrating the limits of global governance and the selective application of international law. In Indonesia and other Asian countries, we are witnessing democratic backsliding and the consolidation of authoritarian practices, reminding us that the struggle for freedom is never guaranteed. Meanwhile, the escalation of trade wars and strategic rivalries—between the United States and China, or within new multipolar blocs—underscores the vulnerability of Global South nations to external shocks and great power competition.

At this crossroads, the meaning of "Global South solidarity" becomes a pressing question. Is it an aspiration, a rhetorical device, or a living practice? And how do we confront the contradictions, hierarchies, and ambivalences within the South itself? The articles in this issue each provide a critical entry point into this debate, offering fresh perspectives on marginality, resistance, diplomacy, and postcolonial justice.

Hemalia Kusumadewi's article on the Bangsamoro and Rohingya reminds us that solidarity within the South is never simple. By framing these communities as the "subaltern of the subaltern," she shows how certain groups within the Global South experience double marginalization—excluded both by dominant global hierarchies and by more powerful actors within their own regions. This contribution challenges us to interrogate the internal fractures that weaken South–South solidarity and to consider how genuine solidarity must address intra-South hierarchies rather than simply opposing the North.

Muhammad Reza Suleiman and Kayode Omojuwa's study of the One Plus-Africa Summits situates Africa at the center of renewed great-power competition. Through a postcolonial lens, they argue that summits such as Russia–Africa, China–Africa, and France–Africa risk reproducing patterns of dependency and exploitation, even as they claim to offer partnership. The analysis forces us to ask whether the rhetoric of South–South cooperation is sufficient, or whether African agency is once again subordinated to external designs. Their work highlights the urgent need for more equitable models of international engagement that recognize Africa not as a passive recipient but as a sovereign actor with developmental priorities of its own.

Yosua Saut Marulitua Gultom and colleagues' article on the Zapatistas returns us to Latin America's radical traditions of resistance. By examining the Zapatistas' decentralized governance model and critique of neoliberal globalization, the authors reveal how indigenous

movements can articulate alternative visions of democracy, autonomy, and dignity. The Zapatista slogan—"a world where many worlds fit"—resonates far beyond Mexico, offering inspiration to global movements that seek pluralism and inclusivity in an era dominated by homogenizing capitalist logics. This piece reminds us that solidarity is not only a diplomatic or institutional project, but also a grassroots practice of building alternative worlds from below.

Danial Darwis and Aria Aditya Setiawan's analysis of Indonesia's membership in BRICS brings the discussion closer to home. Their article illustrates how Indonesia is navigating the opportunities and risks of a multipolar global order. On one hand, BRICS offers access to alternative development financing and platforms for South–South cooperation. On the other, Indonesia faces the danger of being overshadowed by larger powers within the bloc, or of alienating its ASEAN partners. By framing Indonesia's policy as a form of "hedging," the authors shed light on the dilemmas faced by middle powers in the Global South as they seek to balance autonomy, economic opportunity, and geopolitical pressure.

Fitri Fatharani and Shofwan Al Banna Choiruzzad's article on Vietnam's hedging strategy in the US–China trade war further elaborates the theme of small and middle powers navigating structural pressures. Through their analysis of Vietnam's geo-economic response during the Trump administration, they show how Global South states attempt to minimize vulnerability while maximizing opportunity in contexts of great-power rivalry. Vietnam's case demonstrates both the possibilities and limitations of hedging as a strategy, raising broader questions about how Global South economies can protect their sovereignty in the face of volatile global politics.

Nurul Indrarini and Ardhitya Eduard Yeremia Lalisang's study on Dutch cultural object repatriation takes us into the cultural and symbolic dimensions of postcolonial justice. Their content analysis of Dutch policies (2020–2024) reveals the persistence of paternalistic attitudes even as the Netherlands adopts rhetoric of partnership. By showing how repatriation is framed as "cultural cooperation" rather than restitution, the article exposes how power asymmetries are reinscribed in the very process meant to address historical injustices. This contribution highlights that solidarity also requires confronting the politics of memory, heritage, and narrative authority.

Finally, the book review by Md. Masudur Rahman and Khadiza Khatun offers an intellectual bridge by highlighting South Asian perspectives on society and sociology. By engaging with the edited volume *Society and Sociology in Bangladesh*, the review underscores the importance of locally grounded scholarship that enriches our understanding of social realities in the Global South. In a journal dedicated to amplifying Southern voices, such reflections are vital for building epistemic solidarity.

Together, these contributions remind us that Global South solidarity is not an abstract ideal but a complex, fragile, and constantly negotiated project. Yet at a time of genocide, authoritarian resurgence, and geopolitical fragmentation, reflection alone is not enough. Solidarity must be reclaimed as action: to resist oppression, to dismantle hierarchies both external and internal, and to create spaces of care, justice, and emancipation.

The Global South has always been more than a geographical marker; it is a political project, born of struggle. This issue calls on us to carry that spirit forward—to connect our resistances, to amplify our voices, and to imagine alternative futures where dignity, justice, and freedom are not privileges, but rights. The time for solidarity is now.

Sincerely,

Mohtar Mas'oed – Editor in Chief
Suci Lestari Yuana – Managing Editor

GLOBAL SOUTH
REVIEW

The Hierarchical Divide of Global South:

Rohingya and Bangsamoro as Southeast Asian Subaltern

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This paper attempts to understand the contemporary discourse of Subalternity and the Global South, particularly through the lens of Southeast Asian marginalized Muslim communities, the Bangsamoro of Philippines, and the Rohingya of Myanmar. This is to understand the deeper hierarchical divide within the Global South that threatens the 'South Solidarity', and strays away from the mainstream North-South discussion. This paper identifies those groups as 'subaltern of the subaltern', a smaller group of subalterns who have been systematically discriminated against by the larger or more dominant group. This research employs the concept of Subalternity to understand on what basis a group is assigned the identity of being a subaltern, and to understand the discussion of Subalternity in the field of International Relations studies. This research employs a literature review as its primary methodology. This paper finds a deeper hierarchical divide within countries of the Global South, which manifests in communities coined as 'subaltern of subaltern', or those who are marginalized within the Global South. This implication casts doubts upon the sustainability of the 'South Solidarity' agenda.

Keywords: *Bangsamoro, Global South, Rohingya, South Solidarity, Subaltern*

Introduction

Polarity always persists in civilization of any timeline, hence the continuous existence of subalternity. One of the most notable results of extreme polarity is what Spivak (2010, p.35) called as an epistemic violence, as in narrating the already-colonialized, oppressed group as the 'Other', the group eventually known as the subaltern. Hamel et al. (2024) takes the subalternity question further beyond Spivak (1988)'s 'Can Subalterns Speak?'; to questions 'Can Subalterns Exists?', constantly questioning the agency and the right to exist of the isolated. Moving from the common discussion of the South being the subaltern of the North, this paper would highlight the existence of subaltern in Global South, particularly in Southeast Asia. Quite a claim, as most states in this region are included as the world's subaltern. This is due to the fact that the majority of the countries are formerly colonialized, and classified as economically developing states. The term 'subaltern in Global South' does not refer to an entire subaltern state in Southeast Asia.

Instead, it indicates the existence of certain groups being classified as 'subaltern' within these global south countries. This is the concept that will be referred to as 'subaltern of the subaltern'. This concept is yet to be prominent in the Global South discussion, and perhaps questionable in its attempt of classification. How can a colonized, marginalized state have its own smaller scale of subaltern?

Antonius (2023) elaborated that most colonized entities may have their own subalterns, posing a question on 'Can the Subaltern of the Subaltern Speak?' which practically talks about *the marginalized of the marginalized*. This paper points out the existence of these communities in the Global South, in spite of being described as able to 'mutually-recognize the sufferings of the marginalized'. This paper intends to display its doubt toward the 'South Solidarity' through the lens of two subaltern Muslim communities, which are Rohingya and Bangsamoro in Southeast Asia.

Southeast Asia indeed has baggage full of civil, domestic conflicts, with most of them being either an ethnoconflict or separatist issue (Candelaria, 2020). Most Southeast Asian countries also had a history of colonialism. These resulted into divided societies, and some parts of these societies are 'subaltern of the subaltern'. Therefore, this paper will take its 'place' in Southeast Asia, a 'Global South region' which has its own subaltern communities, in which the making of subalternity itself is influenced by colonialism. This implies that the nexus of Subaltern and Global South is intertwined

in the realm of postcolonialist discourse, and it can not be denied that the two are interconnected to understand how subaltern manifests and its historic efforts to stand up against the hegemon. This statement will be further explored in the Discussion session.

This paper specifically discusses the Muslim communities of Bangsamoro and Rohingya as 'subaltern of the subaltern'. This means they are being identified as the representation of the 'divided society' phenomenon, where they became the marginalized part of a society that lives in Global South countries. This discussion took place exclusively in the Global South, and does not include any content about the Global North in the discussion. This paper attempts to shift the discussion of 'South Solidarity' to highlight the concern of deeper divide within Global South, rather than focusing on the rather mainstream North-South divide.

Discourse of Subalternity often involves the marginalization of Muslim community, particularly as 'the other' of the western world (Bracke & Aguilar, 2022; Shaker & Ahmadi, 2022; Danish et al., 2020; Brandt, 2019). O'Brien (2016) explains how Islamic community and Islamist discourse are locked into the binary polar opposite of European civilization, due to sparking narrative conflict of 'Islamophobia vs. Europhobia'. This polarity is reflected in some Southeast Asian states. Despite being a majority in some states, Muslim communities are the subaltern of the subaltern on the contrary. This paper has identified the Rohingya of Myanmar and the

Bangsamoro of Philippines among them, and will centralize the discussion of subalternity in Global South on these two cases. Past research has attempted to either discuss the existence of these subaltern Muslims in Southeast Asian countries (Rahman, 2023; Wahyudi, 2022), studying how Rohingya (Shahabuddin, 2023; Martuscelli et al., 2022; Alam & Purakayastha, 2020; Anugrah, 2019; Vartavarian, 2018) or Bangsamoro being treated as subalterns (Choiroh, 2023; Rahman, 2023; Milligan, 2020; Adam, 2017; 2016).

Therefore, this paper would contribute in discussing two important matters; first is highlighting the existence of 'subaltern of the subaltern' in Southeast Asia to picturize the deeper domestic societal divide in Southeast Asia countries that results in further marginalization of communities with certain features; second is discussing the comparative cases between Bangsamoro and Rohingya, to understand the root cause and after-effects of Muslim minority marginalization in the Global South, and how that signifies a 'deeper divide' within the Global South. This paper's contribution is significant in highlighting how most scholars focus on the larger divide of North-South, but continues to avoid the hierarchical divide within the Global South itself.

Thus, this paper will be arranged systematically as follows; the first part will introduce Subaltern as the main framework, which include the discussion of Subaltern in the International Relations studies, and the research method used in this paper. The second part will discuss the identification of subaltern, under what condition an entity can be said as 'subaltern of the subaltern', with continued elaboration on Bangsamoro's and Rohingya's history and contemporary condition. The third part will discuss the cause and effect of said marginalization, which will discuss three important elements of colonialism, Islamophobia, and violent conflicts. The next part discusses the state of art on Global South – Subaltern discourse, also proving the claim and argument made on the later part of the paper. The final part of conclusion will emphasize the research's finding and answering the research question that has been posed.

Theoretical Framework
Subaltern Concept

The Subaltern Studies is understood as a multifaceted field of study; including literature, sociology, culture, and history; which focuses on the activity and politics of 'subordinated' groups and more often than not intersections with postcolonial thoughts (Chakrabarty & Prakash in Gramsci, 2021). The term 'subaltern' is defined as a person, figure, or a group which represents the opposite of a citizen, or in other words, the 'other' of a society (Thomas, 2018). Subaltern communities will be defined as classed, gendered, and raced subjectivities who were, or are, systematically dismissed in participating in common platforms of civil society (Dutta-Bergman in Place & Ciszek, 2021).

Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" kickstarted discourse and scientific research on subaltern studies, as Spivak explains how

subaltern is defined by its particular political, societal, and cultural exclusion from what is acknowledged as 'common' in certain societies. Originated from group of Indian Scholars that formed the Subaltern Studies, this concept took inspiration largely from the Gramscian understanding of subaltern as 'the social group(s) subjected to dominant power(s), yet rebel against them to change their status-quo' (Gramsci, 2021). This understanding receives various responses and criticism later on, but Gramsci's definition of subaltern contributes to this paper's choice of study cases whereas Bangsamoro and Rohingya both are engaged in conflicts where they have various attempts to fight back.

The core understanding of this concept is to bring the perspective of the colonialized, or marginalized, to understand those who have been robbed of an agency and intentionally put in a 'space of difference' by the existing hegemon group (Naikar, 2019). Mendoza (2018) further emphasizes the importance of subaltern studies academically in preventing the abandonment of many indigenous and marginalized groups in discussion of contemporary critical theories, as invalidation of these groups' epistemologies grew among scholars.

In the field of International Relations (IR), subalternity has not only been assigned to social groups, but also states. These are mostly colonialized states that have been historically disenfranchised by Western/ North colonizers, which means they are mostly states of the Global South. Ratuva (2016) clarifies that societies in Global South are within the subaltern position in the

global configuration, shaped by their shared colonial experiences. This understanding was mostly initiated by Ayoob (2002) who proposes the notion of *subaltern realism*, and later on Sharp (2011) with conceptualizing *subaltern geopolitics*.

As subaltern has its epistemological root in postcolonialism, the usage of subaltern identity could be ascribed to a state that is one of the main subjects of postcolonialist thought. This concept of Subaltern in IR will be utilized to understand under what circumstance, and what does it take for a group to be viewed as a subaltern of the subaltern, and to understand both the root causes and impact of marginalization toward these communities. This understanding is important to show how certain communities may emerge as a 'subaltern of the subaltern' even among the Global South, as well as to understand how deep the division of the Global South goes.

Method

This paper employs literature review as its primary analytical method. Literature review allows the author to use available literature, publications, and other data, to validate arguments elaborated in this writing (Synder, 2019). The method significantly contributes to understanding and analyzing how a division happens within communities in the Global South. Literatures are chosen based on those which discuss such notable subjects: conceptualization of subaltern of the subaltern; subalternity in Global South; how Muslim communities often becomes subaltern community in Global

South countries; discussion of internal conflicts in Global South which involves majority of the population (as the oppressor) and the marginalized (as the oppressed). Antonius (2023) in 'Can the Subaltern of the Subaltern Speak?' explains how Muslim communities often become a 'subaltern of the subaltern' community, particularly Muslim communities who have been subjected to colonization. O'Brien (2016) in 'Islamophobia & Europhobia: Subaltern Discourse & Its Limits' also discusses Muslim communities' tendency to be subaltern. Both of these literatures discuss the subalternity of Muslim communities in different contexts, and were the basis of consideration for the case studies' choices.

Anugrah (2019) in 'Othering the Minority: Comparative Study of Papua in Indonesia's New Order Era and Rohingya in Myanmar during Military Junta' explains a comparative study between subaltern communities (Papuan People and Rohingya). This literature took place in Southeast Asia, explaining how both communities are treated as the 'others' by the government and majority of their respective countries. This literature contributes as the basis of categorizing a community as a subaltern in their own countries. Ratuva (2016) in 'Subalternization of the Global South: Critique of mainstream 'Western' security discourses', positioned Global South as a 'subaltern' within the global power, and directed the focus of discussion from 'West' to 'South'. This literature becomes the fundamental of this paper's claim on how 'Global South' in and of itself is a subaltern,

therefore, a subaltern community in Global South shall be deemed as a 'subaltern of the subaltern'.

The data collection method mainly utilizes archives, books, publications, article journals, and internet-based reports. This method allows the author to increase efficiency in data-collecting stages and receives most updated information.

Results and Discussion

Identifying the Subaltern (of the Subaltern)

This part will introduce a brief history of Bangsamoro and Rohingya, and analyze why they are a part of 'subaltern of the subaltern'. The purpose is to acknowledge the existence of a smaller marginalized group in an already-marginalized group --in this sense, the concept of Global South as inseparable from subalternity itself–and understanding under what circumstances they came to be. This is what would be called a 'subaltern of the subaltern'.

Subaltern of the Subaltern in this paper is a term assigned to a smaller-marginalized, discredited community that lives in an area which has been recognized as being discredited by a 'higher', more powerful hegemon. In this sense, a group that has been historically assigned as a 'subaltern', can be a dominant power over a 'more subaltern' community, while still retaining its 'subaltern' identity due to its condition of systematic disenfranchisement in a larger system. This definition refers to what has been described by Antonius (2023), and an implied understanding in Jones & Robins (2009, p.5-7)'s discourse of Subaltern

Genocide which sourced from 'subaltern frustrations and hostilities'.

Currently, there is no straightforward measure of what counts as a subaltern of the subaltern. But, existing literature has pointed it to the direction of a 'smaller' subaltern group being dominated by a 'larger' subaltern group. The domination often manifests into some sort of structural disenfranchisement, or even explicit statement of not acknowledging the agency of a smaller group, usually done by someone in power. In this paper, Bangsamoro and Rohingya are the subjects to further understand the context of 'subaltern of the subaltern'.

Kapahi & Tañada (2018) describes Bangsamoro as the Filipino-Muslim ethnolinguistic group who resides in the Mindanao, Southern part of Philippine, currently known as Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Muslim Mindanao gained the status of autonomous region, as a solution to the decades-long conflicts in the region. It took a few agreements of peace deals, countless armed confrontations, and 52 years to finally settle things (Rood, 2012). In a span of that 52 years, or arguably for centuries, Bangsamoro has been subjected to structural disenfranchisement from the Philippine government, and much earlier on, the colonizers.

Forms of systematic disenfranchisement suffered by Bangsamoro including forced land-acquisition, depriving economic capability, to armed conflicts that have claimed too many lives. Areas of Mindanao rich with mineral resources were mostly given to non-Muslim and Christian settlers, causing further economic downturn and making Muslim Mindanaoans as the poorest demography in the country (Nobutaka, 2023). This is compounded with the Philippine government forcing children to learn Christianity in schools, with direct comparison towards Christian community's welfare provided by the government (Kapahi & Tanada, 2018). Most importantly, President Ferdinand Marcos imposed Martial Law on Bangsamoro in 1980, which triggered uprisings led by Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1973 and Joseph Estrada's declaration of an all-out war in 2000, which resulted in countless civil wars between Bangsamoro (fought by MNLF and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)) and the Philippines state military force (Mendoza, 2015; Özerdem & Podder, 2012). Ferrer (2023) argued that what was done toward Bangsamoro was 'minoritization' through political-economic marginalization. This systematic alienation has been continuously put in the exceptional space full of conflict, pitted against the rest of the Philippines society, hence Muslim Mindanao became 'the other' of Philippines (Adam, 2017). Although Rood (2012) elaborates on how Bangsamoro's decades of conflict was caused by multitude of factors, but the intentional systematic isolation of Bangsamoro remains the root cause of Philippines' internal conflict.

Author acknowledges that Bangsamoro is not completely innocent either, as Valila Jr (2023), Perez (2021), and Quimpo (2016) found that Moro-induced extremism opens the door to external radical groups, as

well as Moro people's discriminative behavior toward Lumad people (the indigenous minority of Mindanao). However, being a perpetrator of some issues does not erase their status as a 'victim' of others.

On the other hand, the Rohingya of Myanmar faced quite a similar fate, if not much worse. Islam & Khatun (2024) introduce Rohingyas as Muslim from Arakan that have historical ties with Arabian, Bengali, and Persian, but are often classified as an ethnolinguistic group of South Asia. Rohingya's origin is still up to debate however, and most Myanmar nationalist believe Rohingyas are Bengali immigrants who want to claim to be an indigenous ethnic of Burma, now Myanmar (Hasnat & Ahmed, 2023; Druce, 2020). Rohingya have been subjected to persecution from the Myanmar government since 1978, labeling Rohingya as an 'illegal migrant' and denied their citizenship (Hasnat & Ahmed, 2023). The Myanmar 1982 Citizenship Act, exclusion from the 2014 national census, as well as systematic denial of citizenship for Rohingyas forces them to flee and become refugees, due to inhuman treatments including massacre, isolation, forced displacement, and such (Alam, 2019). Salehin (2024) also describes how Rohingya were portrayed as the 'Monstrous Other' in Myanmar national media.

Ansar (2020) called what happened to the Rohingya as 'one of the most protracted and violent humanitarian crises in contemporary history'. Rohingya is the world's largest stateless population, due to the Myanmar government not acknowledging

their existence, and continuing to chase Rohingya out of the state. Scholars and figures from United Nations have regarded what happened to Rohingya as a form of genocide and ethnic cleansing (Bakali, 2021; Faisal, 2020; Sarmin, 2020). In 2019, Gambia has reported Myanmar on allegedly violated the 1948 Genocide Convention, and the International Criminal Court (ICC) approves the case on Myanmar's allegation of crimes against humanity targeting Rohingya (Salehin, 2024: 36; Zahed, 2021). Although, both the ICC and the ICJ investigators cannot reach and investigate further directly in Myanmar, due to Myanmar government's rejection of any kinds of investigation conducted by officials, and the post-2021 military coup shows no significant change to Rohingya's condition. Zahed (2023) discusses how Rohingya actually become a political game between the junta military and National Unity Government (NUG) party, which further emphasize the Rohingyas existence as 'the others'.

Based on what has been found, this paper concludes that Bangsamoro and Rohingya's cases have notable similarities; 1) both are victims of systematic disenfranchisement by their respective governments; 2) both faced violent armed conflicts instigated by governments; 3) both cases have root in colonialism and massive discrimination; 4) both are Muslim minority communities. The similarity in being a Muslim minority in Southeast Asia is quite a topic, as Rahman (2023) noted how these communities have always faced struggle against government and majority oppression

throughout Southeast Asia. These cases can be identified as 'subaltern of the subaltern', as they are the silenced-minority groups who live in Global South countries. Olson (2024) explains this, identifying what kind of situations would cause 'the subaltern silence'. Subaltern being silenced does not necessarily mean a subaltern group does not give response at all, but it is also in a sense that the subaltern's voices are intentionally buried to not be heard. Subaltern is often silenced by the government or the majority, by repressing a subaltern community's freedom of speech, or even worse, 'excluding' them from public life by assigning them a lower status than that of a 'normal person' whether its done through explicit statements or through actions (Morales et al., 2024; Olson, 2024). This is often conducted in accordance with the government's political interest, or majority's will. Thus, Bangsamoro and Rohingya were forced into a condition to be 'silent' just because it is what the government or the majority wants.

Aftermath of Colonialism:
Islamophobia and Violent Conflicts

This part discusses colonialism as the root cause of oppressions, the existence of Islamophobia that worsen marginalization, and violent conflicts as result of systematic marginalization.

Bangsamoro and Rohingya's precarious condition are both rooted in colonialism. Bangsamoro's deeply ingrained modes of resistance and violence were influenced by their continuous resistance toward Spanish, American, and Japanese colonizers (Flor-

esta, 2021; Abubakar, 2019: 93). Moreover, colonizers employed Christian Filipino to annihilate Bangsamoro people, which also make Bangsamoro saw Filipino as foreign invader from the north, and later Filipino also refused Bangsamoro to be included in the nation-building and viewed Bangsamoro as second-class citizen (Rahman, 2023; Valila Jr, 2023; RAGANDANG III, 2018). This made them continue to resist the Philippine government when they noticed another pattern of colonialism. In the case of Rohingya, Ansar (2020) explains that the Rohingya crisis is deeply intertwined with past legacies of colonialism, military dominance, nonexistence of democracy, and others. The deliberate 'divide and rule' strategy of the British colonizer, the different treatment between ethnic and religious majority and minority, has become deeply embedded into Myanmar's political system until today (Ng, 2020; Shahabuddin, 2019).

Islamophobia has worsened marginalization of both cases, although arguably it is worse in Rohingya's case. The divided society of North-South Philippines is heavily influenced by Islamophobia, due to a high number of radical and extremist groups infiltrating Philippines including Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Abu Sayyaf group (Ragandang, 2020; Tabrani et al., 2019). Morales et al. (2024) describes it as 'religious minoritization' that occurs not only in Bangsamoro, but also all over Muslim communities in Philippines, as part of 'silencing' the religious minorities.

In Myanmar, Anti-Muslim sentiment was instigated by sentiments toward Indian

and Bengal immigrants, during the time of British rule. Walton in Ansar (2020) claims that in the eyes of Burma, now Myanmar, ethnic minorities' existences were associated with colonialism. Moreover, Buddhist nationalist and religious leaders were calling for violence against Muslim minorities due to them perceiving Islam as threat against their own religion (Osman, 2017). This implies the main cause of Islamophobia is religious (Buddhism) ultra-nationalism that endorses the state of politics which support their interest as being the religious majority. This condition often manifests into political demands from Buddhist ultra-nationalist that demand (even more) the marginalization of Rohingya, such as continuing to not allow Rohingya having citizenship.

Decades of conflict caused at least 120,000 deaths and millions of Internally-Displaced Persons in Mindanao (Lara in Perez, 2020). Amnesty International (2017) reported that in the 2017 Battle of Marawi alone, 360.000 people became Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and many civilians were trapped inside the deathly besieged city. Post-2019 BARMM establishment still saw traces of conflict behavior, in which 'leftovers' of violent radical groups like Abu Sayyaf Group still remain, which threaten local and national security. Not only that, the deeply divided society also manifested into distrust, particularly between Muslim and Christian settler descendants, as fear of marginalisation in Bangsamoro still ran deeply (Kovacs et al., 2021).

On the other hand, crackdowns on Rohingya have repeatedly been conducted for decades, causing mass displacement, deaths, and other grievances. The ethnopolitical conflict has seen several outbursts that led to armed violences, such as the 2012 Rakhine State Riots that saw internal conflict between Rohingyas and Rakhine ethnic groups (Rahman, 2015). Islam & Wara (2022) argues on how there is a high potential for a spillover conflict in Bangladesh's border and increasing conflict with the local community. This is due to local's different perception toward refugees, and the alleged weak social cohesion between locals and Rohingya refugees. The clash with locals also happens in other Southeast Asian countries, like Indonesia, due to inability to communicate well with each other, and mutual skepticism. The current on-going civil war after the junta military coup d'etat has significantly impacted Rohingya. This civil war saw unrest not only in Rakhine, but also all over the countries. With military and other armed forces locked in the armed conflicts, Rohingyas are thrown into a state of limbo and unclear direction, as the political contestation between junta and the interim government continues.

In 2017 alone, more than a million Rohingyas were forced to flee from Myanmar due to a security operation to force mass exodus conducted by the government (Islam, 2024; Simpson & Farelly, 2020). Human Rights Watch (2022) reported at least 600.000 Rohingyas trapped under Myanmar government's oppressive and discriminative rules. This mass displacement has induced waves of refugee crises among South and Southeast Asian countries.

Thousands of deaths were caused

not only by violent clashes with military, but also famine, abuses, and most recently is the alarmingly high death and disappearance rate at sea according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report (Paul, 2024). The Rohingya Refugee Crisis becomes a threat, even develops into a security concern for some countries. Hossain et al. (2020) explains that Rohingyas are staying in a refugee camp at Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, unwilling to leave there. This has caused a crisis for Bangladesh, especially concerning its status as a lower – middle income country. Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia, also faced their own influx of refugees that mostly arrived from the seas. This condition unfortunately develops into other serious cases, such as people smuggling, human trafficking, and locals' extreme rejection (Mutaqin, 2018).

The dangerous combination of colonial traces and Islamophobia have become the primary cause of grave marginalization for both Bangsamoro and Rohingya, with both resulting in violent conflicts and other devastating collateral damages.

The Global South: Mutual Recognition of Suffering?

This discussion is imperative in that most scholars focus on the larger divide of North-South, but continues to avoid the hierarchical divide within the Global South itself.

López in Schneider (2017) emphasizes the existence of the Global South society as being conscious, and mutually-recognizing others in the similar position of being subaltern. Kloß (2017) then elaborates the inter-linkage of Global South and Subalternity in that the 'Global South' challenged its subaltern, peripheral global position, based on the mutual-recognition of their shared historical and ongoing struggle as the subaltern of the international system. The previous explanation should have been a basis to assume that subalterns of the Global South recognize each other's struggle, and ideally, cooperate to stand against the subaltern(ization) collectively. Dutta (2020) points out how efforts to decolonize the subaltern should come from the Global South, which relies upon solidarity to 'stand up against the North'.

Yet the exact opposite happened, as what has happened in Bangsamoro and Rohingya. Not only are the Global South states persecuting minorities, they also fall into the 'colonialized trap'. This is important to understand, as these governments are not even aware, nor realize that they are repeating the exact colonization pattern that they have suffered altogether. This behavior makes the author heavily doubt the manifestation of states' capability to enhance South Solidarity. Davies & Boehmer (2018) argues that the South – South relation has a strong relation due to its postcolonial characteristic and orientation toward decolonialization. Societies of these Global South countries are unfortunately in a relatively same position of being unaware, as some of them are included as the drivers of structural marginalization happening to both Bangsamoro and Rohingya. This is due to the majority of societies having their own protected interest which does not

necessarily promote inclusivity and solidarity, like in the case of Myanmar's Buddhist ultra – nationalists who felt the existence of their religion being threatened by Rohingya Muslims. The unwillingness to pose a tolerant behavior which is somewhat normalized, added with the government's inability to promote solidarity and tolerance, have likely broken any kind of 'South Solidarity' agenda to manifest in the country.

However, the author contends that 'The South Solidarity' dream will never be truly materialized, no matter how many co-operation and meetings between states are conducted, as long as governments do not grasp the recurring cycle of colonialism. The only way for the condition of 'Mutual Recognition of Suffering' can be realized, is to recognize the suffering of local marginalized people first, and to instigate the driving cause by tracing the state's own history.

Conclusion

Global South and Subaltern are discourses that ultimately intersect, and contextually speaking, tightly aligned as both have parts of their root in postcolonialism. Yet ironically, governments of the Global South became the perpetrator of a recurring cycle of colonialism which is projected into some Muslim minorities of Southeast Asia. These minorities are what this paper calls as 'subaltern of the subaltern', in which this paper argues as to prove that there is a deeper hierarchical divide within a Global South country.

This paper underlines the notion where discrimination against Muslim minorities is the parallel of the West's case of

Islamophobia and discrimination, which further strongly emphasizes that there are traces of colonialism mentality--the West's mentality--being imported to Global South countries, whose conflicting influences result in a divided society of the Global South. The Bangsamoro may have gotten better recently, but it does not erase the decades of disenfranchisement and intentional marginalization, while Myanmar never gets better with its continued oppression. Thus, it is justified for the author to heavily shed a doubt toward the 'South Solidarity' that should have been the huge umbrella for erasing traces of colonialism and unite the Global South society under the narrative of 'shared history and understanding'. Future research could explore other subaltern of the subaltern communities who exist in almost every Global South countries, or explore further notion of 'deeply divided society' in Southeast Asia.

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A Postcolonial Analysis of the One Plus-Africa Summits:

A New Scramble for Africa?

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Since the colonial epoch, Africa has functioned as a ground wherein global powers vie for influence and access to resources, imprinting enduring ramifications on the continent's international relations. Despite attaining political autonomy, African countries grapple with the persistent specters of neocolonialism and economic exploitation. The advent of One Plus-Africa Summits marks a discernible juncture in global geopolitics, engendering discourse surrounding their underlying motivations and operational modalities. Critics argue that these summits risk perpetuating neocolonialism, thereby potentially disenfranchising economic independence while enabling continued exploitation. This study adopts a postcolonial analytical framework to comparatively scrutinize the Russia-Africa, China-Africa, and France-Africa summits, probing their historical antecedents, motivating factors, and impacts. By advocating for more equitably configured paradigms of international engagement vis-à-vis Africa, this inquiry endeavors to foster the empowerment of African states, foregrounding imperatives of sovereignty, developmental progress, and dignified agency. By examining colonial legacies, divergent impetuses, consequential ramifications, and prospective models of collaborative engagement, this scholarly exposition furnishes in-depth insights into the negotiation of intricate postcolonial power dynamics and the advancement of African prerogatives within the global milieu.

Keywords: *Africa, Postcolonialism, Global Powers, Neocolonialism, Summit Diplomacy*

Introduction

Since the dawn of the colonial era, Africa has been a stage where global powers have vied for influence, resources, and geopolitical advantage. This has been referred to as the "Scramble for Africa" to imply the rapid colonization of the continent by European powers in the 19th-century (Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2016). In recent years, this concept has resurfaced as new global players engage in resource extraction and geopolitical competition in Africa, raising concerns about neocolonial practices and the impact on local autonomy (Mlambo et al, 2024). Despite achieving independence, Africa's struggle for sovereignty has continued in the face of neocolonialism and economic exploitation. In the last three decades, a new dynamic has emerged on the African continent: the convening of summits between African nations and the world's major powers, termed the One Plus-Africa summits (Soulé,

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2021a). These gatherings represent a significant shift in global power dynamics and raise critical questions about the motivations and implications of such engagements in a postcolonial context.

The One Plus-Africa Summits have sparked debates and controversies regarding their true nature and underlying objectives. Critics like Usman (2023) and McKesson (1993) argue that these summits perpetuate a new form of colonialism, wherein African nations are once again subjected to the influence and interests of foreign powers. They question whether these engagements truly serve the interests of African nations or merely facilitate the exploitation of their resources and markets by external actors (Suleiman, 2016: 322-323). Further criticisms contend that such summits risk sidelining the agency and sovereignty of African states, potentially undermining their efforts towards self-determination and equitable development (Harper, 2017). He urged for greater transparency and inclusivity in diplomatic initiatives concerning Africa's future.

This study aims to critically analyze the One Plus-Africa Summits through a postcolonial lens, examining the power dynamics, agendas, and implications of these gatherings for African nations. Specifically, it seeks to: analyze how colonialism has shaped modern relationships between Africa and major powers; investigate the motivations of both African nations and these powers in attending the summits; assess the effects of these interactions on African sovereignty, development, and agency; and consider alternative models of cooperation that prioritize African interests.

Comprehending the dynamics of the One Plus-Africa Summits is vital for policymakers, scholars, and activists seeking to enhance African sovereignty, development, and dignity in the global arena. By elucidating the complexities of postcolonial power relations, this study aspires to inform more equitable and sustainable approaches to international engagement with Africa.

This study will begin by providing a historical overview of colonialism in Africa and its lasting impact on the continent's relations with the great powers. It will then analyze the motivations and objectives of both African nations and the great powers in participating in the summits. Subsequently, it will examine the implications of these engagements for African sovereignty, development, and agency. Finally, it will conclude with reflections on alternative models of cooperation and partnership that prioritize African interests and agency in the global arena.

Conceptualizing Postcolonial Dynamics Between Africa and Great Powers

The historical context of colonialism in Africa is a multifaceted and complex narrative that has profoundly shaped the continent's trajectory. European powers embarked on the scramble for Africa in the late 19th century, driven by motives ranging from economic exploitation to geopolitical competition as Rodney (1972) established. The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 formalized the partition of Africa among European powers, disregarding the continent's existing

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socio-political structures and cultural boundaries.

Scholars such as Chinua Achebe (1958), Frantz Fanon (1961), and Walter Rodney (1972) have extensively analyzed the impact of colonialism on Africa. Achebe's seminal work, *Things Fall Apart* vividly portrays the disruption of traditional African societies by European colonialism, highlighting the clash of cultures and the erosion of indigenous values. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* delves into the psychological and existential consequences of colonization, emphasizing the dehumanizing effects on both colonizers and the colonized. Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* examines the economic exploitation inherent in colonialism, tracing the roots of Africa's underdevelopment to centuries of extractive colonial policies.

Postcolonial theory emerged in the latter half of the 20th century as a critical framework for understanding the enduring legacies of colonialism. Scholars like Said (1978; 1993), Bhabha (1994) and Spivak (1988) have pioneered postcolonial discourse, examining issues of power, identity, and representation in the aftermath of colonial rule. Said's *Orientalism* exposes the Eurocentric constructions of the "Other" in Western discourse, revealing how colonial powers constructed distorted narratives to justify domination. Bhabha's concept of "hybridity" explores the interplay of cultures and identities in colonial and postcolonial contexts, challenging essentialist notions of identity and offering possibilities for resistance and subversion. Spivak's

notion of the "subaltern" interrogates the marginalization of voices within colonial and postcolonial discourse, emphasizing the importance of representing the perspectives of the oppressed and disenfranchised.

In the African context, postcolonial theory offers a perspective for analyzing ongoing battles against recolonization, cultural resurgence, and political liberation. It highlights the significance of challenging Eurocentric narratives, reclaiming indigenous histories and identities, and understanding power dynamics shaped by colonial legacies. This theory prompts critical examination of neocolonial structures and promotes transformative practices grounded in decolonization and self-determination.

Great power dynamics continue to play a significant role in shaping Africa's political landscape. The legacy of colonialism has left a heritage of resource exploitation, geopolitical rivalries, and neocolonial interventions in Africa. In the post-Cold War era, global powers, particularly the United States, China, and Russia, have vied for influence in Africa, engaging in strategic partnerships, investment, and military cooperation.

China's growing presence in Africa, characterized by extensive infrastructure projects and resource extraction deals, has sparked debates about the implications of its no-strings-attached approach to investment and its impact on African sovereignty and development (Oqubay and Lin, 2019). The United States has pursued counterterrorism objectives and sought to expand its economic interests in Africa,

through military interventions and security assistance programs (Boyle, 2022). Russia's reemergence as a global player has led to renewed engagement in Africa, primarily through arms sales, energy deals, and diplomatic overtures (Gruzd, Ramani & Clifford, 2022). The intersection of great power competition and Africa's internal dynamics, including governance challenges, ethno-political conflicts, and economic vulnerabilities, has profound implications for the continent's stability and development trajectory. It underscores the importance of African agency in navigating external pressures and shaping their own futures.

Africa summits, whether regional or international, have been the focus of considerable scholarly attention in recent years. These gatherings provide platforms for African leaders to address common challenges, articulate collective goals, and forge partnerships with external actors. Research on One Plus-Africa summits have examined various themes, including governance, peace and security, economic integration, and sustainable development. Scholars (Woldearegay, 2024; Soulé, 2021b; Gavin, 2021; Shaw, 1983) have assessed the effectiveness of summit outcomes in addressing pressing issues such as conflict resolution, poverty alleviation, and infrastructure development. They have also analyzed the power dynamics at play within summit forums, exploring questions of representation, influence, and decision-making processes. Additionally, scholars like Soulé (2021a, b and c) have evaluated the role of regional organizations in facilitating

and mediating summit processes. They have examined the motivations behind external involvement, as well as the impact of external agendas on African priorities and interests. Overall, research on these summits contribute to a deeper understanding of regional dynamics, governance structures, and the evolving relationships between African states and external actors in an increasingly interconnected world.

A Postcolonial Framework

Postcolonial Theory emerged from a critical examination of the legacies of colonialism and imperialism. At its core, it seeks to understand and challenge the power dynamics inherent in colonial encounters and their lasting impacts on societies, cultures, and identities. Postcolonial Theory is underpinned by several key concepts and principles which include othering, subalternity, hybridity, and colonial discourse. The concept of "othering" forms a central tenet of Postcolonial Theory (Dimitrijovska-Jankulovska, A. & Denkovska, 2023; Olson, 1998; Said, 1978). This refers to the process through which dominant powers construct and essentialize the identities of colonized peoples as inferior or different. Othering legitimizes the subjugation and exploitation of colonized populations by portraying them as inherently backward or uncivilized. Postcolonial theorists emphasize the fluid and dynamic nature of cultural identities in the wake of colonial encounters. Hybridity suggests that cultures, identities, and practices are not fixed but are constantly evolving through interactions between colonizers and

the colonized. This concept highlights the complexity and richness of cultural exchange in colonial contexts.

Coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the term "subaltern" refers to the marginalized and silenced voices of the colonized. Subalternity emphasizes the agency and resistance of oppressed groups whose perspectives are excluded from dominant narratives of history and power. Postcolonial theorists seek to amplify these subaltern voices and challenge hegemonic discourses. Postcolonial Theory examines the systems of knowledge, representation, and discourse produced by colonial powers to justify their rule and maintain hegemony. Colonial discourse encompasses a range of cultural, political, and intellectual practices that reinforce colonial hierarchies and perpetuate colonial ideologies.

Postcolonial Theory offers a critical lens through which to analyze the dynamics of power, domination, and resistance in the international arena. Postcolonial Theory can deconstruct dominant narratives in international relations because it challenges the Eurocentric biases inherent in traditional IR theories and narratives. By interrogating the universalization of Western experiences and perspectives, Postcolonial Theory exposes the ways in which colonial histories continue to shape global politics.

Secondly, the theory interrogates global hierarchies by highlighting how colonial legacies persist in contemporary patterns of economic exploitation, political domination, and cultural imperialism. By examining the unequal distribution of power

and resources in the international system, Postcolonial Theory illuminates the ways in which former colonial powers continue to exert influence over formerly colonized regions.

Thirdly, by dwelling on the perspectives of formerly colonized peoples and subaltern groups in the study of IR, this framework amplifies the marginalized voices. By foregrounding the experiences and agency of marginalized populations, Postcolonial Theory provides a more inclusive understanding of international relations.

Methodological Approach

To analyze the One Plus-Africa summits, this study adopted document analysis as a methodology. Document analysis as a methodology offers a comprehensive lens through which to explore complex socio-political phenomena, such as the One Plus-Africa Summits, from a postcolonial perspective. This approach involves scrutinizing the language, symbols, and power dynamics present in the documents to uncover underlying ideologies and structures of dominance (Rapley, 2007). In the context of "the New Scramble for Africa," document analysis can unveil how historical narratives, representations of Africa, and textual analysis contribute to the reassertion of power by former colonial powers and emerging global players. By deconstructing the rhetoric employed in these summits, document analysis allows for a critical examination of how notions of development, cooperation, and sovereignty are constructed, contested, and manipulated in

the pursuit of geopolitical interests (Naeem et al., 2023). Through this methodology, this article examined how colonial legacies continue to shape Africa and great power relations through the One-Plus Africa summits.

Evolution of Great Power Involvement in Africa

Great Power involvement in Africa has undergone significant evolution over the decades, reflecting changes in global geopolitics, economic interests, and security dynamics (Gooch et al, 2022; Shaw, 1983). From colonial exploitation to Cold War rivalries and contemporary economic engagements, the relationship between Great Powers and Africa has been multifaceted and complex. Historically, colonial powers dominated Africa, exploiting its resources and exerting political control (Kalu & Falola, 2019; Rodney, 1972). However, the wave of decolonization in the mid-20th century reshaped the continent's dynamics, leading to the emergence of independent African nations and the onset of new forms of engagement with Great Powers (Odijie, 2021; Hodges, 1972).

Africa-Plus-One summits are high-level engagements between African countries and a single global power or bloc, including the United States, China, Japan, the European Union, France, the UK, and Russia. This includes forums convened by middle powers such as India and Indonesia (Wekesa, 2024). These summits focus on issues such as trade, investment, infrastructure, security, and development, with each summit reflecting the specific interests of the host power. For instance, the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit emphasizes governance and economic partnerships (U.S. Department of State, 2022), while FOCAC (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation) prioritizes infrastructure and trade (Oxford Analytica, 2022). The India-Africa Forum Summit focuses on economic growth and cooperation in education (Bhuyan, 2024), and the UK-Africa Investment Summit addresses trade, investment, and climate change (UK Government, 2024). The France-Africa Summit strengthens diplomatic, cultural, and economic ties (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2021) while the Russia-Africa Summit emphasizes military cooperation, energy, and trade (Wekesa, 2024). These summits provide African nations with opportunities to secure resources and forge strategic partnerships within a complex geopolitical context.

However, implementation challenges and unequal partnerships may hinder the realization of mutual benefits (Amare, T., & Vines, 2024). This is because their outcomes are a reflection of the geopolitical interests in Africa as well as access to resources. This competition has exacerbated regional tensions and complicate efforts for peace and stability in West Africa and the Sudan (Adekaiyaoja, 2024; Opalo, 2024). Thus, some summits address security challenges in Africa, such as terrorism and other security concerns (Ross, 2024). However, differing priorities and approaches among Great Powers may hinder coordinated efforts and sustainable solutions.

Analyzing agendas and outcomes of Russia-Africa, France-Africa, and China-Africa summits will provide insights into the trends and changing dynamics of Africa's relations with Great Powers and the challenges and opportunities they present for the continent's future.

The Russia-Africa Summit

The Russia-Africa Summit is a significant diplomatic event that underscores Russia's renewed interest in strengthening its ties with African nations. The inaugural Russia-Africa Summit was held on October 23-24, 2019, in Sochi, Russia. This marked a pivotal moment in Russia's engagement with the continent, symbolizing its desire to deepen economic, political, and strategic partnerships with African countries (Russia-Africa Forum, 2023). The history of Russia-Africa relations dates back to the Soviet era, characterized by ideological support, arms sales, and development assistance to African liberation movements (Grey, 1984; Brayton, 1979). However, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia's focus shifted away from Africa as it grappled with internal challenges (Ferragamo, 2023; Goumidi, 2023).

In recent years, there has been a noticeable resurgence of Russian interest in Africa, driven by several factors including geopolitical, economic and so on. Russia seeks to expand its global influence and counterbalance Western dominance (Lukyanov, 2016) by cultivating relationships with African states. This is particularly evident in Russia's engagement with resource-rich countries and its desire to establish military footholds on the continent. Africa's growing economies, vast natural resources, and burgeoning consumer markets present lucrative opportunities for Russian businesses. Energy, mining, infrastructure development, and arms sales are key areas of interest for Russian investors (Medvedev, 2015). The Russia-Africa Summit serves as a platform for enhancing diplomatic ties, fostering cooperation, and exploring areas of mutual interest such as counterterrorism, peacekeeping, and trade (Antwi-Boasiako, 2022). Viewing the Russia-Africa Summit through a postcolonial lens reveals complex power dynamics and historical legacies. Africa's history of colonization and exploitation by Western powers has shaped its relationships with external actors, including Russia. While Russia may present itself as a non-Western alternative, it is not immune to criticisms of neo-imperialism or neocolonialism. Critics like Ferragamo (2023) and Herd (2021) argue that Russia's engagement in Africa may perpetuate patterns of dependency, extractive industries, and uneven power relations. Moreover, Russia's history of supporting authoritarian regimes (Bartosiewicz, 2023) and its strategic interests in natural resources raise concerns about human rights abuses and environmental degradation in African countries. On the other hand, proponents of Russia-Africa cooperation like Mishra (2023) and Duursma and Masuhr (2022) emphasize the importance of diversifying Africa's diplomatic and economic partnerships. They argue that African states should leverage

their agency to negotiate favorable terms and maximize the benefits of engagement with Russia and other global actors.

The Russia-Africa Summit holds both opportunities and challenges for African states. African countries stand to gain significantly by broadening their diplomatic and economic alliances beyond the conventional Western partners. Collaborating with Russia presents promising prospects for trade diversification, investment opportunities, and technological exchanges. Leveraging Russian proficiency in crucial sectors like energy, transportation, and telecommunications could fuel infrastructure advancements across Africa, effectively tackling pressing infrastructure deficits and fostering economic advancement. Rosatom, Russia's state nuclear energy corporation, has been actively involved in constructing nuclear power plants in African countries such as Egypt and South Africa with talks currently underway with Ghana, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Morocco, Tunisia and Uganda.

Furthermore, Russian Railways, one of the world's largest railway companies, has been engaged in various infrastructure development projects across sub-Saharan Africa. For example, in West Africa, Russian Railways has indicated interest in railway project that will connect Burkina Faso and Ghana, aiming to improve transportation connectivity between the two nations and within the region broadly (Russia-Africa Forum, 2023). These projects aim to enhance energy security, stimulate economic growth, and provide clean and reliable electricity to meet the rising energy demands of these

nations. However, African nations must adeptly navigate the intricate landscape of international relations, ensuring a delicate balance between their interests and engagements with Russia. It is imperative for them to prioritize developmental objectives, safeguard sovereignty, and uphold long-term sustainability in all collaborative endeavors or partnerships by drawing lessons from previous projects with same and other partners like the Ajaokuta Steel project that has been abandoned after decade (Braimah, 2020).

The Russia-Africa Summit represents a significant milestone in the evolving dynamics of global geopolitics and economic relations. The First Ministerial Conference of the Russia-Africa Partnership, held on November 9-10, 2024, reaffirms Russia's commitment to enhancing peace, security, and development in Africa, offering a forum for strengthened cooperation on conflict resolution and regional stability (Russia-Africa Forum, 2024)**.** By emphasizing economic growth and infrastructure development, the conference presents African states with opportunities to diversify their international partnerships and secure strategic investments in critical sectors such as energy, technology, and agriculture. While it offers opportunities for cooperation and mutual benefit, African states must approach engagement with Russia critically, mindful of historical legacies, power imbalances, and their own developmental aspirations.

The France-Africa Summit

The France-Africa Summit encapsulates a multifaceted nexus of historical, political, and economic interdependencies between France and its former African colonies. Rooted in the colonial legacy of the Scramble for Africa, this summit functions as a pivotal forum where contemporary Franco-African relations are articulated and negotiated. Established amid the wave of mid-20th century decolonization movements, France's postcolonial engagements have since evolved into a complex diplomatic architecture encompassing economic cooperation, security partnerships, and cultural exchanges (Chafer, 2002; McKesson, 1993; Nwokedi, 1989). Convened periodically, the summit symbolizes France's sustained influence in shaping Africa's socio-political landscape, while simultaneously highlighting the entrenched dynamics of power, privilege, and dependency that characterize postcolonial interactions.

When examined through a postcolonial theoretical framework, the France-Africa Summit reveals the persistence of colonial hegemonies and the ongoing contestations for agency and sovereignty across the African continent. Despite presenting itself as a platform for equal partnership, the summit often reproduces asymmetrical power relations (Mattheis, 2024; Nicolaides, 2017), whereby France maintains substantial leverage over its former colonies. This enduring dominance is manifest in economic structures that perpetuate neocolonial dependencies, as African economies remain intricately tied to French commercial interests, thereby reinforcing cycles of underdevelopment and economic subordination. Furthermore, France's military footprint across Africa, ostensibly aimed at maintaining regional stability and countering security threats, has been critiqued as an extension of neo-imperialist influence, reinforcing France's strategic grip on African affairs (Gibbs , 2024; Sylla, 2024). Concurrently, cultural imperialism permeates Franco-African relations, privileging French language and norms at the expense of indigenous cultural expressions, thereby perpetuating cultural subjugation (Mentan, 1989; Ali, 2023).

For African states, participation in the France-Africa Summit presents a complex interplay of opportunities and constraints in managing the legacy of postcolonial diplomacy (Tasamba, 2021). Economically, the summit facilitates access to French markets and investment capital, albeit often compromising authentic economic sovereignty. Politically, it offers African leaders a venue for bilateral negotiations and collaborative problem-solving; yet, this engagement frequently risks perpetuating a neocolonial status quo in which African agency is circumscribed by French interests.

Historically, France has exerted profound influence in West Africa as a consequence of its colonial past. However, contemporary discourse increasingly underscores a marked erosion of French influence in the region. France maintained a significant military presence in West Africa, most notably through now-terminated Operation Barkhane, which was tasked with

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combating Islamist militant insurgencies in the Sahel. Nevertheless, this military presence has engendered widespread contestation, culminating in the unprecedented expulsion of French troops from multiple West African states, including Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, in response to mounting popular dissent and political rejection of French interventionism (Bertrand et al., 2023; Chafer et al., 2024). These expulsions represent a watershed moment, signaling a substantive rupture in France's traditional security architecture in the Sahel and reflecting broader demands for sovereignty and self-determination. Such developments highlight a discernible decline in French influence and an attendant reconfiguration of regional security dynamics, as affected states seek alternative partnerships to address their security challenges.

Simultaneously, demographic shifts, particularly the burgeoning youth populations in West Africa, have catalyzed heightened political mobilization and demands for transparent governance, fueling revolutions and social movements that have challenged entrenched French influence (Chatelot, 2023a; Chatelot & Bensimon, 2023b). In this context, West African leadership increasingly asserts its autonomy vis-à-vis former colonial powers. Despite formal independence attained in the mid-20th century, France's enduring presence through economic, military, and cultural ties has perpetuated significant influence. Yet, rising critiques of French neo-colonialism have galvanized efforts to diversify diplomatic and economic alliances.

This strategic realignment is evidenced by an increasing orientation towards emerging global powers such as China, India, Brazil, and Russia. Through these diversified partnerships, West African states aim to diminish their historical dependency on France and enhance their bargaining power in international affairs. Consequently, these states are progressively cultivating more balanced and multifaceted diplomatic relations to better navigate the complexities of the contemporary global order.

The France-Africa Summit thus serves as a microcosm reflecting the intricate and contested power relations inherent in postcolonial engagements. While emblematic of enduring historical legacies and dependencies, it also offers a critical site for African states to assert agency and renegotiate the modalities of their engagement with France and the wider international community. As Africa confronts the geopolitical challenges of the twenty-first century, the summit remains a barometer for the continent's aspirations towards genuine autonomy, solidarity, and self-determination amidst ongoing neocolonial pressures.

China-Africa Summit

The China-Africa Summit represents a pivotal juncture in the evolving dynamics between China and African nations. Established against the backdrop of historical colonial legacies and contemporary global power shifts, this summit serves as a platform for diplomatic engagement, economic cooperation, and strategic partnership

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between China, a rising global power, and African states, representing a diverse array of socio-economic and political contexts (Ibonye, 2022; Kyirewiah & Xiaolong, 2022). China's involvement in Africa spans decades, characterized by multifaceted engagements encompassing trade, investment, infrastructure development, and aid. The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), initiated in 2000, has been instrumental in fostering dialogue and collaboration, culminating in the triennial summits that underscore China's commitment to deepening ties with African nations.

Examining the China-Africa Summit through a postcolonial lens unveils a complex interplay of power dynamics, historical contexts, and socio-economic implications. Postcolonial theory posits that the legacy of colonialism continues to shape global relations, influencing perceptions, policies, and interactions between former colonizers and colonized nations. China's engagement with Africa intersects with postcolonial discourses in several ways. Critics such as Omolo (2022) argue that China's pursuit of resources and markets in Africa echoes colonial-era exploitation, perpetuating asymmetrical power relations. Moreover, China's non-interference policy, contrasted with Western interventionism, raises questions about the balance between sovereignty and external influence in African states.

However, proponents of China-Africa cooperation assert that it offers African nations agency and alternative pathways for development, countering traditional Western hegemony. They argue that China's investment in infrastructure, technology transfer, and capacity building empowers African states to assert their interests on the global stage, fostering South-South cooperation and challenging traditional North-South power dynamics (Suleiman & Slighoua, 2024). The China-Africa Summit holds profound implications for African states, shaping their socio-economic trajectories, political landscapes, and international standing. Economic partnerships with China provide avenues for infrastructure development, industrialization, and job creation, addressing critical developmental challenges facing many African nations.

Nevertheless, African states must navigate the complexities of engaging with China, balancing the pursuit of economic opportunities with safeguarding sovereignty, environmental sustainability, and social welfare. Critiques (Mutai, Cuong, Dervishaj, Kiarie, Misango, Ibeh, Popoola, & Lallmahamood, 2024; Ofosu & Sarpong, 2022) of China's investment practices, such as debt-trap diplomacy and labor exploitation, underscore the importance of robust governance frameworks and strategic planning in maximizing the benefits of cooperation while mitigating potential risks. Moreover, the China-Africa Summit underscores the evolving geopolitical landscape, wherein African nations emerge as strategic partners in China's global ambitions (Singh, 2024). African states wield newfound leverage in international affairs, leveraging their partnerships with China to

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diversify diplomatic ties and enhance their bargaining power on issues ranging from trade negotiations to climate change mitigation. The China-Africa Summit encapsulates the complexities of contemporary international relations, navigating the intersections of history, power, and development.

Great Power Dynamics and Neo-Colonialism

Africa endures indelible scars of socio-economic, political, and even, cultural landscape bequeathed by colonial and neocolonial relations. While formal colonialism has ostensibly ended, the legacy of imperial domination persists through neo-colonial mechanisms perpetuated by great powers. This paper investigates the manifestations of neo-colonialism in Africa, focusing on three key dimensions: economic exploitation, military presence, and cultural hegemony. Great powers have historically exploited Africa's abundant natural resources for their economic gain. This economic exploitation continues unabated, with resource-rich African nations trapped in unequal trade relationships and subjected to predatory lending practices. Multinational corporations, backed by powerful states, extract minerals, oil, and other valuable resources, reaping immense profits while leaving local populations impoverished and environments degraded. The persistent plundering of Africa's resources perpetuates cycles of poverty and underdevelopment, reinforcing the continent's dependency on external actors.

The strategic significance of Africa's geopolitical location has led great powers to maintain a substantial military presence across the continent. Under the guise of promoting stability and combating terrorism, foreign militaries intervene in African conflicts, further entrenching their influence and advancing their geopolitical agendas. Military bases, training programs, and arms sales serve to bolster the security interests of great powers, at the expense of African sovereignty and self-determination. Moreover, these military interventions frequently exacerbate local conflicts and contribute to the perpetuation of violence and instability.

Cultural imperialism continues to shape Africa's values and identities through the enduring influence of colonial legacies, Western media, consumer culture, and globalization, marginalizing indigenous cultures and languages (Elkandoussi, 2015; Daramola & Oyinade, 2015). However, Africa is increasingly reclaiming its cultural sovereignty through movements like Afrocentrism, the promotion of local languages, and the resistance to foreign cultural dominance, asserting a more independent and diverse cultural identity. An example of cultural imperialism in Africa is the dominance of Western brands and media, such as Hollywood films and fast food chains like McDonald's, which shape consumer habits and ideals of success, overshadowing traditional African customs and lifestyles. In response, African countries like Nigeria have embraced Afrobeat music and Nollywood film industry, promoting

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local culture globally and reasserting pride in African traditions (Faidi, 2024; Busari, 2024).

The analysis presented in this article underscores the enduring relevance of colonial legacies in shaping contemporary power dynamics in Africa. Great powers continue to wield influence through economic exploitation, military intervention, and cultural hegemony, perpetuating neo-colonial structures that undermine African sovereignty and development. Addressing these entrenched inequalities and power imbalances requires concerted efforts to challenge and dismantle the mechanisms of neo-colonialism, fostering genuine partnerships based on mutual respect, equity, and self-determination. Only through such transformative actions can Africa chart a path towards true independence and prosperity.

Navigating Neocolonialism: African Responses at Great Power Africa Summits

In the dynamic landscape of international relations, African nations find themselves grappling with the complexities of neocolonialism, manifested through the agendas of great powers. The Great Power Africa Summits serve as platforms where these tensions come to the forefront, prompting African states to adopt multifaceted strategies to assert agency and resist neocolonial influences.

African nations demonstrate agency by asserting their sovereignty and pushing back against neocolonial impositions during Great Power Africa Summits. They refuse to be passive recipients of external agendas and instead actively engage in shaping the discourse. This is evident in their insistence on equitable partnerships, fair trade practices, and respect for national autonomy. By leveraging their collective strength, African states assert themselves as equal partners in global affairs, rather than mere subjects of neocolonial exploitation.

African states employ a range of strategies to counter neocolonialism. Economic diversification, regional integration, and diplomatic alliances are key tactics employed to reduce dependency on external actors and enhance self-reliance. Additionally, investment in education, technology, and infrastructure bolsters African economies, enabling them to negotiate from positions of relative strength. By diversifying their partnerships beyond traditional colonial powers, African states mitigate the risk of falling prey to neocolonial traps (de Freitas, 2023). Chinese investments have had both positive and negative effects on Africa. On the positive side, they have improved infrastructure, created jobs, and boosted economic growth, enhancing connectivity and trade. These developments have helped reduce youth unemployment, leveraging Africa's demographic advantage.

Pan-Africanism and regional organizations play crucial roles in the fight against neocolonialism (Oloruntoba, 2023). Pan-Africanism fosters solidarity among African nations, emphasizing the importance of unity in confronting external threats. Regional organizations such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community

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of West African States (ECOWAS) provide platforms for collective action and coordination of strategies to counter neocolonial influences. Through these platforms, African states amplify their voices and present a unified front in negotiating with great powers, thus enhancing their bargaining power.

Civil society and grassroots movements serve as vital agents of change in challenging neocolonialism. These movements mobilize communities, raise awareness about the impacts of neocolonial policies, and advocate for alternative approaches that prioritize African interests. By amplifying marginalized voices and holding governments accountable, civil society organizations contribute to the democratization of decision-making processes at Great Power Africa Summits. Grassroots activism empowers local communities to resist exploitative practices and assert their rights in the face of neocolonial pressures.

Great Power Africa Summits represent critical junctures where African nations navigate the complexities of neocolonialism. Through agency, strategic planning, Pan-African solidarity, and grassroots activism, African states assert their autonomy and resist external domination. By harnessing collective strength and advocating for equitable partnerships, Africa charts a course towards a future free from the shackles of neocolonialism, where its nations stand as equal players on the global stage.

Implications for Policy

Great power engagement in global affairs holds significant implications for the international community, shaping geopolitical dynamics and influencing regional stability. As major powers vie for influence and dominance, the consequences reverberate across diverse domains, from economic cooperation to security arrangements. Understanding these implications is crucial for navigating an increasingly complex global landscape and charting future directions for international relations.

The consequences of great power engagement are multifaceted and extend across various spheres:

Geopolitically, great power engagement leads to geopolitical shifts as states compete for strategic advantage. This can result in alliances realignments, territorial disputes, and proxy conflicts, altering the balance of power in key regions. Economic interdependence characterizes great power engagement, with states forging trade relationships, investment partnerships, and financial dependencies. However, economic competition can also breed tensions, as seen in trade disputes, currency manipulation, and the imposition of sanctions.

Military posturing is a prominent feature of great power engagement, with states enhancing their military capabilities, conducting joint exercises, and projecting power in contested regions. This militarization raises concerns about arms races, escalation risks, and the potential for conflict. Further, ideological contestation

accompanies great power rivalry, as states promote competing visions of governance, development, and international order. This ideological competition shapes diplomatic discourse, media narratives, and public perceptions, influencing global norms and values. Also in the perspective of global governance, great power engagement impacts global governance structures, with states seeking to shape institutions, norms, and rule-making processes to advance their interests. This can lead to debates over the legitimacy, effectiveness, and inclusivity of international institutions.

African countries stand to benefit from infrastructure investment facilitated by great powers, addressing critical gaps in transportation, energy, and telecommunications. However, these investments may come with strings attached, such as debt burdens or resource extraction agreements. Africa's rich natural resources attract the attention of great powers, leading to competition for access and control. While resource exploitation can stimulate economic growth, it also raises concerns about environmental degradation, resource depletion, and unequal distribution of benefits. Great power engagement in Africa intersects with security dynamics, including counterterrorism efforts, peacekeeping operations, and military assistance. While external support can enhance security capacity, it may also exacerbate conflicts, undermine sovereignty, and perpetuate dependency.

Great power involvement in African affairs poses challenges to governance and sovereignty, with states facing pressure to align with external agendas and interests. Balancing sovereignty with the need for international cooperation remains a central dilemma for African policymakers. African economies seek to leverage great power engagement to diversify trade relations, attract investment, and stimulate economic growth. However, structural barriers, such as limited market access and regulatory hurdles, hinder the realization of Africa's economic potential.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

As policymakers navigate the implications of great power engagement and seek to promote African development, several recommendations merit consideration. First and foremost, African countries should pursue strategic partnerships with multiple great powers. By diversifying their engagement, they can mitigate dependency risks and maximize developmental benefits. Moreover, enhancing transparent governance practices is imperative. Transparency, accountability, and good governance are crucial to ensuring that external investments contribute to sustainable development and benefit local populations.

Furthermore, strengthening regional integration efforts is paramount. This can enhance Africa's collective bargaining power and resilience amidst great power competition. Additionally, it fosters intracontinental trade and cooperation, bolstering the continent's position on the global stage. Investing in human capital development, infrastructure,

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and institutional capacity building is equally critical. This empowers African states to negotiate on equal footing with great powers and manage external engagements more effectively. Prioritizing conflict resolution is another vital aspect. By focusing on conflict prevention, mediation, and peacebuilding initiatives, African nations can mitigate the destabilizing effects of great power rivalries. This, in turn, creates conducive environments for sustainable development.

By adopting this approach to great power engagement and addressing the unique challenges and opportunities it presents, African countries can position themselves as active participants in shaping the future of international relations. In doing so, they can advance their developmental aspirations while contributing meaningfully to global discourse and progress.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Great-Power Africa Summits, encompassing France-Africa, Russia-Africa, and China-Africa engagements, have served as pivotal platforms for understanding and analyzing the multifaceted dynamics shaping the continent's global relationships. Recapitulating key findings, these summits have highlighted the evolving strategies of great powers in Africa, ranging from economic cooperation to geopolitical influence. France has emphasized historical ties and security cooperation, Russia has pursued resource extraction and military partnerships, while China has prioritized infrastructure development and trade. These

summits have significantly contributed to scholarship by offering insights into the complex interplay between geopolitics, economic interests, and development agendas in Africa. They have underscored the need for balanced analyses that consider the diverse interests and strategies of both great powers and African states.

However, further research is necessary to delve deeper into the socio-economic impacts of great-power engagements in Africa, including their implications for governance, human rights, and local communities. Additionally, exploring the effectiveness of different models of engagement and the potential for African agency in shaping these relationships would enrich our understanding of the dynamics at play. In essence, the Great-Power Africa Summits have laid a foundation for ongoing discourse and research, highlighting the significance of global partnerships in shaping Africa's trajectory in the 21st century.

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The Southern Voice: Zapatista and the Challenge towards

Neoliberal Agenda in a Globalized World

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The Zapatistas, emerging in the early 1990s in Chiapas, Mexico, advocate for indigenous autonomy, participatory democracy, and social justice, offering a powerful critique of neoliberal globalization. Their decentralized governance model, based on autonomous municipalities known as "caracoles," emphasizes collective consensus, horizontalism, and grassroots self-governance, challenging conventional power structures. This study utilizes qualitative research through literature analysis and frames its discussion within critical perspective. By critiquing neoliberal policies and advocating for indigenous dignity and autonomy, the Zapatistas underscore the detrimental impacts of globalization on marginalized communities, presenting a broader struggle against capitalist exploitation. It explores the Zapatistas' ideological foundations, strategic resistance to NAFTA, and its critique of neoliberal globalization highlighting its significance for global social movements. The movement's unique operational model contrasts with Mexico's hierarchical systems, promoting local authority and community empowerment. The Zapatistas' commitment to gender equality, education, healthcare, and improved living standards reflects their vision of a pluralistic and inclusive society. Their slogan, "a world where many worlds fit," continues to inspire contemporary social movements worldwide, advocating for a just and equitable society.

Keywords: *Neoliberal Policies, Globalization, Social Movement, Zapatista*

Introduction

Social movements in the 21st century are characterized by the dynamic and interconnected nature of global society, driven primarily by the advancements in digital technology, social media, and increasing awareness of global issues. Digital technology and social media platforms play a crucial role in organizing, mobilizing, and disseminating information (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014). Movements such as the Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter, and the #MeToo movement utilize social media to unify voices and mobilize mass action. This demonstrates how technology can be a powerful tool for creating social change and amplifying voices that might otherwise go unheard. Contemporary social movements generally have a positive impact on many aspects, albeit facing challenges. They have successfully

raised public awareness about various critical issues such as climate change, gender equality, human rights, and social justice. For instance, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has drawn global attention to issues of racism and police brutality. Additionally, modern social movements often influence policies and legislation, urging governments to adopt more fair and inclusive changes. By leveraging digital technology and social media, these movements can mobilize masses quickly and effectively, creating global solidarity that can pressure political leaders and corporations to take action. Overall, these dynamics demonstrate that 21st-century social movements can create broader and more sustainable social change (Tilly, 2019).

Current social movements often focus on global issues like climate change, human rights, gender equality, and social justice, while also addressing specific local issues that make them relevant in various contexts. These movements tend to be inclusive, involving diverse groups of people regardless of background, age, gender, or ethnicity, which strengthens the movements and increases their impact. Frequently, these movements are sparked by viral events that accelerate mass mobilization and attract international media attention. Moreover, many modern social movements adopt more horizontal and decentralized structures, allowing for more egalitarian participation and flexible responses to emerging issues (Morrow & Torres, 2022).

Contemporary social movements often employ creative tactics and strategies to capture public and media attention, such as peaceful demonstrations, theatrical actions, and viral online campaigns. Collaboration among organizations, communities, and individuals is increasingly common, strengthening social movements through broader networks and alliances. With these innovative and adaptive approaches, they successfully leverage technology and global networks to amplify their voices and achieve their goals, creating broader and more sustainable change.

The social movements of the 21st century share a close relationship with the Zapatistas in several aspects. Firstly, the Zapatistas have served as an inspiration for contemporary social movements with their innovative approach to social change. The concepts of horizontalism and democratic participation pioneered by the Zapatistas have influenced many modern social movements in terms of organizational structure and inclusive decision-making. Moreover, the Zapatistas also address issues relevant to current social movement issues, such as climate change, human rights, gender equality, and social justice. Contemporary social movements often draw inspiration from the Zapatista struggle for the rights of minorities and indigenous communities, as well as their resistance against neoliberalism and detrimental economic globalization (Alcantara & Bringel, 2019).

The Zapatista Army of National Liberation, or Zapatistas, is a revolutionary indigenous movement originating from the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. Emerging in 1994, the Zapatistas rose in resistance against the implementation of the North

American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which they perceived as a threat to indigenous autonomy, land rights, and economic well-being. Led by the enigmatic Subcomandante Marcos, the Zapatistas seized control of several towns and cities in Chiapas, proclaiming their demands for indigenous rights, land reform, and autonomy. The movement is deeply rooted in Mayan culture and anti-capitalist ideology, seeking to address centuries of marginalization and exploitation faced by indigenous communities (Dupuis-Déri, 2019).

The urgency of analyzing the Zapatista movement lies in its ideological foundation and strategic resistance to NAFTA and neoliberal policies in general. The movement's vision encompasses indigenous autonomy, participatory democracy, and social justice, offering a powerful critique of neoliberal globalization. Understanding the ideological underpinnings of the Zapatistas sheds light on their emergence and ongoing struggle against economic exploitation and cultural imperialism. Strategically, the Zapatistas operate through decentralized autonomous municipalities known as "*caracoles*", where decision-making is based on collective consensus and participatory democracy. Their movement strategies emphasize horizontalism, rejecting traditional hierarchical structures, and promoting grassroots organizing and self-governance. This unique operational model challenges conventional notions of power and authority, offering an alternative vision for social and political organization (Zibechi, 2019). Critically analyzing the Zapatista movement's critique of neoliberal

globalization is essential for comprehending its purpose and significance. By challenging neoliberal policies and advocating for indigenous autonomy and dignity, the Zapatistas highlight the devastating impact of globalization on marginalized communities. Their resistance represents a broader struggle against capitalist exploitation and serves as a beacon of hope for social movements worldwide.

Theoretical Framework

As reflected by Weber (2002), critical theory approaches in international relations (IR) have developed a theoretical lens to evaluate the nature, quality, and scope of social change in the era of globalization. This era is viewed either as an ideology that obscures long-standing trends of modern capitalism or as something fundamentally new. Within the IR discipline, "critical theory" has become a shorthand for various efforts to break away from the dominant paradigms of realism/neorealism and liberalism/neoliberalism. As such, it represents diverse critiques from the peripheries of the discipline, including neo-Gramscian analyses, reformulations of Marxist theory, feminist challenges, poststructuralist inquiries, and theoretical contributions from the Frankfurt School.

Critical theory provides a compelling framework for understanding globalization, emphasizing the socio-political, economic, and cultural dimensions of this complex process. It seeks to challenge the dominant narratives and ideologies that sustain global inequalities and power structures. A critical viewpoint on globalization starts from the framework that it is not merely an inevitable

economic phenomenon, but a deeply contested political project shaped by powerful actors with vested interests.

One of the central tenets of critical theory is the critique of neoliberalism ideology in legitimizing and sustaining the globalization process. The dominant neoliberal ideology promotes the idea that globalization leads to economic growth and development, leading to the excessive usage of capitalism to count, meaning the capitalization of any resource. Globalization, from this perspective, is viewed as an extension of capitalist exploitation on a global scale. The neoliberal economic policies that drive globalization— such as deregulation, privatization, and free trade—are seen as mechanisms that perpetuate wealth concentration in the hands of a few multinational corporations and wealthy nations (Senker, 2015). These policies often result in the marginalization and impoverishment of vulnerable populations, particularly in the Global South. Critical theorists highlight how globalization exacerbates existing inequalities and creates new forms of socio-economic stratification, thus perpetuating a cycle of dependency and underdevelopment (Petras, 1999).

However, critical theorists argue that this narrative obscures the exploitative and unequal nature of global economic relations (Hornborg, 2017; Hickel et al, 2022). By promoting the notion of a borderless world where free markets reign supreme, neoliberalism masks the power imbalances and coercive mechanisms that underpin globalization (Donnelly, 2019). This ideological critique is essential for understanding how

global economic policies are justified and perpetuated despite their adverse impacts on many communities. Therefore, the critique of free trade and neoliberalism is central to the theoretical debate on globalization within critical theory. This critique challenges the assumptions and consequences of neoliberal economic policies mentioned above. Critical theorists argue that these policies are not neutral or universally beneficial but are instead deeply political, serving the interests of powerful economic actors while exacerbating social and economic inequalities. One primary critique is that free trade, as promoted by neoliberalism, leads to unequal economic development. Critical theorists argue that while free trade is purported to generate economic growth and efficiency, it often benefits wealthy nations and multinational corporations at the expense of poorer countries and marginalized communities. This perspective draws on dependency theory and world-systems theory, which emphasize the structural inequalities in the global economy. These theories argue that the global economic system is designed to maintain the dominance of the Global North over the Global South, perpetuating a continuous cycle of dependency and underdevelopment. Free trade agreements and policies often open up markets in the Global South to competition from more advanced economies, leading to the deindustrialization and destabilization of local economies (El-Ojeili & Hayden, 2006).

Underscoring the importance of resistance and agency in the context of globalization also becomes an important part. While globalization is often portrayed as an

unstoppable force, critical theorists highlight the various forms of resistance that emerge in response to its detrimental effects. Social movements, grassroots organizations, and transnational networks of activists play a crucial role in challenging the injustices perpetuated by globalization. These movements seek to promote alternative visions of globalization that prioritize social justice and human rights over profit and economic interests. These movements often emerge from marginalized communities that are disproportionately affected by the adverse consequences of free trade and neoliberal economic policies. Their struggles are vital for imagining and constructing alternative futures. By challenging the status quo, these movements open up spaces for envisioning new forms of economic organization that prioritize human well-being and social justice (Johnston & Laxer, 2003).

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate the Zapatista movement's ideological basis, strategic resistance, and influence. This method was chosen for its potential to provide in-depth, comprehensive, and nuanced insights into the movement's complicated social dynamics. A systematic review of scholarly journal articles and books is used to collect data, which provides critical assessments and contextual background necessary for comprehending the greater significance of the Zapatista movement. These sources are chosen to provide a variety of opinions while remaining relevant.

Thematic analysis is used to analyze data, which entails several critical phases. To obtain a full comprehension, the data is first acquainted with by extensive reading and re-reading of relevant literature. Following that, initial codes are generated by recognizing key phrases and segments linked to the research themes. These codes are then sorted into prospective themes, iterated upon to appropriately portray the data, and cross-checked against the complete dataset for consistency and depth. Throughout the study, ethical considerations are strictly adhered to, particularly in the literature's respectful representation of indigenous knowledge and cultural practices. The use of many data sources to triangulate the research improves its reliability and validity. Reflexivity is maintained by noting personal biases and preconceptions, hence preserving study transparency. This analytical approach strives to provide a full, detailed, and contextualized knowledge of the Zapatista movement, providing significant insights into its ideological origins, resistance techniques, and long-term influence.

Results and Discussion
Ideological Foundation of Zapatista

In the early 1990s, the Zapatista movement, formerly known as the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, or Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, or EZLN, rose out of the Mexican state of Chiapas. Its core principles, which represent a wide range of leftist philosophies, include participatory democracy, anti-neoliberalism, and indigenous rights (Stephen, 1995). Fundamentally,

the movement supports indigenous communities' autonomy and self-governance and works to preserve and honor their customs, languages, and cultures. This ideological position results from indigenous groups in Mexico having long been marginalized and exploited (Mora, 2007). The Zapatistas are fierce opponents of neoliberal economics, claiming that such policies increase inequality and further alienate the impoverished, especially indigenous populations. They oppose free trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), deregulation, and privatization. According to the Zapatistas, these measures disrupt traditional ways of life, ruin livelihoods, and harm local economies. Their resistance to neoliberalism places them in line with larger international movements that denounce the effects of corporate capitalism and globalization on marginalized groups.

Although the Zapatistas greatly borrow from socialist ideas, their philosophy transcends traditional Marxism. They promote resource and land redistribution, highlighting collective ownership and demolishing capitalist frameworks that support exploitation (Harvey, 1998). Their endeavors to recover land for native populations and create independent areas where communal life and cooperative economy are the norm are indicative of this. They take a practical approach to socialism, adjusting it to the particular social and cultural circumstances of Chiapas. Gilbreth and Otero (2001) point out that the Zapatista movement's dedication to participatory governance and direct democracy makes it unique. The EZLN makes sure

that choices represent the will of the people by utilizing a network of grassroots assemblies and councils. By giving people more local authority and a sense of agency over group decisions, this kind of government empowers people. It symbolizes the Zapatista critique of conventional power structures and stands in stark contrast to the hierarchical and frequently corrupt governmental systems that rule Mexico.

The movement advocates for gender equality, education, healthcare, and a good standard of living. This devotion is more than just rhetoric; the Zapatistas have taken tangible steps to improve living circumstances in their autonomous zones, such as creating schools, clinics, and cooperative companies (Stephen, 1995). Their ideology aims to address both the symptoms and the underlying causes of poverty and inequality. The Zapatista goal is summed up in their slogan, "a world where many worlds fit." This slogan shows their desire for a pluralistic and inclusive society that values variety and encourages equality. They envision a world in which indigenous peoples and other oppressed groups own their lands and resources, and economic and social systems emphasize human needs before profit. This vision extends beyond Chiapas, connecting with global movements working to oppose capitalism and create more equal communities (Gahman, 2017).

Indigenous peoples of Chiapas historically experienced severe persecution, land dispossession, and socio-economic marginalization. From this, the EZLN uprising on January 1, 1994 was a direct response to

these long-standing injustices. This uprising coincided with the implementation of the highly significant NAFTA policy. In light of this, peasants and indigenous peoples began to worry that NAFTA would lead to more land grabs and economic hardship. Therefore, the Zapatistas positioned themselves as defenders of indigenous rights against the encroachment of global capitalism when they declared themselves rebels on the day NAFTA came into effect (Harvey, 1998). For the Zapatistas, land reform has been a major concern. The indigenous people of Chiapas have long fought for agrarian reform and land rights. Grounded in the struggles waged by communities as land reclamation forces and advocates for equitable distribution and use of land resources, the Zapatista movement emerged. This movement serves as a call for social and economic justice coupled with their demand for land reform, which runs counter to the historical phenomenon of injustice that has disenfranchised indigenous peoples in the region (Gilbreth & Otero, 2001).

The political climate in Mexico has had a major impact on the growth of the Zapatista movement. It can be seen that Mexico's political system, characterized by corruption, clientelism, and the dominance of elite interests, has resulted in severe inequality and disenfranchisement for the entire society in Mexico (Mora, 2007). The Zapatistas emerged as a grassroots opposition to this system, advocating for openness, accountability, and genuine democratic governance. The Zapatistas themselves criticize the Mexican state for its failure to protect the rights and welfare of the most vulnerable populations, particularly indigenous groups. Its vision for a more just and equitable society, founded on the ideas of autonomy and communal ownership continues to inspire and influence social movements around the world. The Zapatistas' struggle against past and contemporary injustices demonstrates their unwavering dedication to establishing "a world where many worlds fit," where variety is valued and equality is the norm.

Zapatista's Strategic Resistance to NAFTA

The Zapatista movement, represented by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), has employed a multifaceted strategy of resistance against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) since its inception in 1994. This resistance is rooted in the belief that NAFTA disproportionately benefits large corporations and agribusinesses, to the detriment of indigenous communities and small farmers in Mexico, particularly in the state of Chiapas. The Zapatistas feared that the agreement would lead to the displacement of indigenous populations and the erosion of their traditional ways of life (Khasnabish, 2010).

On January 1, 1994, the day NAFTA came into effect, the EZLN launched an armed uprising. They occupied several towns in Chiapas, including San Cristóbal de las Casas, and declared war against the Mexican government. This dramatic move was designed to draw international attention to the adverse effects of NAFTA on indigenous peoples. The initial phase of their re-

sistance involved direct military confrontation with the Mexican army (Stahler-Sholk, 2017). Utilizing guerrilla tactics and leveraging the difficult terrain of Chiapas, the EZLN sought to challenge the state's power. However, faced with an overwhelming military response, they soon shifted their strategy (Reyes, 2016).

One of the most effective strategies employed by the Zapatistas was their adept use of media and public relations (Inclán, 2018). Subcomandante Marcos, the charismatic spokesperson of the EZLN, became a symbol of the movement. Through communiqués, the internet, and alternative media, the Zapatistas were able to disseminate their message globally. This savvy use of media helped them garner international support and sympathy, transforming their local struggle into a global issue. Their ability to articulate their grievances and aspirations resonated with activists and sympathizers worldwide, creating a broad network of solidarity.

In addition to their media strategy, the Zapatistas engaged in political and legal maneuvers (Reyes, 2016). They entered into peace talks with the Mexican government, leading to the San Andrés Accords in 1996. These agreements recognized indigenous rights and autonomy, although they were not fully implemented. In response to this failure, the Zapatistas established autonomous municipalities known as *caracoles* and *Juntas de Buen Gobierno*. These entities allowed them to exercise self-governance, independent of the Mexican state. This move was both a practical and symbolic assertion of their autonomy and resistance to the neoliberal pol-

icies embodied by NAFTA (Harvey, 2016).

The Zapatistas also focused on building international solidarity and networking. They hosted international *encuentros* (encounters) to bring together activists from around the world. These gatherings facilitated the exchange of ideas and strategies, fostering a transnational movement opposed to neoliberal globalization. The Zapatistas' struggle resonated with various global movements, such as the anti-globalization protests in Seattle in 1999 and the World Social Forum, highlighting the interconnectedness of local and global struggles against neoliberalism (Perea Ozerin, 2021).

Economic resistance and self-sufficiency were also key components of the Zapatista strategy. They established agricultural cooperatives to produce and sell goods such as coffee, crafts, and textiles based on fair trade principles. These cooperatives aimed to reduce dependence on external markets and government aid, promoting economic autonomy within their communities. Additionally, the Zapatistas prioritized education and healthcare, building their own schools and clinics to improve living conditions and enhance self-reliance. These initiatives were crucial in sustaining their communities and demonstrating the viability of alternative, self-sufficient ways of living (Naylor, 2014). In addition, cultural resistance was another vital aspect of the Zapatista movement (Higgins, 2000). They emphasized the preservation and promotion of indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions as a form of resistance against the homogenizing effects of globalization and neoliberal policies

promoted by NAFTA. This cultural assertion reinforced their identity and solidarity, strengthening their resilience against external pressures.

Despite the decline in media attention over the years (Tucker, 2014), the Zapatista autonomous regions continue to operate, serving as a model of self-governance and resistance. Their innovative approach has highlighted the adverse impacts of neoliberal policies on indigenous populations and small farmers, making a significant impact on global discussions about trade, indigenous rights, and social justice. The Zapatistas' struggle against NAFTA and neoliberalism has influenced various global movements, demonstrating the power of local resistance in shaping global narratives and inspiring broader efforts for social and economic justice (Rebrii, 2020).

Zapatista's Critique of Neoliberal Globalization

The Zapatista movement's critique of neoliberal globalization is indeed deeply rooted in their commitment to indigenous autonomy, social justice, and resistance against economic exploitation and cultural imperialism. To comprehend the purpose behind their critique, it is imperative to delve into the principles and context that shape the Zapatista worldview. At the core of the Zapatista critique lies a profound dedication to indigenous autonomy and the preservation of indigenous rights. The Zapatistas staunchly advocate for the rights of indigenous peoples to govern themselves, control their land and resources, and

uphold their cultural heritage and identity (Godelmann, 2014). They view neoliberal globalization as a direct threat to these rights, as it often promotes privatization and market-driven development that disregard indigenous perspectives and interests. For the Zapatistas, defending indigenous autonomy is not just a matter of practical necessity, but a fundamental assertion of dignity and self-determination in the face of historical and ongoing marginalization. At the heart of the Zapatista critique lies a rejection of neoliberal policies and practices that prioritize profit over people, deregulate markets, and dismantle social welfare programs. Neoliberal globalization, characterized by free trade agreements, privatization, and austerity measures, has led to increased inequality, environmental degradation, and the marginalization of indigenous communities worldwide. For the Zapatistas, neoliberalism represents a continuation of colonialism and imperialism, perpetuating systems of oppression and exploitation (Collier & Collier, 2020).

The purpose of the Zapatista critique of neoliberal globalization is twofold: to defend indigenous autonomy and rights, and to challenge the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism. The Zapatistas assert the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination, land, and resources, which they view as essential for preserving their culture, identity, and way of life. Neoliberal policies, however, threaten these rights by prioritizing corporate interests and market forces over indigenous sovereignty and communal land tenure systems. Moreover, the Zapatistas critique

neoliberal globalization for its devastating impact on local economies, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability. By opening up markets and deregulating industries, neoliberal policies often lead to the displacement of small-scale farmers, the exploitation of natural resources, and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few elites. This exacerbates poverty, inequality, and social unrest, particularly in marginalized communities like those in Chiapas (Brass, 2020).

Another key aspect of the Zapatista critique is its emphasis on alternative modes of development and governance rooted in indigenous knowledge, traditions, and values. The Zapatistas reject the notion that development and progress are synonymous with Western-style capitalism and consumerism. Instead, they advocate for a form of development that prioritizes the well-being of communities, respects nature, and fosters collective solidarity and self-sufficiency. The Zapatista's purpose in critiquing neoliberal globalization is not merely to resist or oppose, but to propose alternatives and build alternatives. Their resistance is not just about saying "no" to neoliberalism but also about envisioning and constructing a different world based on principles of justice, equity, and solidarity. This is evident in the autonomous municipalities or *caracoles* established by the Zapatistas, where they govern themselves according to principles of participatory democracy, collective decision-making, and mutual aid (Maison, 2023).

Indeed, the Zapatistas' commitment to their critique of neoliberal globalization is vividly demonstrated through the establishment of autonomous municipalities, known as *caracoles*. These self-governing communities operate based on principles of participatory democracy, collective decision-making, and mutual aid, serving as living embodiments of the alternative vision advocated by the Zapatista movement. Within these *caracoles*, decision-making is decentralized, with power distributed among community members rather than concentrated in the hands of a few elites. This horizontal organizational structure not only challenges traditional hierarchical models of governance but also fosters a sense of collective ownership and responsibility among community members. Furthermore, the emphasis on mutual aid underscores the Zapatistas' commitment to solidarity and community support, countering the individualism and competition often promoted by neoliberal ideologies. By establishing these autonomous municipalities, the Zapatistas not only reject the authority of the Mexican state but also demonstrate the viability of alternative forms of governance rooted in indigenous autonomy and collective self-determination.

Conclusion

The Zapatista movement, formally known as the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), emerged in the early 1990s in Chiapas, Mexico, championing participatory democracy, anti-neoliberalism, and indigenous rights in response to historical marginalization and exploitation. Op-

posing neoliberal policies and agreements like NAFTA, which they argue exacerbate inequality and harm traditional livelihoods, the Zapatistas advocate for collective ownership, resource redistribution, and communal living tailored to their cultural context.

Their governance model, based on grassroots assemblies and councils, contrasts sharply with Mexico's hierarchical and often corrupt systems, emphasizing local authority and community empowerment. Committed to gender equality, education, healthcare, and improved living standards, the Zapatistas have implemented tangible improvements in their autonomous zones.

Their slogan, "a world where many worlds fit," reflects a vision for a pluralistic and inclusive society that values diversity and prioritizes human needs over profit. The 1994 uprising was a direct response to the injustices exacerbated by NAFTA, highlighting their focus on land reform and agrarian rights. The political corruption and elite dominance in Mexico have fueled their growth as they advocate for transparency and genuine democratic governance. The Zapatistas' struggle against global capitalism and their vision of a just, equitable society continue to inspire global social movements.

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Indonesia's Strategic Diplomacy and BRICS Membership:

Opportunities and Risks in a Multipolar Global Order

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This article analyses Indonesia's strategic diplomatic manoeuvre in joining BRICS amidst the growing multipolarity of the global order. Using a qualitative case study approach, this paper integrates three key frameworks: Free and Active Foreign Policy, Hedging Strategy, and Multipolarity. The study draws on secondary data from government documents, academic journals, think-tank reports, and international media sources. The findings reveal that Indonesia's accession to BRICS opens strategic opportunities in South–South economic cooperation, access to alternative development financing, and enhanced geopolitical influence. However, it also presents diplomatic risks such as potential Western pressure, internal dominance within BRICS by major powers, and reputational shifts that may affect ASEAN cohesion. The paper argues that Indonesia adopts a calculated hedging strategy that balances bilateral ties and multilateral engagement to maintain strategic autonomy. This study contributes to existing literature by offering an integrated analytical framework to understand Indonesia's foreign policy adaptation, while also providing practical insight into the dynamics of middle power diplomacy in the Global South.

Keywords: BRICS; free and active policy; hedging; multipolarity; strategic diplomacy

Introduction

Indonesia has faced a transformation of the global order from a unipolar system to a multipolar era since the early 2020s. The international structure changed from the dominance of the United States to multipolarity as powers such as BRICS, the European Union, and ASEAN grew (Setiawan, 2025). BRICS emerged as an alternative force in the Global South that sought to challenge the dominance of Western institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank (Bunskoek & Verburg, 2025; Setiawan, 2025). This change opens up wider diplomatic opportunities for developing countries, including Indonesia, which are looking for strategic maneuver space (Setiawan, 2025). The dedollarization initiative spearheaded by BRICS introduces an alternative global financial system and opens up opportunities to diversify Indonesia's foreign exchange reserves (Pandito, 2025). Indonesia then showed strategic interest in BRICS membership as a step to expand economic

access while improving its diplomatic position in the global arena (Setiawan, 2025). Therefore, the context of global multipolarity is an important background to understand Indonesia's foreign policy motivation in expressing interest in joining BRICS.

Studies on BRICS participation have so far focused more on member countries such as Brazil, Russia, and China, while the aspirations of prospective members such as Indonesia are still not studied in depth (Patrick & Hogan, 2025). Indonesian foreign policy studies tend to highlight the free-active doctrine without explicitly linking it to adaptive diplomacy strategies in a multipolar order (Wicaksana & Karim, 2023). The literature on Indonesia's hedging strategy mostly emphasizes the economic, security, or balance of power dimensions, but there is still a lack of empirical studies on Indonesia's role in the BRICS forum (Kusumadewi & Wiswayana, 2024; Anwar, 2023)—while several other studies such as the concept of multilevel hedging have begun to be explored in the context of developing countries (Kusumadewi & Wiswayana, 2024). Previous research has rarely addressed simultaneously all three conceptual frameworks—free and active policy, hedging strategy, and multipolarity—in a single integrative analysis model. Therefore, there is still a literature gap on how Indonesia harmonizes the principles of normative diplomacy with adaptive practical strategies in the multipolar era and in the context of aspirations to join BRICS. This article fills this gap by designing a conceptual framework that combines free and active foreign policy, hedging strategy,

and multipolarity in a single analysis model. Thus, this research offers a more comprehensive theoretical contribution and provides a new empirical understanding of Indonesia's foreign policy adaptation in an increasingly multipolar and heterogeneous global order.

The principle of Free and Active Foreign Policy has been used as the main normative framework that has shaped the orientation of Indonesian diplomacy since the independence era (Anwar, 2023). The concept of Hedging Strategy is understood as a flexible approach that integrates elements of active neutrality, inclusive diversification, and adaptive offsets to deal with geopolitical uncertainty (Kuik & Jamil, 2024). Multipolarity is seen as the structure of the international system in which global powers begin to spread and provide greater diplomatic space for emerging and middle power actors (Patrick & Hogan, 2025). This combined approach between these three frameworks allows for integrative analysis without negating Indonesia's diplomatic autonomy in the face of great power rivalries (Anwar, 2023; Kuik & Jamil, 2024). The theoretical strength of this article lies in the incorporation of the normative and pragmatic dimensions of foreign policy in the framework of multipolar hedging (Anwar, 2023; Patrick & Hogan, 2025). The emphasis on inter-conceptual relations emphasizes that Indonesia's diplomacy strategy is not merely adherence to the bloc, but an adaptive maneuver based on the calculation of risks and benefits (Kuik & Jamil, 2024). Therefore, this article places the three elements—

free-active, hedging, and multipolarity—in a single comprehensive and contextual analytical model to understand the role of Indonesian diplomacy on the Global South stage.

This paper raises the following key research questions: How does Indonesia use strategic diplomacy through BRICS membership to seize opportunities and mitigate risks in a multipolar global order? This question is relevant considering that Indonesia's membership in the BRICS reflects strategic steps that are aligned with a free-active foreign policy and a response to the dynamics of global multipolarity (Patrick & Hogan, 2025; Reuters, 2025). The objectives of this study include three main aspects. First, analyze how Indonesia designs a diplomacy strategy through the process of joining BRICS in order to maximize economic access, Global South political integration, and diplomatic autonomy (Setiawan, 2025). Second, identifying opportunities open to Indonesia in the BRICS, such as market diversification, access to alternative financing through the New Development Bank, and strengthening its position in global forums (Syamsudin, 2025; Reuters, 2025; Asia Society Policy Institute, 2025). Third, assess the diplomatic and geopolitical risks that may arise, such as the perception of dependence on the great powers of the BRICS (China–Russia), pressure from the West, and internal disagreements of the alliance (The Australian, 2025; Reuters, 2025). The analytical framework of this study integrates three main concepts: Free and Active Foreign Policy, Hedging Strategy, and

Multipolarity (Patrick & Hogan, 2025; Kuik & Jamil, 2024). The article is organized into five parts: Introduction discusses the global context, literature, conceptual foundations, problem formulation, and research objectives. After that, Methodology explains the research design and analysis techniques; then unravelling Indonesia's strategic calculations of the BRICS; further evaluate the opportunities and risks of Indonesian diplomacy; and finally a Conclusion that summarizes the findings, reflects conceptual contributions, points out limitations, and recommends further comparative research.

Methodology

This study uses the case of Indonesia expressing interest in joining BRICS on October 25, 2024 through an official statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia during the BRICS Plus Summit in Kazan, Russia, until full membership in January 2025 as the main analysis unit (Kementerian Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia, 2024; Reuters, 2025). This case was chosen because it reflects the dynamics of Indonesia's foreign policy in the face of a multipolar global structure. The study site includes official government statements, state speeches, and diplomatic documents published by the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The temporal location focuses on the period of diplomatic decisions as well as the international reaction to the accession. The institutions analyzed included the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the New Development Bank, and the BRICS Plus forum. The analysis also involves

a group of Global South actors who influence or respond to Indonesia's diplomacy process. As such, this case represents the merging of domestic and global dimensions in strategic diplomacy.

This research uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory and explanatory case study design (Anwar, 2023; Siborutorop, 2024). This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the process and meaning behind Indonesia's diplomatic policy towards BRICS. The case study design was chosen because it was able to capture the complex interactions between foreign policy and global geostrategy. The design also facilitates an analysis of the national and international contexts that influenced the decision to join BRICS. The qualitative approach allows for the critical and contextual exploration of document text data. This study does not use quantitative methods because its focus is on understanding the patterns, motives, and strategies of diplomatic action. Thus, the qualitative design of the case study is best suited to the objectives of strategic analysis.

This research only uses secondary data obtained from government documents, academic journals, thinktank reports, and trusted international media (Setiawan, 2025; Priamarizki, 2024). Government documents include official statements from the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, presidential speeches, and BRICS Plus Summit materials. Academic journal articles provide theoretical context and previous analysis of diplomacy and hedging. The reports of policy institutions such as the Carnegie Endowment and the Clingendael

Institute support global diplomatic and geopolitical understanding. International media such as Reuters and The Australian provide data on international reactions to Indonesia's diplomatic decisions. All of this secondary data is verified to ensure credibility and suitability with the topic of analysis. This approach prioritizes the quality of authoritative and verified sources.

The data collection process is carried out through a systematic literature and official document review desk (Maulana & Azis, 2025). First, the researcher identifies and downloads relevant policy documents and academic resources about BRICS membership. Second, journal data and reports were selected based on the relevance of the topic. Third, international media data is collected through news provider platforms such as Reuters and the websites of policy agencies. Fourth, each document is read carefully to record relevant quotes, dates, and contexts related to Indonesian diplomacy. Fifth, the researcher made a thematic summary for each source based on the analytical framework. Sixth, the entire desk-review process is recorded in the research worksheet to ensure transparency and replication. This process guarantees that data is collected systematically and traceable.

Data analysis follows three main stages of Miles & Huberman: data reduction, thematic data presentation, and conclusion/verification (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2018). First, the researcher reduced the data by sorting relevant data based on keywords, themes, and categories such as diplomacy, calculation strategies, hedging, opportunity,

risk, free-active, and multipolar. Second, the reduction results are presented in the form of a narrative that visualizes the relationships between the main concepts. Third, conclusions are drawn by interpreting the pattern of relationships between strategies, opportunities, and risks in Indonesian diplomacy. Fourth, the validity of the findings is verified through triangulation between official documents, academic literature, and the media. Fifth, the researcher recorded the analysis memo to strengthen the researcher's interpretation and reflection during the analysis. Sixth, all findings are analyzed within the selected theoretical framework (hedging, multipolarity, free-active). Seventh, the final report reflects the systematic process and provides a coherent and scientific analytical narrative.

Indonesia's Strategic Calculation of the BRICS

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of Indonesia's strategic calculations in utilizing its membership in the BRICS. First, it examines how BRICS functions as a multipolar platform that expands access opportunities to institutions such as the New Development Bank as well as the dedollarization agenda that benefits members of the Global South, including Indonesia. Furthermore, Indonesia's strategic motivation is discussed, which includes market diversification, the role of diplomatic bridges between the West and the South, and the consistency of the hedging approach that supports a free and active foreign policy (Syamsudin, 2025; Setiawan, 2025). Then, international re-

sponses; such as remarks from BRICS member countries, the reaction of Western powers to Indonesia's move, and the implications for ASEAN and strategic bilateral relations as a form of risk mitigation were examined. Thus, the entire section captures how Indonesia builds adaptive diplomacy that is calculative, balanced, and responsive to ongoing geopolitical dynamics.

The Role of BRICS in the Multipolar Global Order

BRICS is evolving into an important instrument in the global multipolar order that offers developing countries an alternative to the world's financial institutions and governance (Patrick & Hogan, 2025). The expansion of the BRICS bloc in January 2025 includes Indonesia as the first full member of Southeast Asia (Reuters, 2025; Associated Press, 2025). This membership opens access to the New Development Bank (NDB) which provides financing for infrastructure and green energy projects (Patrick & Hogan, 2025; Fitriana, 2025). In addition, Indonesia also took advantage of the momentum of dedollarization initiated by BRICS as an effort to diversify foreign exchange reserves (Patrick & Hogan, 2025; Bunskoek & Verburg, 2025). This reflects structural opportunities in advancing South–South economic diplomacy (Patrick & Hogan, 2025; Phenomenal World, 2023). Indonesia's willingness to serve in this forum demonstrates its diplomatic ability to take advantage of the new global architecture. Thus, BRICS occupies a strategic position for Indonesia's adaptive diplomacy.

Through BRICS membership, Indonesia positions itself as a country that promotes the reform of global institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank for the benefit of the Global South (Patrick & Hogan, 2025). Through this forum, Indonesia also encourages an inclusive approach to global health, economic justice, and technology issues (Patrick & Hogan, 2025). Active involvement in BRICS discussions strengthens Indonesia's diplomatic legitimacy as a representative of the Global South (Heine, 2025; The Diplomat, 2025). The climate change and technology agenda is also an effective means of soft power diplomacy (Phenomenal World, 2023). The forum also encourages collaboration in AI governance, global health, and inclusive development (Patrick & Hogan, 2025). Thus, BRICS is not only an economic platform but also normative and substantive diplomacy. Indonesia uses this to expand its global network without relying on the Western system.

BRICS also provides space for Indonesia to develop soft power through global development and reform issues (Syamsudin, 2025; Heine, 2025). Indonesia uses this forum to strengthen its image as a mediator between global powers and developing countries (The Diplomat, 2025). This participation reflects a balanced diplomatic strategy— optimizing opportunities without losing policy independence (Heine, 2025; The Diplomat, 2025). This diplomacy is in line with Indonesia's free-active and non-aligned foreign policy principles (Patrick & Hogan, 2025). Indonesia also strengthens its role in

the South-South dialogue on development issues and financial independence (Heine, 2025; Bunskoek & Verburg, 2025). This forum strengthens Indonesia's position as an adaptive middle power country in the era of multipolarity. Thus, the role of BRICS provides high strategic value in Indonesian diplomacy.

Indonesia's Strategic Motivation: Domestic and Global Interests

Indonesia's main motivation for joining the BRICS is the diversification of export markets to member countries such as India, Russia, and Brazil, especially for strategic products such as CPO, coal, and natural gas (Syamsudin, 2025). In addition, Indonesia uses NDB as an alternative source of financing without political attachment to Western institutions (Patrick & Hogan, 2025; Fitriana, 2025). This approach reflects a hedging strategy that maintains the autonomy of a free foreign policy while maintaining relations with Western powers (Heine, 2025; Syamsudin, 2025). In an internal review, the government places participation in BRICS as strengthening Indonesia's image as a bridge to the Global South (Syamsudin, 2025; The Diplomat, 2025). This strategy is seen as relevant by the political elite because it is in line with the national narrative that emphasizes the role of the leader of the Global South (The Diplomat, 2025). On the domestic side, BRICS membership supports national growth targets while balancing external pressures (Syamsudin, 2025; Fitriana, 2025). Thus, Indonesia's strategic motivation is calculative and based

on domestic-external opportunities.

Indonesia's hedging strategy approach clashes between expanding relations with BRICS and maintaining bilateral relations with the US and the European Union (Heine, 2025). Indonesia wants to create a diplomatic space where the country is not tied to a single power bloc (The Diplomat, 2025). The domestic economy is one of the main drivers, because this membership enlarges investment and technology opportunities (Syamsudin, 2025; Fitriana, 2025). In addition, Indonesia maintains the principle of free activity as the foundation of adaptive diplomacy (Patrick & Hogan, 2025). This strategy allows for flexibility to tailor relationships with various global powers. In diplomatic practice, Indonesia is actively conducting bilateral negotiations to maintain a balance of relations—including with Russia—as part of an integrated diplomacy strategy in BRICS membership (The Australian, 2025). Therefore, Indonesia's strategic motivation is seen as a combination of an opportunity-economic matrix and adaptive geopolitical considerations.

In addition to economic and political aspects, Indonesia also makes BRICS diplomacy a soft power arena through the global governance reform agenda and Global South issues (Patrick & Hogan, 2025; Syamsudin, 2025). Indonesia strengthens its image as a mediator by carrying the spirit of the Bandung Conference in the BRICS forum (The Australian, 2025). Visits by heads of state and investment negotiations are tools of diplomacy that help strengthen the legitimacy of the global position (Reuters, 2025). This

diplomacy emphasizes concern for the issue of inclusive development and solidarity in the Global South (Phenomenal World, 2023; Bunskoek & Verburg, 2025). This strategy also has the potential to trigger suspicion from the West about Indonesia's diplomatic orientation (Sood, 2025). However, the government responded by strengthening active bilateral diplomacy as risk mitigation. Thus, Indonesia's diplomacy strategy in the BRICS reflects an integrated and calculative approach to global challenges.

International Response to Indonesia's Position

Reactions to Indonesia's entry into the BRICS were mixed; BRICS members welcome it as an expansion of the bloc's legitimacy in Southeast Asia and a contribution to the Global South (Patrick & Hogan, 2025). However, Western powers such as the US and the European Union have expressed concern about the possibility of a shift in Indonesia's strategic orientation in joining the BRICS, which is considered to obscure the country's traditional non-aligned commitments (The Australian, 2025; Wong, 2025). Some analysts highlight long-term diplomatic risks such as potential economic sanctions or tariff threats (Sood, 2025). ASEAN has shown a cautious response because it is concerned that regional integration could be affected by a shift in unilateral diplomacy (Sulaiman, 2024). In line with that, Indonesia is strengthening bilateral diplomacy to cushion global pressures, including strengthening economic and defense cooperation with Australia

in order to maintain strategic balance and respond to tensions with the United States (Reuters, 2025; The Australian, 2025). This international response forced Indonesia to maintain a balance between new influence opportunities and widespread diplomatic risks.

The meeting between President Prabowo and President Putin in June 2025 in St. Petersburg strengthens bilateral cooperation initiatives between Indonesia and Russia in the fields of defense, energy (including nuclear reactor development), and education (Reuters, 2025). Nevertheless, Indonesia emphasized that this approach is still based on the principle of non-aligned and national strategic autonomy, by not siding with any of the power blocs (Reuters, 2025). This strengthened relationship has drawn the spotlight from Western powers, who question whether Indonesia is starting to shift its strategic orientation. In response, the Indonesian government ensured the continuation of dialogue with Western countries to maintain a balanced and independent partnership (The Australian, 2025; Reuters, 2025). This diplomacy reflects Indonesia's diplomatic hedging strategy that combines strategic bilateral engagement as well as multilateral participation. ASEAN's response to the progress of this relationship has remained moderate, with attention to the potential impact on regional integration (Sulaiman, 2024). Thus, Indonesian diplomacy is faced with the challenge of maintaining a balance of global reputation and partnership.

Internal tensions within the BRICS, particularly the rivalry between China and India, can disrupt the collective agenda that benefits new members such as Indonesia (Patrick & Hogan, 2025; Wulf, 2024). In addition, the lack of joint decisions on significant issues creates high strategic uncertainty for newcomer countries (Patrick & Hogan, 2025; East Asia Forum, 2024). The dedollarization agenda promoted by BRICS raises debates about the geopolitical implications and possible dependence of Indonesia on alternative currencies, especially amid systemic pressures against the dollar's dominance in the evolving multipolar order (Patrick & Hogan, 2025; Bunskoek & Verburg, 2025). Indonesia faces the need to maintain diplomatic neutrality while implementing adaptive policies that have the principles of hedging, multipolarity, and diplomatic independence (Patrick & Hogan, 2025). The reaction from the West shows external pressures that require active and flexible mitigation strategies (The Diplomat, 2025; Sood, 2025). The Indonesian government responded through proactive bilateral diplomacy and the role of mediator of the Global South countries. Thus, the international response emphasizes the importance of calculative and flexible diplomacy as a pillar of Indonesia's foreign policy strategy.

Opportunities and Risks of Indonesian Diplomacy

This section will present an in-depth analysis of the strategic opportunities and risks facing Indonesia through membership

in the BRICS. First, it will discuss various strategic opportunities, including access to new markets in member countries such as India, Brazil, and Russia, as well as alternative funding opportunities through the New Development Bank that support infrastructure and green energy projects (Pandito, 2025; Patrick & Hogan, 2025). Furthermore, it will critically explore geopolitical and diplomatic risks, such as potential pressure from Western countries on Indonesia's policy orientation and the issue of internal domination by major BRICS powers such as China and Russia (Fitriana, 2025; Valdai Club, 2025). Finally, it will explain how the diplomatic hedging strategy is a solution for Indonesia to maintain a balance between maximizing the benefits of BRICS and strengthening bilateral relations with other global powers such as the United States and Japan, while maintaining its position as a free and active middle power (Syamsudin, 2025; The Diplomat, 2025). Thus, this discussion will illustrate how Indonesia calculatively manages opportunities and mitigates risks in the geopolitical shift towards a multipolar world.

Strategic Opportunities

Indonesia officially joined as a full member of BRICS in January 2025, making it the first member of Southeast Asia and marking an important strategic diplomacy milestone (Associated Press, 2025; Patrick & Hogan, 2025). This membership opens direct access to the fast-growing export markets of member countries such as India, Russia, and Brazil, thereby strengthening the diversifi-

cation of the national economy (East Asia Forum, 2025). Indonesia also gained access to alternative funding through the New Development Bank to support infrastructure and green energy projects (Reuters, 2025). Through NDB, countries can accelerate the clean energy transition and technology development, which has a significant impact on the domestic development agenda (IESR, 2025). In addition, Indonesia's participation supports Global South diplomacy through a global reform platform, especially in international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank (East Asia Forum, 2025; Patrick & Hogan, 2025). The BRICS Forum is also a forum for effective soft power diplomacy, raising issues such as climate change and inclusive development as part of Indonesia's diplomacy maneuvering strategy (East Asia Forum, 2025). Thus, diplomacy in the BRICS provides strategic economic and geopolitical opportunities that are crucial for Indonesia's global position.

Indonesia leverages BRICS membership to expand strategic investment networks from member countries, especially in the energy, infrastructure, and technology sectors (East Asia Forum, 2025). Indonesia's participation in the NDB (New Development Bank) is considered a strategic step to access alternative funding sources outside Western financial institutions, which are often associated with certain political requirements or ideological agendas (Reuters, 2025; Patrick & Hogan, 2025). Indonesia explicitly mainstreams the concept of a hedging strategy that balances relations with the BRICS while maintaining bilateral relations with global

powers such as the United States (Syamsudin, 2025). Indonesia's hedging strategy allows the country to maintain diplomatic flexibility and avoid exclusive attachment to one pole of power, both BRICS and the West (Southeast Asia Report, 2025). BRICS provides an opportunity for Indonesia to expand South-South development cooperation in an inclusive and equitable scheme (Anugrah et al., 2025). Indonesia's involvement in BRICS also provides space to fight for the global financial independence agenda, especially through support for dedollarization in the international transaction system (EBC Forex, 2025). Therefore, Indonesia's membership in the BRICS creates large-scale diplomatic and financial opportunities.

Indonesia's participation in the BRICS agenda strengthens its image as a representative of the Global South that fights for inclusive global reforms (East Asia Forum, 2025). Indonesia uses this platform to apply soft power through climate and energy diplomacy, which is consistent with national sustainable development efforts (IESR, 2025). This diplomatic power is further strengthened by the free-active foreign policy philosophy reflected in the president's rhetoric that *"A thousand friends are too few, one enemy is too many"* (Infobank News, 2025). BRICS also opens up opportunities for knowledge and technology exchange through energy research and innovation collaboration between BRICS members (EIIR, 2025). This approach gives diplomatic legitimacy for Indonesia to speak in global forums on global structural reform. Thus, Indonesia's diplomacy in the BRICS is not only economic,

but also strengthens the country's ideological position on the international stage.

Geopolitical and Diplomatic Risks

Indonesia's membership in the BRICS cannot be separated from the risk of diplomatic pressure from Western countries, especially the United States, which suspects that Indonesia's policy direction will increasingly lean towards China or Russia (The Australian, 2025). Some US officials even threatened to impose additional tariffs of up to 32% if Indonesia was deemed to have taken policies deemed anti-American, although it was eventually refined to a 19% tariff through intensive diplomatic negotiations (The Australian, 2025; Reuters, 2025). These risks reflect that Indonesia's foreign policy orientation remains a major concern for major global powers. In addition, the internal dominance in the BRICS structure by major powers such as China and Russia can limit Indonesia's influence in decision-making in the bloc (CEPA, 2025). As a new member, Indonesia risks ending up in a position of geopolitical subordination if this dominance is not managed with a mature diplomatic strategy. ASEAN also expressed concern that Indonesia's unilateral orientation towards BRICS could disrupt regional integration and regional leadership positions (Lowy Institute, 2025). Therefore, diplomatic and geopolitical risk mitigation is an important aspect of Indonesia's diplomacy strategy.

Indonesia faces an international reputation risk if it is considered to be too far on the side of non-Western powers, which

can weaken the image of neutrality and free-active policies that have been upheld (The Australian, 2025). Internal tensions within the BRICS—especially between China and India—can disrupt collective policy consolidation, including for new members such as Indonesia, which has the potential to experience coordination and strategic alignment constraints in the multilateral forum (Tran, 2023; Bunskoek & Verburg, 2025). This challenge raises questions about institutional compatibility and the resilience of Indonesia's policies amid the shock of the bloc's dynamics (Patrick, 2024). These diplomatic risks suggest that Indonesia must carefully manage expectations and influence in the BRICS structure. In addition, the de-dollarization plan carried out by BRICS has the potential to shake national macroeconomic stability if it is not anticipated with a mature financial strategy (Merics, 2024). Diplomacy that is only symbolic in nature—without concrete policy support—can erode Indonesia's global credibility. Therefore, a systematic and multidimensional mitigation strategy is very important.

President Prabowo faces a complex diplomatic challenge in balancing strategic cooperation with BRICS members such as Russia, while maintaining consistency on the principles of free and non-affiliated foreign policy (Reuters, 2025). This move has sparked concerns in the West about the potential shift in political orientation if Indonesia is considered too close to China or Russia (The Australian, 2025; Sood, 2025). The Australian news agency noted that there

are concerns over the internal dominance of the BRICS which is considered to obscure Indonesia's position as a non-aligned country (The Australian, 2025). The SCMP reminded that Indonesia's diplomatic image will be tested if it is considered to be one-sided, even though the government emphasizes that BRICS membership does not mean taking sides with one of the powers (Sood, 2025). From the regional side, ASEAN reacted cautiously to Indonesia's membership in the BRICS due to concerns that it could weaken the cohesion of regional integration and affect the shared commitment to ASEAN's centrality (Sulaiman, 2024). In addition, concerns have also arisen about the internal impact of China-India tensions on the effectiveness of the BRICS collective agenda—this phenomenon has the potential to limit Indonesia's diplomatic maneuverability (Lowy Institute, 2025). In this context, multilayered diplomacy and hedging strategies are vital, demanding adaptive responses to maintain a balance of countries' reputations and partnerships on the global stage.

Indonesia's Diplomacy Hedging Strategy

In response to BRICS opportunities and risks, Indonesia implements a hedging diplomacy strategy—combining multilateral engagement in BRICS and active bilateral cooperation (East Asia Forum, 2025; Syamsudin, 2025). This strategy ensures diplomatic flexibility so that Indonesia can adapt to geopolitical changes without sacrificing national policy independence (CEPA, 2025). President Prabowo affirmed the philosophy

of *"a thousand friends are too few, one enemy is too many"* as a reflection of a free and inclusive foreign policy towards all alliances (East Asia Forum, 2025). Through the BRICS forum, Indonesia strengthens its position as a Global South actor while maintaining a sustainable dialogue with Western powers such as the United States (East Asia Forum, 2025; Reuters, 2025). This approach maintains Indonesia's reputation as an adaptive and non-partisan *middle power* (Syamsudin, 2025). The combination of multilateral and bilateral diplomacy strengthens Indonesia's strategic bargaining position. Thus, diplomatic hedging is the main foundation for Indonesia's diplomacy strategy in responding to the challenges of the global multipolar order.

Indonesia is building a strong strategic bilateral network with the United States, Japan, and ASEAN countries as a buffer against potential pressure from both blocs—BRICS and Western powers (Reuters, 2025). This cooperation covers various important sectors such as energy, defence, education and digital infrastructure (The Australian, 2025; AP News, 2025). The bilateral approach adds a layer of external risk mitigation, which is essential to prevent a single reliance on a single power bloc. In addition, Indonesia is also actively proposing low-emission development projects and green technology through NDBs under the BRICS forum (IESR, 2025). This shows that the hedging strategy is not just rhetorical but implemented through real projects. Indonesia simultaneously maintains its involvement in the BRICS and remains faithful to

the principle of non-affiliation. Through this multi-layered diplomacy approach, Indonesia has succeeded in maintaining its strategic autonomy in the global arena.

In response to the opportunities and risks of BRICS membership, Indonesia is implementing an adaptive, calculative, and pragmatic model of hedging diplomacy—a strategy that allows Jakarta to navigate relations with China and Russia without sacrificing partnerships while maintaining national policy flexibility (Center for European Policy Analysis, 2025; East Asia Forum, 2025). This strategy opens up space for simultaneous dialogue with other global powers such as the United States and the European Union, so that Indonesia can maintain a strategic balance in the global multipolar order (East Asia Forum, 2025; Syamsudin, 2025). Indonesia also uses the momentum of BRICS membership to promote global reforms—especially in the governance of international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank—through active engagement in BRICS platforms and international think tanks (East Asia Forum, 2025; Patrick & Hogan, 2025). This hedging strategy strengthens the legitimacy of Indonesia's diplomacy as a pragmatic democratic country and is not trapped in one pole of power, while strengthening national diplomatic resilience (Syamsudin, 2025; Global South Forum, 2025). Thus, diplomatic hedging has become the cornerstone of Indonesia's foreign policy strategy in facing the challenges of the global multipolarity era.

Conclusion

This research reveals that Indonesia strategically makes its membership in the BRICS an effective instrument of hedging diplomacy in the face of the multipolar global order. Through this membership, Indonesia has succeeded in opening up opportunities for economic diversification, expanding access to alternative financing through the New Development Bank, and strengthening its diplomatic position as a bridge to the Global South. Diplomacy that combines the principles of a free foreign policy with a calculative practical approach provides greater legitimacy and bargaining power in international forums. Nonetheless, this shift in diplomacy orientation has brought the spotlight from major global powers and concerns in the ASEAN region about the implications of regional integration. Thus, Indonesia's membership in the BRICS is the result of strategic considerations that combine diplomatic opportunities and geopolitical risk mitigation.

This study offers a scientific contribution through a conceptual analysis framework that integrates variable hedging strategies, global multipolarity dynamics, and the principle of free and active diplomacy. New variables such as market diversification within the BRICS scope, access to the New Development Bank, as well as the approach to cultural diplomacy as a global reform agenda have been introduced as part of the innovative analysis model. A qualitative approach based on the study of the latest literature and analysis of official policy documents provides a relevant systematic method for understanding the diplomacy strategies of developing countries. This framework also opens up the direction of potential comparative studies between middle powers such as Indonesia, Turkey, Mexico, and South Africa. As a contribution to the study of Indonesia's international relations, this research has succeeded in bridging the dimensions of normative theory and adaptive diplomacy practice that are applicable and empirical.

However, this study has significant limitations, among other things because it only examines one case—namely Indonesia's membership in the BRICS in early 2025—which limits the generalization of results to other countries or different periods. The study methods used were limited to the analysis of secondary documents without primary data such as field surveys or interviews with political and public actors. This study also does not include demographic variables such as gender, marginal groups, or cross-generational that can enrich understanding of the dynamics of domestic diplomacy. In addition, a limited focus on Indonesia without involving other BRICS candidates or members such as South Africa, Turkey, or Mexico reduces the variety of cases. Therefore, advanced research is recommended to use multinational comparative quantitative designs involving a wide range of policy actors, civil society, and the media, in order to allow for a broader and valid generalization of strategic diplomacy theories.

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Vietnam's Hedging Strategy in the US–China Trade War:

Geo-economic Response during the First Trump Administration

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The United States–China trade war placed Vietnam in a strategic yet vulnerable position, as a non-involved country that significantly benefited from trade and investment relocation. This situation contributed to Vietnam's relative capability growth and created new space for asserting its role in regional economic and political structures. This article analyzes Vietnam's foreign policy strategy in response to the rivalry between two great powers by applying a geo-economic approach and qualitative research methods. The findings reveal that Vietnam adopts a hedging strategy by undertaking active neutrality, contradictory policy—simultaneously accepting and rejecting dominance—and by diversifying its global partnerships to preserve policy autonomy. Vietnam's hedging reflects both a function of national interest protection and an effort to leverage the opportunity created by relative capability enhancement amidst structural uncertainty. Thus, hedging emerges as a relevant geo-economic instrument for middle states in navigating major power competition while maintaining strategic space and sovereign decision-making.

Keywords: *Geo-economics, Hedging, US-China, Trade War, Vietnam.*

Introduction

The trade war between the United States and China, the world's two most important economic powers, has disrupted the stability of the global supply chain (GSC). As trade barriers increased and so does the cost of doing business in China, companies around the world started diversifying their production sources (Selmi et al., 2020). In this changing environment, Vietnam has quickly become one of the top destinations for relocating production. According to Vietnam's Foreign Investment Agency

(FIA), the country saw a 69 percent increase in foreign direct investment (FDI) in the first five months of 2019, with 42.5 percent of the capital coming from China (VNS, 2019). By the end of that year, 23 out of 33 companies that previously operated in China had moved their production to Vietnam (Anwar, 2019; CNN, 2019). These changes highlight the new opportunities created by the trade war and show how Vietnam has found itself in a strategic yet vulnerable position amid the growing rivalry between the two global powers.

International Relations (IR) scholarship has mainly focused on great powers as the primary actors shaping the global system, often portraying middle power states as passive entities reacting to external influences[1]. However, the growing rivalry between the United States and China has extended the concept of great power competition beyond military and security issues into economic sectors, which now directly impact countries that are not central to global power structures. This development emphasizes the need to re-examine how middle states responses to a shift in the international system. Despite this, many studies have overlooked how countries like Vietnam, between two great powers, strategically develop their foreign policies in response to complex and evolving geo-economic conditions.

This study examines how Vietnam navigates its complex position within the U.S.–China rivalry using a geo-economic approach. This study explores how Vietnam employs hedging strategies to protect its independence, expand its foreign policy options, and leverage the competition between the two powers to achieve its national development goals. The research focuses on the first term of the Trump administration (2017–2020), a period characterized by rising trade war tensions and significant shifts in global supply chains.

The Impact of the US-China Trade War: a Review of Literature

The trade war between the United States and China has become a key topic within the international political economy due to its extensive implications not only for the two disputing countries but also for the stability of the global supply chain. Academic literature on the topic has generally categorized the impacts of the trade war into three main clusters, based on the actors affected: (1) the impact on the U.S. and/or Chinese domestic economies; (2) disruptions and restructuring within global supply chains; and (3) shifts in cross-border investment flows. While these studies have contributed significantly to understanding the macroeconomic and systemic consequences of the conflict, they remain predominantly centered on the perspectives of great powers. As a result, the responses of middle-power states, particularly those that have experienced either spillover gains or structural vulnerability, have been relatively understudied. This presents a gap in the literature, especially considering that such states often serve as buffer zones and adaptive actors amid great power rivalries.

The first cluster of studies focuses on the domestic economic impacts of the trade war on both the United States and China. Sheng et al. (2019) argue that the U.S. initiated the trade war primarily to address its trade deficit with China. However, a growing body of literature, such as that by Cui et al. (2019), Guo et al. (2017), and Archana (2020), finds

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1   Great powers refer to countries with the capacity for global military and economic dominance (Mearsheimer, 2001), while middle powers are countries that do not dominate but play strategic and normative roles in maintaining the international order through active diplomacy and multilateral cooperation (Jordaan, 2003).

that the tariffs imposed during the trade war have brought more economic harm than benefit to the U.S. economy. These studies challenge the assumption that the trade war was driven by economic rationale. In this context, Sahide (2021), Moosa (2020), and Zhang (2018) advocated for structural economic reforms as a more viable solution than protectionist policies.

Meanwhile, China appears to have demonstrated relative resilience, as suggested by Carvalho et al. (2019), Lai (2019), Li et al. (2018), and Liu (2020), who point to China's diversification strategies and internal policy adjustments. These studies imply that despite the economic justification of correcting trade imbalances, geopolitical ambition shaped the U.S.'s approach more than economic logic. This confirms the geo-economic nature of the conflict, where financial instruments are used to pursue strategic and political objectives beyond purely economic outcomes.

The second cluster examines the impact of the U.S.–China trade war on global supply chains. Studies such as Iqbal et al. (2019), Mao and Görg (2020), and Qiu et al. (2019) find that rising trade tensions have disrupted supply chains and encouraged the relocation of manufacturing from China to alternative countries. These shifts expose the structural vulnerability of global trade to geopolitical frictions. While most analyses remain at the macro level, some recent works have begun exploring the different impacts on developing economies. For instance, Cheng et al. (2019) note Malaysia's greater exposure due to stronger China ties, while Pangestu (2019) views Indonesia's resilience

as stemming from diversified exports. Yildiz (2020) finds Latin America still tethered to the U.S. economy, while Abiad et al. (2018) suggest Southeast Asian countries could benefit from investment spillovers.

The third cluster discusses the trade war's impact on cross-border investment flows and the mitigation strategies of international business actors. Amiti et al. (2019) demonstrate that rising tariffs significantly increased costs for U.S. importers, prompting firms to adopt divestment strategies and relocate production to alternative markets. Reinsch (in Lowrey, 2018) observes that geopolitical uncertainties have accelerated corporate decisions to shift operations out of China, with Vietnam emerging as one of the primary destinations due to its favorable investment climate and growing industrial base.

Despite these dynamics, much of the existing literature portrays developing countries as passive recipients of structural change, rather than as strategic actors. Kuik (2022) argues that middle powers often accommodate the interests of great powers due to inherent power asymmetries. However, such view risks overlooking the agency of these states in navigating geopolitical rivalries. This analytical gap underestimates the ability of countries like Vietnam to formulate hedging strategies that not only mitigate external risks but also harness the opportunities presented by great-power competition. Focusing on Vietnam's geo-economic response to the U.S.–China trade war, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how middle powers exercise strategic au-

tonomy through proactive and adaptive economic policies.

Therefore, in response to this gap in the literature—specifically, the lack of attention to how middle powers actively navigate great-power rivalry—this article proposes a conceptual approach that integrates geo-economic analysis with the hedging strategy. Hedging is understood here not merely as a security-oriented strategy but as a geo-economic approach that enables states to manage systemic uncertainty by leveraging opportunities and mitigating risks, without aligning exclusively with either significant power. In this light, Vietnam is not merely a passive recipient of supply chain restructuring and investment flow shifts triggered by the trade war. It emerges as an actor capable of formulating contradictory strategies to preserve national autonomy while advancing its domestic development goals.

Hedging Strategies in Global Geo-economic Rivalry: A Conceptual Framework

The rivalry between the United States and China through trade war illustrates a shift in the interstate conflict, from traditional security tensions to geo-economic competition. In today's interconnected global economy, middle- and small-power states are increasingly exposed to the ripple effects of great-power rivalries, manifested through supply chain disruptions, investment, and trade volatility. However, as long as there is no explicit pressure to choose either side, these states retain policy space to determine their foreign policy direction autonomously.

This opens up a space for foreign policy maneuvering that is neither strictly bandwagoning nor balancing, but instead reflects a more complex and calibrated form of engagement.

In this context, it is essential to understand that the foreign policies of such states are not merely reactive to external developments, but are also shaped by rational calculations of national interest. From a neorealist perspective, scholars such as Waltz (1967) and Mearsheimer (2010) emphasize that a state's strategy aims to ensure survival and autonomy. Similarly, Morgenthau (1949) posits that foreign policy is a rational expression of national interest. Accordingly, Vietnam's response to the U.S.–China trade war should be interpreted as an active strategy to safeguard its sovereignty and policy autonomy under global structural pressure, rather than a passive or powerless stance. In other words, Vietnam seeks to strategically manage the tensions between great powers to advance its national interests. Within this framework, hedging is a stratagem to simultaneously manage both systemic and domestic risks.

Hedging, as defined in the international relations literature, refers to a foreign policy behavior that avoids complete alignment with either side in a rivalry while pursuing benefits from both (Kuik, 2022; Lim & Mukherjee, 2019). Rather than choosing between balancing and bandwagoning, hedging enables states to diversify their strategic and economic relations as a buffer against uncertainty. This strategy is especially relevant in a geo-economic context, where

economic tools such as trade agreements, infrastructure investments, and technological cooperation serve economic and strategic objectives. By hedging, Vietnam can attract foreign investment, expand export markets, and secure technology transfers, while maintaining flexibility in its political positioning. Thus, hedging offers a practical means of navigating power asymmetries in a global order increasingly shaped by economic rivalry.

Nevertheless, asymmetries in capabilities continue to constrain the strategic choices of middle and small powers in their engagement with major powers. In economic relations, great powers can utilize their influence through formal trade frameworks, leveraging asymmetries in market access, investment, and regulatory power (Lim & Mukherjee, 2019). Consequently, the foreign policy decisions of less powerful states are influenced not only by considerations of external power dynamics, but also by internal imperatives—particularly the need of ruling elites to preserve regime legitimacy and domestic political stability (Kuik, 2016). As Hiep (2013) notes, these states often adopt compromise-based approaches that reflect trade-offs between safeguarding policy autonomy and ensuring national economic and political resilience.

Within this framework, hedging emerges as a pragmatic and strategic response. It offers states like Vietnam the necessary maneuvering room to navigate intensifying great-power rivalry without committing fully to either side. Crucially, hedging should not be misconstrued as passive neutrality.

As Kuik (2016) emphasizes, the state's non-aligned posture represents an active strategy grounded in a dual approach: power rejection and acceptance. Rather than overtly balancing or bandwagoning, Vietnam carefully calibrates its relations with the United States and China to maintain equidistance. This is achieved through two key mechanisms. First, it preserves positive bilateral relations with both powers to avoid signaling alignment. Second, it engages in selective, interest-driven cooperation to optimize strategic and economic benefits while safeguarding its sovereign decision-making capacity.

To further understand how Vietnam's hedging strategy operates in practice, this study adopts a framework comprising three key dimensions of geo-economic hedging: Active Neutrality, Contradictory Policies, and Inclusive Diversification of Strategic Partnerships. These dimensions reflect an adaptive and context-sensitive approach that enables Vietnam to navigate the uncertainties of global economic turbulence without succumbing to binary alignments.

Table 1. Operational Characteristics and Objectives of Vietnam's Hedging Strategy

Hedging	Key Features	Objectives
Active Neutrality	Maintaining balanced relations with both the U.S. and China	Minimize dependency risks and assert foreign policy independency
Contradictory Policies	Simultaneous engagement in seemingly opposing strategies	Maximize strategic flexibility and national interest gains
Inclusive Diversification	Expanding partnerships beyond the two great powers	Reduce dependency, build resilience, and enhance bargaining power

This framework reveals that hedging is not confined to traditional security dilemmas but equally applies to managing contemporary geo-economic rivalries. Vietnam's response to the U.S.–China trade war underscores how economic asymmetries—while lacking overt military coercion—nonetheless generate strategic pressures that require calculated responses. In this context, Vietnam's hedging strategy functions as a risk-aware geo-economic practice that seeks to optimize the benefits of global integration while preserving national policy space and sovereignty.

Vietnam's Hedging Strategy in the US–China Trade War

This section discusses Vietnam's hedging strategy through three main aspects: ambivalence in its relations with the United States, ambivalence in its relations with China, and diversifying its strategic partnerships. This approach examines Vietnam's bilateral relations with the two great powers and demonstrates that Vietnam's hedging is a comprehensive strategy in response to structural uncertainties in the international system. Through active neutrality, contradictory policies, and diversification, Vietnam tries to navigate great-power rivalry by maintaining policy independence amid global structural uncertainties. In this context, Vietnam's economic strength is a key source of legitimacy, allowing it to manage its geo-economic strategies with greater confidence and autonomy.

Vietnam's Strategic Ambivalence in Relations with the United States

Following the U.S.-China trade war, Vietnam has strengthened its ties with the United States, especially in economic and strategic areas. A major milestone was the 2019 U.S.–North Korea Summit held in Hanoi, which boosted Vietnam's diplomatic profile and underscored its rising significance in U.S. regional strategy. During the summit, high-level meetings between U.S. President Donald Trump and Vietnamese leaders Nguyen Phu Trong and Nguyen Xuan Phuc

showed increased U.S. focus on Vietnam as a regional strategic partner. In his speech, Trump highlighted three main priorities: improving bilateral trade, expanding defense cooperation, and countering China's influence in Southeast Asia (Trump White House, 2019a).

Strengthening economic ties has been crucial in U.S.–Vietnam relations, especially after Vietnam hosted the 2019 U.S.–North Korea Summit. Vietnam's selection as the summit host was not only due to geographic convenience but also carried symbolic significance. Once an adversary during the Vietnam War, Vietnam now stands as a stable economic and political partner, a message that the U.S. wanted to send to North Korea. For Washington, Vietnam represented a successful economic transformation within a non-liberal political system, showing North Korea that economic reform and political stability coexist without regime change (Berlinger, 2019; Hoekstra, 2019; Rosenfeld, 2019). The summit thus served a dual purpose: advancing U.S. diplomatic goals and reaffirming Vietnam's position as a credible, independent partner.

During the summit, the U.S. also promoted arms sales and defence ties with Vietnam in response to shared concerns over China's actions in the South China Sea (Pearson & Mason, 2019). While Vietnam welcomed closer security cooperation, it remained committed to its "Four No's" defence policy: no military alliances; no siding with one country against another; no foreign military bases; and no use or threat of force (Zhen & Ip, 2022). For such, this

defence cooperation should not be seen as bandwagoning but as part of Vietnam's hedging strategy, taking action to reject US power domination.

On the economic front, the 2019 U.S.–North Korea Summit also served as a platform to strengthen bilateral trade ties. Vietnam signed high-profile agreements to buy Boeing aircraft and GE engines worth over USD 21 billion (Trump White House, 2019a, 2019b). While Washington celebrated the deals as a success in reducing the U.S. trade deficit, for Hanoi, they represented a strategic move to manage trade tensions and increase leverage amid the U.S.–China trade war. This mix of engagement across sectors shows Vietnam's hedging behaviour, using closer ties with Washington while keeping autonomy and flexibility in its foreign policy.

Although the U.S.–Vietnam partnership has strengthened, Vietnam remains cautious of Washington's possible hegemonic ambitions. The U.S. is seen as politicizing trade and technology in its competition with China, pressuring other nations to adopt export restrictions (The Embassy of the PRC in New Zealand, 2023). Aware of these concerns, Vietnam emphasizes its principles by boosting domestic capacity and protecting against exploitative practices, such as investment dumping and tariff avoidance, as noted by Dr. Tran Dinh Thien of the National Financial and Monetary Policy Advisory Council (Asia News Monitor, 2018).

As an official measure, Vietnam and the United States signed the Treaties and Other International Acts Series 20-

520 on Law Enforcement. This agreement aimed to strengthen Vietnam's customs law enforcement system, making it more adaptive to changes in international trade and boosting bilateral cooperation without sacrificing foreign policy flexibility. In this way, the bilateral partnership reflects Vietnam's mixed approach, building stronger ties with the U.S.

while carefully avoiding commitments that could threaten its independence.

These dynamics show that Vietnam's engagement with the United States is shaped not by straightforward alignment but by careful strategic considerations. The table below summarises the different forms of Vietnam's ambivalence toward the U.S.

Table 2. Vietnam's Ambivalence Toward the United States

Areas of Cooperation	Power Acceptance	Power Rejection
Economy	Strengthened bilateral trade to reduce the U.S. trade deficit by signing contracts worth over USD 21 billion for Boeing aircraft and GE engines.	Diversifying trade relationships to mitigate the risks of overreliance on a single economic power.
Defence or Security	Strengthening maritime security in the South China Sea through expanded military cooperation.	Reaffirming the "Four No's" doctrine
Institutional	Vietnam ratified a bilateral agreement on customs law enforcement	Ensuring institutional resilience to reduce asymmetrical dependence on the United States

Vietnam's relationship with the United States shows a calculated pattern of ambivalence within its hedging strategy. While strengthening economic and security ties-including the elevation to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2023-Vietnam also avoids formal alliances and maintains relations with rival powers. This dual-track approach exemplifies a policy of active neutrality, enabling Vietnam to gain economic and strategic benefits from its engagement with Washington. The seemingly contradictory gestures, such as purchasing U.S. arms while reaffirming the "Four No's" doctrine, are not signs of inconsistency but deliberate tools for self-protection. They demonstrate Vietnam's hedging: a flexible, interest-driven foreign policy that balances cooperation and caution to preserve autonomy amid rising great power competition.

Vietnam's Strategic Ambivalence in Relations with China

Despite increasing ties with the United States, Vietnam remains economically and ideologically connected to China. As Vietnam's biggest trading partner and a key supplier of intermediate goods, China is essential for maintaining Vietnam's export-focused economy. The U.S.–China trade war brought risks and opportunities for Hanoi, but Vietnam chose to keep stable relations with Beijing, even amid ongoing tensions in the South China Sea. This stability reflects a practical approach influenced by three main factors: (1) a shared socialist identity that promotes political unity; (2) domestic goals for economic growth during Vietnam's "breakthrough years"; and (3) strategic integration into regional supply chains benefiting from the shift of Chinese production.

One of the main pillars of this stability is the narrative of ideological closeness consistently promoted by both parties. During the trade war period, there was a significant rise in high-level meetings between Vietnamese and Chinese leaders. In a speech marking the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations on January 18, 2020, President Xi Jinping highlighted the frequency of his meetings with Nguyen Phu Trong as a symbol of their long-standing close ties (The Embassy of the PRC in Australia, 2018). In his speech, terms like "comrade" and "brother" were used to strengthen political solidarity among socialist states and to ease tensions, especially on issues like the South China Sea.

The ideological narrative promoted by China serves as both a symbolic and strategic tool to enhance influence over Vietnam amid global uncertainty. Invoking shared socialist identity, President Xi Jinping emphasized Party-to-Party solidarity to face external challenges, a message welcomed by Vietnamese elites like Tran Quoc Vuong and Nguyen Phu Trong, who reaffirmed China as a foreign policy priority (Permanent Mission of the PRC to the UN Office at Geneva, 2020). These interactions show Vietnam's deliberate acceptance of power by engaging deeply with China while leaving room for strategic maneuvering. Simultaneously, China sought to downplay tensions in the South China Sea by promoting rhetoric of

peaceful cooperation and proposing to elevate bilateral ties to a "new level," the highest status in Beijing's diplomatic language (Xinhuanet, 2019; CGTN, 2022). The narrative aims to reduce maritime tensions, strengthen political ties as fellow socialist countries, and present China as a stable partner amid rising regional competition. This rhetoric helps Vietnam maintain good relations with China while continuing its hedging strategy.

China has proposed developing manufacturing infrastructure in Vietnam to strengthen its regional manufacturing influence amid the U.S.–China trade war. President Xi Jinping has promoted deeper integration of industrial and supply chains, expanding cooperation into sectors such as technology, healthcare, and climate change (Zhen & Ip, 2022; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in New Zealand, 2023). This initiative is not designed to replace China's role as the world's manufacturing hub but to maintain influence over shifting supply chains. A key example of this strategy is the revival of the Two Corridors and One Economic Circle initiative, which is part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and actively involves Vietnam. Rather than signaling alignment, Vietnam sees this cooperation as a way to speed development while keeping policy independence. Vietnam's selective participation in the BRI shows how economic diplomacy functions as a development tool and a way to navigate unequal power relations without sacrificing strategic independence.

The escalation of the U.S.–China trade war in 2018 created significant challenges for Vietnam's development goals for 2016–2020. Although Vietnam's 2016–2020 Socio-Economic Development Plan recognized global instability, it did not foresee how severe the disruption would be. A key turning point came in 2019 when Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, during the Sub-Committee meeting for the 13th National Party Congress, highlighted the importance of institutional reform and domestic economic strengthening to build resilience against external shocks. In this context, senior economist Tran Du Lich stressed that institutional reform must be a national priority for Vietnam to take advantage of opportunities from shifting regional and global dynamics. Accordingly, external geo-economic tensions were increasingly seen not just as threats, but as catalysts for internal transformation.

While Vietnam publicly endorsed China's narrative of peace and friendship, protecting its national sovereignty remained a key policy focus. This is clear in Vietnam's Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2021–2025, which responded more directly to increasing great-power rivalry by emphasizing the importance of economic diversification, proactive global engagement, and stronger cross-sector cooperation (Government of Vietnam, 2021). Compared to the 2016–2020 plan, the new strategy signalled a shift toward addressing internal structural challenges in the global political economy—especially the U.S.–China trade war—as factors driving domestic reform and resilience. These policy directions reflect a more deliberate and selective approach to exercising influence,

where Vietnam collaborates with China on favourable economic terms while maintaining policy independence and aligning foreign partnerships with national development goals.

In the aftermath of the U.S.–China trade war, Vietnam's engagement with China reveals ambivalence. Simultaneously advancing economic cooperation and managing geopolitical vulnerabilities, Vietnam pursues a strategic hedging posture to navigate structural asymmetries without undermining its core national interests. The following table summarises the key dimensions of Vietnam's ambivalent strategy toward China.

Table 3. Vietnam's Ambivalence toward China

Dimension	Power Acceptance	Power Rejection
Ideological	The "comrade and brother" narrative was promoted by the elites of both countries (Xi Jinping and Nguyen Phu Trong).	Continued emphasis on the principle of non-alignment and avoiding complete foreign policy alignment with China.
Security	Xi Jinping's commitment to peaceful cooperation in the South China Sea.	Vietnam maintains the South China Sea as a national priority for sovereignty.
Economy	Cooperation within the *Two Corridors and One Economic Circle* framework & the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).	Institutional reforms and the pursuit of a self-reliant national development strategy.
Regional	Strengthening supply chains and cross-sectoral technological investment from China.	Diversifying trade partnerships and engaging in global value chains beyond China's orbit.

Diversification in Multilateral Forums

The escalation of the U.S.–China trade war has intensified global supply chain restructuring and prompted shifts in regional investment flows. In August 2019, President Donald Trump explicitly urged American companies to seek alternatives to China, including relocating their production and headquarters (Arvirianty, 2019). While this development was initially seen as a strategic opportunity for Vietnam, it also created uncertainty among Vietnamese businesses regarding the volatility of global trade dynamics (The Ministry of Finance, 2019). In navigating these disruptions, Vietnam has adopted a strategy of inclusive diversification by expanding its economic and diplomatic engagements beyond dependence on any single major power. This approach is increasingly reflected in Vietnam's active participation in multilateral forums and diversified partnerships at both regional and global levels.

In the context of the US–China trade war and the ongoing fragmentation of global supply chains, diversification of partnerships has become a vital strategy for reducing external risks and enhancing domestic economic resilience. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) classifies the world's countries into three major economic blocs post-pandemic: one led by the United States, another centered around China, and a third consisting of non-aligned states (Global Data Point, 2023). Vietnam's response to the changing geopolitical economy involves expanding its multilateral engagements.

This multilateral approach serves Vietnam's developmental objectives and operates as a strategic hedge, allowing the country to avoid excessive dependence on any significant power and to navigate global fragmentation with greater flexibility (Falak, 2020). The following table outlines Vietnam's engagement patterns with the three major economic blocs, illustrating how geo-economic hedging is operationalized through multilateral diplomacy.

Table 4. Vietnam's Multilateral Cooperations Across Three Major Global Economic Blocs

Economic Bloc	Key Partners	Forms of Cooperation	Objectives
East Asia (China)	China, ASEAN, Japan, South Korea	RCEP (2022); ASEAN+1; Mekong–Lancang Cooperation (MLC)	RCEP covers 30 percent of global GDP, reflecting Vietnam's close economic ties with East Asia and China, while maintaining geopolitical caution.
Pacific (U.S. and Allies)	United States, Canada, Australia	CPTPP (2019); IPEF (2022); APEC	CPTPP is viewed as part of Vietnam's strategy to reduce economic dependence on China.
Europe (EU)	European Union, United Kingdom	EVFTA (2020); UKVFTA (2021)	Expanding high-standard trade access to European markets, enhancing economic diversification, and reform credibility.

While diversification has granted Vietnam some degree of policy independence, the ongoing pressure to align with one side remains a significant challenge. As Nguyễn Anh (2023) notes, Vietnam's foreign policy aims to maintain national stability while avoiding strategic alignment and the escalating rivalry between two major powers. In accordance with this goal, Vietnam's geo-economic path has increasingly focused on expanding diverse strategic partnerships.

The diversification of Vietnam's strategic partnerships is evidenced by a rise in Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships (CSPs) established after 2022. Before the escalation of trade tensions, Vietnam had only three CSPs with China, Russia, and India, which were traditional partners. Between 2022 and 2024, Vietnam broadened its CSPs to include four additional countries: South Korea, the United States, Japan, and Australia. An increase in the number and variety of strategic partners demonstrates Vietnam's flexibility in leveraging global rivalries to boost its international standing. It reflects Vietnam's strategic aim to balance

relations among major powers. The following table provides an overview of Vietnam's Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships as of 2024:

Table 5. Vietnam's Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships 2024

| No	Countries	Established
1	China	May 2008
2	Russia	July 2012
3	India	September 2016
4	South Korea	December 2022
5	United States	September 2023
6	Japan	November 2023
7	Australia	March 2024

Source: (Vietnamnet Global, 2024).

Beyond quantity, the quality of intensified bilateral cooperation is also crucial. In 2023, Hanoi hosted official visits by three world leaders: Presidents Joe Biden, Xi Jinping, and Vladimir Putin. Biden's visit aimed to strengthen Vietnam as a key partner in high-tech supply chains as an alternative to China. Beijing responded with a visit by Xi three months later, leading to the establishment of the Vietnam–China Economic Community (Zhen and Ip, 2022). This visit reinforced Vietnam's geo-economic position as a key partner in shaping global value chains.

President Putin's visit to Vietnam in June 2024 added further complexity to Vietnam's hedging strategy. Despite relatively

modest bilateral trade (USD 3.6 billion) compared to China and the U.S., the visit coincided with intensified Western sanctions on Russia due to the Ukraine conflict, resulting in the signing of over a dozen agreements, including those on energy and indirect defence cooperation (Aljazeera, 2024; Ghosal, 2024). For Vietnam, welcoming Putin reflects a hedging approach by maintaining relations with major powers despite international pressure. However, this move also carries reputational risks. The US government has expressed concern that giving Putin a platform could normalize Russian aggression (Lakshmi, 2024). The main challenge for Vietnam's diversification lies in maintaining the perception of strategic neutrality while not losing access to global investments and markets.

Figure 1. Visits of U.S., Chinese, and Russian Leaders to Vietnam (2023–2024)
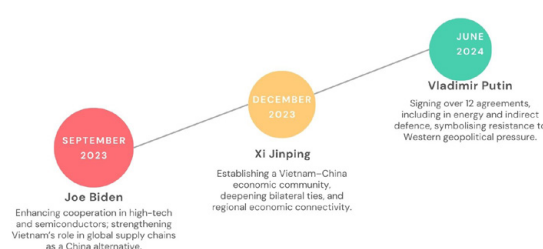
Source: Compiled from The State Council The People's Republic of China (2023), Hoa (2023), and Ghosal (2024).

The successive visits of influential leaders to Vietnam highlight the country's ability to strengthen its strategic position rather than being caught in great-power

rivalry. Vietnam has successfully improved its international standing by adopting a balanced approach to its relations with the three major global powers within a short timeframe. In this context, Vietnam's hedging strategy acts as a form of security against the uncertainties of the international order (Kusumasomantri, 2015), providing the flexibility to switch between balancing and bandwagoning as circumstances change. The consecutive visits of three world leaders to Hanoi within these past nine months show the success of this approach—demonstrating Vietnam's capacity to maintain active neutrality while turning geopolitical tensions into geo-economic opportunities.

The effectiveness of this strategy is further supported by Vietnam's extensive diplomatic network, which now covers 193 countries and includes 18 strategic partners (Asia News Monitor, 2024). Compared to other ASEAN nations, this wide network gives Vietnam a distinct advantage in managing the effects of the global trade war. Through these complex relationships, Vietnam has built a resilient foundation to attract investment from various economic powers, boost its regional competitiveness, and reduce dependence on any single actor amid the shifting landscape of global geo-economics.

Vietnam's geo-economic strategy in responding to the U.S.–China trade war is marked by adaptability, precision, and multidimensionality. Using a hedging approach, Vietnam reduces external pressures and actively reshapes its strategic position amidst global turbulence. This approach is reflected in national policy directions, the expansion of strategic partnerships, and intensified economic diplomacy on multiple levels. Consequently, Vietnam has preserved domestic stability and exploited geo-economic tensions to bolster its role in global supply chains, attract foreign investment, and improve national competitiveness.

Figure 2. Analytical Models of Vietnam's Geo-Economic Hedging Strategy in Response to the U.S.–China Trade War
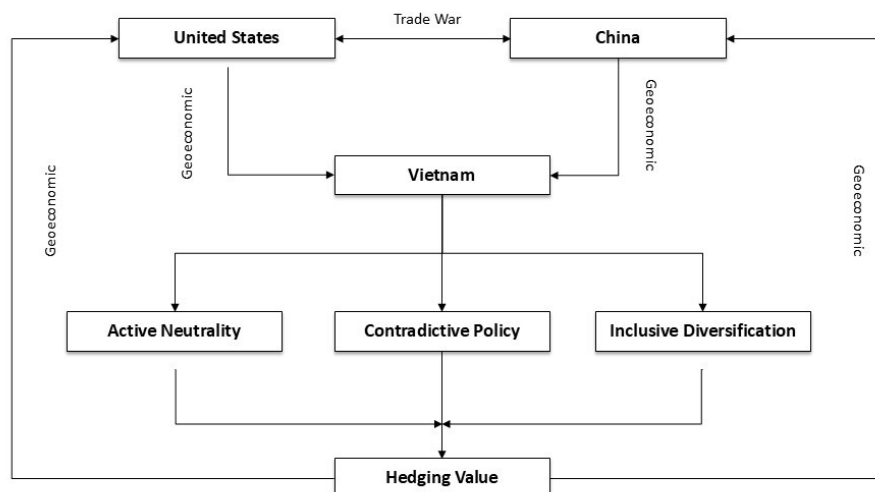
The Analytical Model of Vietnam's Geo-Economic Hedging Strategy is introduced to capture these dynamics systematically. It demonstrates the interaction between external challenges, policy responses, and geo-economic achievements. This strategy reflects a reaction to crises and a broader strategic shift towards a complex, multipolar world order.

Conclusion

This study shows Vietnam's geo-economic approach to the U.S.–China trade war as a deliberate hedging strategy used by a middle power. Instead of taking clear sides, Vietnam balances conflicting interests by accommodating the U.S. and China while protecting its national sovereignty. This strategy acts as insurance against systemic and domestic risks from global uncertainty. In the context of the trade war, although Vietnam does not face an immediate military threat, the rising geo-economic tensions have been used by Vietnam as an opportunity to reposition itself in global supply chains, enhance its economic competitiveness, and expand its diplomatic options without becoming overly dependent.

Vietnam's geo-economic hedging strategy mainly relies on three pillars: active neutrality, contradictory policy, and inclusive diversification. Active neutrality helps Vietnam stay balanced amid great power competition without committing to any side permanently. Contradictory policy allows for flexible diplomacy that adapts to changing circumstances. Meanwhile, diversification by expanding strategic partnerships and joining multilateral economic frameworks boosts economic resilience and reduces dependence on any single dominant actor.

Ultimately, these findings contribute to the development of international relations literature by broadening the scope of hedging analysis beyond traditional security issues into the geo-economic sphere. For middle powers, Vietnam's strategy emphasizes the importance of maintaining flexible and strategic responses to global pressures while safeguarding its own national autonomy. The Vietnamese government also strengthened this approach by implementing deeper institutional reforms and diversifying trade partners to avoid overdependence on any single power. For the academic community, this expanded view of hedging as a state response to shifting power dynamics—in both military and economic aspects—provides a crucial avenue for further research. In this context, the economy is not just a tool for domestic development but a vital instrument of strategic diplomacy for developing countries facing intensifying great power competition.

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Colonial Legacies in the Repatriation of Cultural Objects:

A Content Analysis of Dutch Policies (2020–2024)

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Amid growing global awareness of historical justice and the rights of formerly colonized nations in the Global South over their cultural heritage, the repatriation of colonial cultural objects has become increasingly important in Dutch foreign policy. This article analyzes how official Dutch discourse constructs representations of former colonies in government documents concerning cultural object repatriation between 2020 and 2024. Through qualitative content analysis, applying Herrmann et al.'s (1997) image theory, the study identifies narrative patterns that combine recognition of ownership rights with emphasis on procedures and cooperation mechanisms within Dutch policy frameworks. The findings reveal a discursive shift from colonial-era imagery toward partnership rhetoric, yet paternalistic concerns regarding technical standards, conservation, and governance capabilities persist. This representation frames repatriation as an asymmetrical cultural cooperation rather than mere object return. The study contributes to postcolonial international relations scholarship by demonstrating how repatriation serves as an arena for negotiating meaning, legitimacy, and power relations between former colonial powers and newly sovereign states.

Keywords: *Repatriation, Colonialism, Cultural Objects, The Netherlands, Indonesia*

Introduction

Over the past decade, European societies have undergone a significant shift in how they perceive colonial cultural heritage housed in their museums. Cultural objects that were once displayed as symbols of colonial glory are now increasingly scrutinized for their historical association with oppression and exploitation. This shift has been accompanied by growing global awareness of historical justice and the rights of formerly colonized nations to reclaim their cultural heritage (Prott, 2009).

These developments have driven the expansion of decolonial campaigns. These campaigns range from removing monuments that glorify colonial figures to decolonizing educational curricula. They also include reforming museological practices that perpetuate imperial perspectives (Hermkens & Venbrux, 2023; Sarr & Savoy, 2018; van Beurden, 2022).

In this context, repatriation discourse extends beyond the physical transfer of artifacts. It encompasses political, ethical, and epistemological struggles that reflect

how former colonial powers frame formerly colonized states within their cultural policies.

A comprehensive understanding of the repatriation discourse requires considering the historical contexts in which these cultural objects were brought to Europe. During the colonial era, European states positioned themselves as advanced, refined custodians of ancient civilizations (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020). They claimed superior anthropological insight, cultural sensitivity, and political competence compared to other imperial powers in Asia (Yapp, 2016). European powers acquired objects from colonial territories through looting, exploitation, and highly unequal negotiations. This demonstrates that colonialism not only annexed territories but also eroded the cultural sovereignty of colonized societies (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020; van Beurden, 2016).

In the Dutch colonial context, cultural objects were acquired across multiple regions through different forms of exploitation. The Indonesian archipelago formed the core of Dutch imperial rule. Here, cultural objects were obtained through military expeditions, political annexations, and highly unequal exchanges. Examples include the Lombok treasure and the Kris of Klungkung (Commissie Koloniale Collecties, 2023b, 2023a). In Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka), the Dutch controlled coastal areas between 1640 and 1796. Cultural artifacts such as the Lewke Disava cannon were looted as war trophies (Commissie Koloniale Collecties, 2023c). In the Caribbean, particularly Suriname and Curaçao, colonial domination relied on slavery and plantation economies. This system also generated ethnographic and ritual collections that were later transferred to Dutch institutions. Beyond Asia and the Caribbean, the Dutch presence in West Africa—notably at Elmina in present-day Ghana—was tied to the transatlantic slave trade. Cultural objects from this region symbolized imperial control. These regional variations demonstrate that colonial collections in the Netherlands are embedded within histories of coercion, violence, and cultural dispossession (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020).

Colonial collections in Europe now raise increasingly complex ethical, political, and epistemological questions. This has prompted a discursive shift in cultural policy and international relations. Across Europe and the broader Western world, decolonial movements have gained visibility in public discourse, academic institutions, and cultural policy agendas.

Ter Keurs (2009) emphasizes that collecting cultural objects during colonial times reflected asymmetrical power relations between colonizers and colonized. These collections were acquired through scientific, military, and religious expeditions. A critical turning point occurred in 2017 when French President Emmanuel Macron publicly addressed colonial cultural heritage. In his speech in Burkina Faso, Macron declared that collecting cultural objects during colonialism constituted a "crime against humanity." He

asserted that European museums could no longer serve as "prisons" for Africa's cultural heritage (Sarr & Savoy, 2018). This statement marked official recognition of colonialism as a serious ethical violation in modern European history. It provided an important backdrop for subsequent shifts in restitution discourse in the Netherlands.

Repatriation, however, is not a new demand. As a country with a long colonial history, the Netherlands has faced demands to return cultural objects acquired during the colonial period to its former colonies. Indonesia first raised this issue at the 1949 Round Table Conference. Repatriation was proposed as part of the decolonization agenda, though the matter was ultimately left unresolved (Scott, 2017).

Partial returns of colonial cultural objects occurred during the 1970s. These included three paintings by the maestro Raden Saleh, the Nagarakretagama manuscript, the Prajnaparamita statue, four memorabilia items of Prince Diponegoro, and 243 items from the Lombok treasure (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020). However, repatriation in this period lacked a clear ethical or legal framework and was largely symbolic. Scott (2019) argues that such returns were framed as acts of goodwill by the Netherlands. They aimed to repair bilateral relations with Indonesia, which had been strained by the Dutch military aggression of December 1948.

Before the publication of the *Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van Onrecht* report in 2020, Dutch restitution mechanisms positioned countries of origin as passive recipients. The 2019 restitution of the Museum Nusantara collection exemplifies this pattern. Dutch curators and the municipality of Delft internally selected which objects to keep from more than 18,000 cultural items. As the legal owner of the collection, Delft determined which items would remain in the Dutch national collection. Only approximately 1,500 objects were subsequently offered to Indonesia. The Indonesian government was not involved in the curatorial process or in nationwide public consultation (Antara, 2013; van Beurden, 2022).

This mechanism curtailed Indonesia's sovereignty in determining restitution priorities. It also imposed acceptance of the collection as a single package. Additionally, Indonesia had to bear all costs of transportation, management, and storage (Sudarto, 2016). This pattern illustrates that restitution before 2020 operated within a framework that reproduced colonial hierarchies. Substantive authority remained concentrated in the hands of the former colonial power.

Indonesia formally objected to this mechanism through Hilmar Farid, the Director General of Culture, in March 2016. Farid strongly criticized the narrative and priorities determined by the Dutch side. He asserted that the offered cultural objects amounted to "junk" that lacked cultural relevance or significant historical meaning. Much of the collection was redundant with similar items already existing in Indonesia. For example, wayang golek puppets were deemed less significant compared to other

heritage objects (Suyitno, 2016).

The Museum Nusantara case demonstrates the limitations of pre-2020 restitution practices. Before the policy shift emphasizing *onvoorwaardelijke teruggave* (unconditional return) and equitable dialogue, restitution was treated as a symbolic gesture laden with institutional control. It did not represent full recognition of the cultural rights and historical sovereignty of the country of origin.

Building on earlier restitution practices, subsequent developments signaled a shift toward a more structured and principle-based approach. The 2019 Museum Nusantara case had been marked by asymmetrical decision-making and the absence of a shared normative framework. International movements in Europe during the 2010s created a normative environment where ignoring repatriation demands was no longer politically or morally defensible. This occurred even without direct institutional pressure from bodies such as the United Nations or UNESCO. Following France's publication of the Sarr & Savoy report in 2018, the Netherlands released its own report in 2020. *Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van Onrecht* was initiated by the Minister of Education, Culture, and Science, Ingrid van Engelshoven.

In this context, Van Engelshoven affirmed that "*Dit kan ook een pijnlijke confrontatie met het onrecht uit ons verleden betekenen*" ("This may also entail a painful confrontation with the injustices of our past") (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020; Rijksoverheid, 2021). This statement represents a moral

repositioning by the Netherlands following the publication of the 2020 report. It was later operationalized in the 2021 *Beleidsvisie Collecties uit een Koloniale Context*. This reflects a broader trend among former colonial powers toward critical self-reflection on their colonial legacies.

Recent developments indicate that pursuing historical redress through repatriation has shaped restitution negotiations and driven changes in Dutch foreign policy. The current phase of repatriation began with the release of *Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van Onrecht* in 2020 and continued with implementation in 2023–2024. This phase is characterized by formal recognition of historical injustice and adoption of the principle of *onvoorwaardelijke teruggave* (unconditional return). This principle is supported by *herkomstonderzoek* (provenance research) and joint dialogue (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020; Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2021).

The 2020 report of Advisory Committee on Colonial Collections Policy Framework defines unconditional return as "the willingness for unconditional return means that the interest in redressing historical injustice in a restitution request is not weighed against other interests, no matter how relevant those other interests may be individually" (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020).

Consequently, returning cultural objects unlawfully acquired during the colonial period is no longer contingent upon technical conditions. These conditions previously included the readiness of storage facilities or

preservation capacity in the country of origin. This principle elevates recognition of colonial injustice above other Dutch national interests. These interests include educational, scientific, or legal ownership considerations. This marks a fundamental transformation in the moral and political architecture of Dutch cultural diplomacy

The articulation of *onvoorwaardelijke teruggave* (unconditional return) and the acknowledgment of *onvrijwillig bezitsverlies* (involuntary loss of ownership) reflect a shift in the moral geography of the Global North. Former colonial powers are increasingly called upon to confront both the symbolic and material legacies of empire.

This evolving perception shapes the Netherlands' policy formulation on repatriation. It also informs how formerly colonized states are represented in official documents. Within this framework, the perspectives and agency of formerly colonized nations in the Global South remain central to the discourse on representation. The construction of repatriation policy discourse plays a strategic role in determining the direction and approach taken in the return of cultural objects.

This study examines the narrative patterns employed by the Dutch government in responding to repatriation demands. It analyzes how the representation of formerly colonized states has influenced shifts in Dutch foreign policy regarding the restitution of colonial cultural objects. The study applies a content analysis approach to investigate colonial imagery in Dutch repatriation policy. This involves examining the linguistic patterns, terminology, and narrative constructions in official documents. The analysis identifies elements that remain consistent and those that exhibit change over time. This method enables the identification of thematic categories and the interpretation of meanings embedded in the texts. It examines how language choices and narrative structures contribute to the formation and legitimation of policy agendas. The study seeks to uncover how representations of formerly colonized states are constructed, sustained, or contested within restitution policy. It also examines how these representations influence contemporary cultural policymaking.

Extensive academic scholarship has addressed the identity of colonial cultural objects and the dynamics of restitution. Previous studies have shown that colonial cultural collections are not merely historical artifacts but also instruments of political domination. Ter Keurs (2009) argues that colonial collections were shaped by hybridity, politics of distribution, and colonial ideologies (including the Ethical Policy), rendering them not as "authentic" cultural representations but as complex products of interaction imbued with political meaning and prestige. Maulana (2022) argues that exhibiting colonial collections in European museums reinforced Dutch control over Indonesia. Within this framework, the restitution of colonial cultural objects represents both a reconstruction of historical narratives and an effort to redress injustice. This makes provenance research a crucial element.

Recent scholarship highlights the fundamental challenges inherent in provenance research, which constitutes a crucial pre-

requisite in restitution policy. Van Beurden (2022) demonstrates that the deaccessioning of more than 18,000 objects from the Museum Nusantara in Delft exposed methodological gaps in tracing the origins of collections. It also reflected diplomatic tensions between the Netherlands and Indonesia. Stutje (2022) underscores this complexity through the case of a diamond from Banjarmasin. In this case, ownership, meaning, and historical narratives overlap and compete, complicating the legitimacy of repatriation claims. Hermkens & Venbrux (2023) further argue that provenance research is frequently constrained by limited documentation, interpretive bias, and colonial contexts that hinder the reconstruction of cultural continuity. Meanwhile, Drieënhuizen & Sysling (2021) show that restitution processes are not merely about historical authentication. They also constitute a political arena in which ownership claims are shaped by postcolonial power relations.

Taken together, these studies affirm that provenance research is not simply a technical procedure. It is a contested historical, political, and epistemological field that fundamentally shapes the discourse on repatriation

In global discourse, the restitution of colonial cultural objects is understood not only in physical terms but also within broader social, political, and national identity contexts. Gaudenzi & Swenson (2017) describe restitution as a complex negotiation process, particularly in Dutch–Indonesian relations between 1949 and 1979.

Scott (2017; 2019) argues that the Netherlands has employed restitution as a diplomatic instrument, enabling the renewal of relations with former colonies while maintaining control over colonial narratives. Van Beurden (2022) shows that such asymmetries persisted in the 2019 repatriation case, in which Indonesia lacked full agency in determining which objects would be returned. Out of the 12,000 objects initially offered, the country ultimately received only about 1,500 "leftover" items. These examples highlight that restitution continues to operate as a contested arena shaped by political and economic interests between former colonial powers and formerly colonized nations.

Previous research has examined the legal, political, and diplomatic dimensions of restitution. However, little attention has been paid to how the Dutch government represents former colonies in repatriation policy discourse. This gap is particularly significant given recent policy developments.

This study addresses this gap by analyzing shifts in the colony image in Dutch restitution policy. The research focuses specifically on the 2023–2024 restitution period. It employs the colony image framework from Herrmann et al. (1997) image theory as an analytical tool. This framework examines the meanings embedded in the language and narratives of Dutch official documents. The study aims to explain how the image of former colonies is articulated within these documents. It also situates such representations within broader policy discourses.

The structure of this article is organized to progressively connect theory with empirical analysis and policy implications. Following the introduction and literature review, the discussion is divided into three analytical sections: Dutch policy discourse on repatriation, the representation of former colonies through the lens of image theory, and the implications of these representations for policy. This structure is designed to move from contextual background toward theoretical application and then to policy evaluation, ensuring coherence between historical developments, analytical framework, and empirical findings. By sequencing the sections in this way, the article demonstrates how discursive representations of former colonies are not only embedded in policy documents but also shape the evolving practices of Dutch cultural diplomacy and repatriation.

Methodology

This study employs content analysis as its primary methodological approach. Following Bryman (2012), content analysis is defined as a systematic and replicable technique for examining texts and documents in order to identify patterns and meanings. While often associated with quantitative approaches that rely on predefined categories, this study applies content analysis in a qualitative and interpretive manner. In this approach, policy documents are not treated as neutral administrative records but as ideological and discursive constructions, reflected in language choices, issue prioritization, and silences or omissions.

The analytical corpus in this study refers to a purposively selected body of texts that constitutes the primary material for content analysis. It primarily consists of official Dutch policy documents on the repatriation of colonial cultural objects issued between 2020 and 2024—including *Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van Onrecht* (Colonial Collections and Recognition of Injustice, 2020), *Beleidsvisie Collecties uit een Koloniale Context* (Policy Vision on Collections from a Colonial Context, 2021), and *Implementatie Beleidsvisie Collecties uit een Koloniale Context* (Implementation of the Policy Vision on Collections from a Colonial Context, 2022), as well as advisory reports (2023–2024) issued by the Colonial Collections Committee on the restitution of specific colonial objects. These texts were selected as they represent the state's official position and authoritative narratives on restitution.

In addition, news articles and academic works were incorporated to provide historical context and triangulate interpretations. The analysis focuses on tracing keywords, terminology, and narrative constructions, combined with interpretive reading, to uncover how language choice, textual structure, and narrative strategies construct, sustain, or contest representations of formerly colonized states within Dutch repatriation policy.

The colony image framework developed by Herrmann et al. (1997) serves as the theoretical foundation for assessing how recipient states are represented in contemporary cultural policy. This framework also provides a basis for evaluating whether the

repatriation policies under review reflect an egalitarian reconfiguration of relations or, conversely, reproduce hierarchies rooted in colonial history.

Colony Image in Image Theory

Image theory in International Relations emphasizes that perceptions of other states are not neutral reflections of objective reality but are shaped through cognitive constructions mediated by language and the representational frameworks used to describe them (Herrmann et al., 1997). Theoretically, Herrmann & Fischerkeller (1995) identify five ideal strategic images: the enemy image, ally image, imperialist image, degenerate image, and colony image. However, in their empirical study (Herrmann et al., 1997) only four images were applied—excluding the imperialist image—as it was found to be of limited relevance among American respondents. These images function as interpretive frameworks that guide how the motivations, capabilities, and institutional processes of another state are understood, in contrast to structural realism which privileges the distribution of power as the primary determinant of international relations (Waltz, 1979).

Within the colony image, Herrmann et al. (1997) conceptualize perceptions of the target state as divided between two categories of actors: "good forces" and "bad forces." The good forces are typically perceived as cooperative elites or societal groups within the colony who are aligned with modernization and regarded as potential partners by the perceiving state. In contrast, the bad forces are seen as resistant, traditional, or non-co-

operative actors who are believed to obstruct integration or stability. This dichotomy is crucial because it demonstrates how colonial or postcolonial powers often construct former colonies not as coherent entities but as contested spaces characterized by an internal struggle between progressive (good) and obstructive (bad) forces.

Table 1. Colony Image: Attributes and Actors (Good and Bad Forces)

Components	Description
Motivation	**Good forces:** Paternalistic leaders, progressive modernizers, nationalists, leaders driven by the people's interests. **Bad forces:** Radical demagogues, xenophobic extremists, evil dictators, puppets of enemy great powers.
Capability	**Good forces:** "Well-meaning children" who require guidance; can use equipment under supervision, but lack discipline and skills to manage technology, infrastructure, or weapons. **Bad forces:** Untalented protégés supported by foreign powers; terrorists indicating moral weakness; immature agitators mistaking slogans for intelligence; conspirators skilled in deception; agents whose success depends on foreign patrons. and dogmas with intelligence.
Decisional Process	**Good forces:** Try hard but are incapable of efficient national governance. **Bad forces:** Highly disciplined units operating via strict top-down command.

(Summarized from Herrmann et al. (1997))

Dutch Policy Rethorics on the Repatriation of Colonial Cultural Objects

An analysis of Dutch government documents related to the repatriation of colonial cultural objects reveals that Dutch policy can be interpreted through a discourse rich in political, historical, and symbolic meanings, shaping the relationship between former colonizers and formerly colonized states. The repatriation discourse highlights two major themes: (1) the articulation of goodwill and the effort to redress historical injustices and (2) the implementation of policy vision between partnership and postcolonial hegemony.

The Expression of Goodwill and Redressing Historical Injustices

"*Het koloniaal verleden is een onderwerp dat vele mensen nog dagelijks persoonlijk raakt. We moeten daarom zorgvuldig omgaan met koloniale collecties. Ik vind het belangrijk dat de koloniale collecties toegankelijk zijn en vanuit verschillende perspectieven de daaraan verbonden verhalen vertellen. Dit kan ook een pijnlijke confrontatie met het onrecht uit ons verleden betekenen, een onrecht dat zich soms nog dagelijks laat navoelen. Geroofde cultuurgoederen horen daarbij niet in de Rijkscollectie thuis. Als een land dat wil, geven we het terug.*"

"The colonial past is a subject that still personally affects many people today. We must therefore handle colonial collections with care. I believe it is important that these collections are accessible and that the associated stories are told from multiple perspectives. This may also entail a painful confrontation with the injustices of our past, injustices that can still be felt today. Looted cultural goods do not belong in the national collection. If a country wishes to reclaim them, we will return them.")

(Rijksoverheid, 2021)

A statement by the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture, and Science, published in the article *"Kabinet: Herstel onrecht door teruggave van cultuurgoederen aan landen van herkomst"* ("Cabinet: Redressing Injustice through the Return of Cultural Objects to Countries of Origin"), signals a shift toward greater recognition of the rights of recipient countries to manage their own cultural heritage. These countries are portrayed as having suffered *onvrijwillig bezitsverlies* (involuntary loss of ownership) of cultural objects due to colonialism, forming the foundation for a discourse centered on *herstel van onrecht* (the redress of historical injustice).

This acknowledgment reframes repatriation not merely as a legal obligation but as an ethical and historical imperative. As Van Engelshoven asserted, *"Dit kan ook een pijnlijke confrontatie met het onrecht uit ons verleden betekenen"* (This may also entail a painful confrontation with the injustices of our past) (Rijksoverheid, 2021). Here, the term *'dit'* refers to the inclusion of multiple perspectives on colonial collections, not the mere presence of colonial objects. The use of the word *pijnlijk* ('painful') implicitly evokes recognition of historical wounds that demand accountability and reflection.

While this ethical framing appears progressive, it is important to note that repatriation has long been characterized in Dutch policy as an act of benevolence. The *Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van Onrecht* report (2020) recalls the historical framing of repatriation as a "*teken van goede wil*" (sign of goodwill) in the context of the 1949 Round Table Conference in The Hague. Similarly,

Scott (2017) argues that repatriation with "goodwill" became part of the Dutch strategy to renew bilateral relations with Indonesia in the 1970s, exemplified by Queen Juliana's state visit to Jakarta. However, this historical narrative has been criticized by Hilmar Farid, Director General of Culture of Indonesia, who emphasized that the return of cultural objects should not be understood merely as an act of goodwill, generosity, or benevolence on the part of the former colonizer, but rather as a recognition of the inherent rights of the recipient state (Faizal, 2023). Within this critical framing, repatriation is thus represented as a moral gesture by the former colonial power, rather than as the rightful restitution of property to its legitimate owners.

The shifting perceptions regarding the presence of colonial cultural objects are also reflected in the Netherlands' tendency to align itself with broader international developments, rather than initiating repatriation autonomously or directly responding to claims submitted by formerly colonized states. The Netherlands has positioned itself within the momentum of as by van der Leden (2023) notes "Restitution Revolution," rather than leading it. This is particularly noteworthy given that repatriation claims had already been raised by former colonies such as Indonesia since the Round Table Conference in 1949 (Scott, 2017).

This dynamic is exemplified by Van Engelshoven's own statement: *"Daarnaast sluit ik met dit kader aan bij een brede internationale ontwikkeling: de sterke roep vanuit landen van herkomst en diasporagemeenschappen om teruggave"* ("In addition, through this framework, I align with a broader international movement: the strong call from countries of origin and diaspora communities for the return [of cultural objects]") (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2021). Ultimately, the decision regarding when, under what circumstances, and in what manner repatriation takes place remains under the control of the Dutch state. This indicates that, despite the formal recognition of claims made by former colonies, the underlying structures of colonial power relations have not been fully dismantled.

Repatriation Policy Vision: Between Partnership and Postcolonial Hegemony

"De volgende stap is dat ik bereid ben, conform de tweede aanbeveling, door teruggave van cultuurgoederen aan landen van herkomst en internationale samenwerking een bijdrage te leveren aan het herstellen van dit historisch onrecht, dat tot op de dag van vandaag nog als onrecht wordt ervaren. Het is deze bereidheid die de basis vormt voor het beleidskader voor de omgang met koloniale collecties."

"The next step is that I am willing, in accordance with the second recommendation, to contribute to the redress of this historical injustice—which is still experienced as injustice today—through the return of cultural goods to countries of origin and through international cooperation. This willingness forms the foundation of the policy framework for dealing with colonial collections."

(Minister Van Engelshoven, 2021)

This statement is taken from *Beleidsvisie Collecties uit een koloniale context*, a policy document released by the Dutch government on 29 January 2021 as an official guideline for the management of colonial collections in Dutch institutions. The vision responded to the report *Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van*

Onrecht published by the Raad voor Cultuur, and was subsequently followed by the publication of *Implementatie Beleidsvisie Collecties uit een Koloniale Context* on 15 July 2022. This implementation document outlined practical steps to address repatriation requests, establish an independent evaluation committee, and support provenance research.

The Dutch repatriation mechanism begins with a formal request submitted by the country of origin to the State Secretary for Culture and Media (a junior minister under the Minister of Education, Culture, and Science), which is then forwarded to the Colonial Collections Committee for evaluation. Based on the results of provenance research, the Committee assesses whether the object in question was subject to *onvrijwillig bezitsverlies* (involuntary loss of ownership) during the colonial period (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020; Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2021). If this can be established, unconditional restitution is recommended; if not, the Committee engages in a balancing of interests between the country of origin and the Netherlands. The Committee's recommendation forms the basis for the final decision by the State Secretary, who also facilitates the restitution process and strengthens international cultural cooperation (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2022).

This framework reveals that the evaluation process remains under the control of the former colonizing state. Restitution decisions are based on two principal criteria: (1) whether the object was acquired through involuntary loss, and (2) whether it holds significant cultural, historical, or religious value for the country of origin. In cases where the first condition cannot be proven, the evaluation process becomes more complex and involves additional considerations (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020). The statement, "*het belang van een koloniaal cultuurgoed dat zich in een Nederlands museum bevindt, zal vaak voor Nederland anders zijn dan voor het land van herkomst*" (the significance of a colonial cultural object located in a Dutch museum will often be different for the Netherlands than for the country of origin) (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020), illustrates that although the rights of the countries of origin are formally acknowledged, Dutch authorities continue to define the meaning and value of such objects from their own perspective.

In practice, the final decision regarding repatriation remains in the hands of the Netherlands. This is evident in the protracted case of Lewke's Cannon, for which the Sri Lankan government submitted repatriation requests between 1964 and 1980 through diplomatic channels and UNESCO. These claims were initially rejected on the grounds that the cannon was considered a diplomatic gift rather than war spoil. Only in the late twentieth century was the Sinhala inscription on the cannon translated, revealing its provenance from the King of Kandy. The most recent evaluation by the Colonial Collections Committee concluded that the cannon was brought to the Netherlands in 1765 and was shortly thereafter "*Hij liet het kanon in november 1765 overbrengen naar de Republiek der Ned-*

erlanden, […] kort daarna werd het als oorlogsbuit tentoongesteld in het 'curiositeitenkabinet' van de stadhouder in Den Haag" (He had the cannon transferred to the Dutch Republic in November 1765, […] shortly thereafter it was displayed as war spoil in the stadtholder's cabinet of curiosities in The Hague) (Commissie Koloniale Collecties, 2023c). Nevertheless, the legitimacy of the claim still had to be substantiated through scientific and administrative processes led by Dutch authorities.

This reliance on colonial epistemological frameworks imposed by Western institutions is also evident in the broader repatriation structure, which is designed to preserve authority over national collections. Claim evaluations, while not imposing formal requirements, nevertheless place the burden on countries of origin to substantiate their historical narratives and submit them for validation by Dutch institutions. This pattern is not only reflected in the case of Lewke's Cannon, but also in other examples, such as *Java Man*. The fossil of *Java Man* (Homo erectus)—discovered by Eugène Dubois in Trinil, East Java, between 1891 and 1892—remains in the Netherlands, positioned as part of a universal scientific heritage and considered of national significance, despite Indonesia's repeated efforts to secure its return (Drieënhuizen & Sysling, 2021). These cases demonstrate how scientific value and narrative control are frequently used to justify the retention of colonial objects, reflecting how colonial logics of knowledge production continue to shape postcolonial relations today.

Nevertheless, policy developments in the 2023–2024 period indicate a discernible shift toward a more partnership-oriented discourse. These developments provide formerly colonized nations with an institutionalized arena to negotiate ownership and historical recognition on more equal terms (Faizal, 2023). Within this framework, countries of origin are formally acknowledged as possessing the right to submit claims for any colonial object they deem significant.

Indonesia, through the Tim Repatriasi Koleksi Indonesia established by the Directorate General of Culture, has actively submitted requests for the restitution of highly symbolic objects. Pursuant to these agreements, the *Lombokschat* (Lombok treasure) was ultimately returned in its entirety, following the partial restitution of the collection in 1977 (Commissie Koloniale Collecties, 2023b). The recognized right to initiate and negotiate claims also demonstrates how potential disputes—such as the contentious 2019 case of the repatriation of the former Nusantara Museum collection—may be effectively avoided. Thus, repatriation should not be understood merely as a technical framework for the recovery of cultural property, but rather as an arena of postcolonial political negotiation in which formerly colonized nations reassert symbolic sovereignty and contest historical narratives.

In this context, international cooperation is framed not only in terms of the return of objects but also in terms of institutional collaboration. The *Implementatie Beleidsvisie* document contains statements such as, "*Daarnaast zal ik onderzoeken hoe naar aanleid-*

ing van verzoeken tot teruggave van andere landen ook museale samenwerking kan worden gestimuleerd" ("In addition, I will explore how, in response to repatriation requests from other countries, museum cooperation can be stimulated") (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2021), reflecting a growing commitment to scholarly exchange. Current museum collaborations increasingly emphasize bilateral engagement—particularly through joint research initiatives, staff training, and capacity development. Although elements of Dutch supervision remain, this evolving framework suggests a more dialogical relationship.

In sum, Dutch repatriation policy reflects a tension between institutional control and the recognition of historical claims by formerly colonized nations. While the legal and administrative frameworks continue to echo postcolonial power structures, recent developments indicate a gradual shift toward more collaborative and reciprocal approaches. Nevertheless, restitution remains contingent not on the inherent rights of the countries of origin, but on the terms and procedures defined by the Dutch state.

Colony Image in Dutch Policy Documents

Dutch government documents on the repatriation of colonial cultural objects (2020–2024) articulate a formal acknowledgment of historical injustices rooted in colonialism and set out key principles for restitution, notably the importance of *herkomstonderzoek* (provenance research) and the active involvement of countries of origin. Through the *Beleidsvisie* (2021) and its *Imple-*

mentatie (2022), the Netherlands establishes an ethical and legal framework that emphasizes collaboration, unconditional return, and long-term museological cooperation—signaling a shift toward a more equitable and reflective partnership. This subchapter examines how these policies represent former colonies by applying the three core components of image theory (Herrmann et al., 1997)—motivation, capability, and decision-making—to analyze whether the "colony" image is reinforced or transformed. In line with Herrmann et al. (1997), the colony image is conceptualized not only through these analytical components but also through a distinction between actors—"good forces" and "bad forces"—which resonates with Dutch policy narratives that highlight cooperative elites versus obstructive forces in former colonies.

Representing Motivation: Decolonization and The Demand for Historical Justice

The representation of formerly colonized states' motivations in Dutch repatriation policy reveals how postcolonial power relations are discursively maintained or contested. Informed by Herrmann et al.'s (1997) image theory, which emphasizes motivation as a key dimension in strategic perception, this analysis investigates how the Netherlands frames the intentions of source countries—such as nationalist revival, decolonial claims, and appeals for historical justice. These representations offer insight into whether the Dutch policy discourse marks a departure from or a continuation of hierarchical postcolonial dynamics.

In the *Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van Onrecht* report, the Dutch government articulates an explicit recognition of the transformed status of formerly colonized nations. Once subordinated entities are now acknowledged as sovereign states with autonomous political will, shaped through historical processes and decolonial movements. The introductory sections of the report emphasize political emancipation as a central justification for restitution claims. Statements such as "*Er was sprake van een versnelde politieke en staatkundige emancipatie*" ("there was an accelerated political and constitutional emancipation") (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020) frame former colonies as legitimate actors entitled to reclaim their cultural heritage. However, the fact that this acknowledgment only emerged in recent official discourse—more than seven decades after Indonesia's independence—reveals a prolonged institutional hesitation to fully recognize the political agency of formerly colonized states in matters of cultural ownership.

Decolonization is presented as a foundational element driving the nationalist resurgence of formerly colonized states. Its conceptual significance is underscored by the presence of a dedicated subsection—*2.5 De Dekolonisatie*—in the *Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van Onrecht report*, where the term *dekolonisatie* appears nineteen times. This frequency reflects the Dutch government's emphasis on viewing former colonies as actors seeking transformation and modernization. Rather than treating decolonization as a matter of narrow nationalism or post-

colonial symbolism, the report frames it as an ongoing historical process that remains incomplete.

The process of decolonization is thus positioned as the historical foundation upon which claims for the repatriation of colonial cultural objects are built, echoing episodes such as Indonesia's 1945 struggle for independence. The report traces the emergence of Indonesian nationalism to the early twentieth century, particularly among the educated elite, and identifies the founding of the Indonesian National Party (PNI) by President Sukarno in 1927 as a key expression of resistance to colonial domination and exploitation (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020).

Beyond Indonesia, the report also addresses the broader trajectory of Dutch decolonization, particularly in the Caribbean. It notes the political and economic motivations behind large-scale migration from Suriname and the Antilles to the Netherlands prior to independence. In contrast to Suriname, the Antillean islands pursued a different path—seeking self-determination within the Kingdom rather than full independence. Aruba became the first to obtain status aparte in 1986, followed by the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles in 2010, after which Curaçao and Sint Maarten acquired autonomous status, while Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba were designated as special municipalities of the Netherlands, collectively referred to as the Caribbean Netherlands (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020). These cases are invoked to underscore the heterogeneity of

postcolonial trajectories, but all are framed within the broader narrative of decolonization as a political and moral rationale for cultural restitution.

The representation of formerly colonized states' motivations in Dutch repatriation policy is evident in the government's explicit acknowledgment of the legitimate demands made by sovereign postcolonial nations. In the official policy document *Beleidsvisie collecties uit een koloniale context*, the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture, and Science affirms that the Netherlands' approach to colonial collections is shaped by "*de sterke roep vanuit landen van herkomst en diasporagemeenschappen om teruggave van cultuurgoederen*" (the strong calls from countries of origin and diaspora communities for the return of cultural objects) (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2021). This statement signals a significant shift from a previously unilateral colonial framework toward a recognition of cultural sovereignty and historical justice as the normative basis for restitution.

This narrative move not only acknowledges the historical fact of postcolonial independence but also reframes the motivations behind repatriation claims. The Dutch government no longer views such claims as purely administrative or material requests, but rather as political-cultural expressions of national consciousness—one that preceded formal independence. Both *Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van Onrecht* (2020) and *Beleidsvisie Collecties uit een Koloniale Context* (2021) emphasize that the return of cultural objects plays a vital role in the "reconstruction of national history," the "restoration

of cultural dignity," and the "formation of postcolonial identity." Terminologies such as *symbolen van onafhankelijkheid* (symbols of independence), *nationaal erfgoed* (national heritage), and *erkenning van historische onrecht* (recognition of historical injustice) reflect a discursive transformation—one that locates restitution within the realm of symbolic sovereignty and historical redress, rather than collection management alone.

The motivations of formerly colonized states are represented in Dutch policy documents as *good forces*—legitimate and coherent actors grounded in claims for historical justice and cultural sovereignty, rather than as passive responders to colonial injustice. Through this lens, Dutch policy discourse reconstructs the image of former colonies in line with Herrmann et al. (1997)'s colony image—as entities with limited material capabilities but strong normative motivations to end symbolic and political dependence on former colonial powers. While this recognition does not always lead to fully symmetrical engagement, the emergence of nationalist discourse in official policy signals a notable shift in how the motivations of formerly colonized states are framed in the context of cultural restitution.

The emphasis on sovereignty and historical aspiration, particularly in *Koloniale Collecties en Erkenning van Onrecht* (2020) and *Beleidsvisie Collecties uit een Koloniale Context* (2021), presents formerly colonized states not merely as a postcolonial nation driven by nationalist sentiment, but as a rational actor asserting its historical rights through legal, diplomatic, and cultural means. The

narrative of decolonization and the symbolic reconstruction of national history through cultural heritage becomes central to how Dutch policy articulates the motivations underlying restitution demands. Thus, the representation of motivations in Dutch policy discourse reveals a shift from a conventional colony image toward a more adaptive and affirmative construction.

Representing Capability: Recipient States as Entities Still in Need of Guidance

The capability of formerly colonized states is a critical dimension in the discourse on the repatriation of colonial cultural objects. It concerns the extent to which source countries possess the institutional infrastructure, technical expertise, and cultural resources required to assess, preserve, and reinterpret returned heritage. Consequently, it is essential to examine how Dutch policy narratives construct the capabilities of these states—whether as an affirmation of their autonomy or as a continuation of hierarchical relations that position them as subordinate actors in need of technical guidance and supervision from the former colonizer.

Although official Dutch policies emphasize equality and unconditional return, the emphasis on infrastructure, training, and capacity-building simultaneously reproduces a discursive hierarchy that may be read as paternalistic. Indonesia is often portrayed as institutionally and technically unprepared, thus requiring assistance in building museum infrastructure, developing professional expertise, and understanding colonial heritage. This representation is reflected in statements that countries of origin "*behoeven ondersteuning bij het opzetten van een museale infrastructuur met goede bewaaromstandigheden, de opleiding van deskundige medewerkers*" (require support in developing museum infrastructure with proper storage conditions, as well as in staff training) (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020).

Infrastructure limitations in formerly colonized countries are often cited as reasons for implementing repatriation cautiously or with specific conditions. In the official report, dialogue partners from Suriname and the Caribbean argued that "*dat eerst de museale infrastructuur op orde moet worden gebracht*" ("the museum infrastructure must first be improved before those countries can receive back all the objects") (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020).

In addition, the criteria for assessing repatriation requests also take into account the management conditions in the country of origin. The Dutch government states, "*Ook de beheeromstandigheden op de plaats waar het cultuurgoed bij teruggave terecht zou komen, kunnen bij de beoordeling van een teruggaveverzoek een rol spelen*" ("the management conditions at the location to which the cultural object would be returned can play a role in the assessment of a repatriation request") (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020). This indicates that the validity of a claim is not determined solely by historical grounds but also by the technical readiness of the requesting country, assessed through standards embedded in Dutch policy.

Nevertheless, although the capabilities of formerly colonized countries are still often regarded as requiring improvement, the Dutch government ultimately grants them full autonomy in managing repatriated collections. In Indonesia, for instance, concerns over infrastructure resurfaced after the fire at the National Museum on 16 September 2023, which damaged 817 objects made of bronze, ceramics, terracotta, and wood, as well as miniature collections and replicas of prehistoric artifacts (Azhari, 2023). Although the Ministry of Culture emphasized that previously repatriated items were unaffected and the museum reopened in October 2024 as a sign of institutional recovery (Prameswari, 2024), the incident reignited debates regarding Indonesia's technical preparedness. The incident was also noted in Dutch cultural discussions (Reinhart, 2023, DutchCulture), although Dutch authorities emphasized that they can no longer intervene in the management of repatriated collections.

Moreover, in *Beleidsvisie Collecties uit een Koloniale Context*, Dutch authorities reiterate that countries like Indonesia require sustained supervision and collaboration. This is evident in the statement: "*De Indonesische gesprekspartners geven aan intensiever met Nederland en met de Nederlandse musea te willen samenwerken op het gebied van herkomstonderzoek. Expliciet wordt daarbij genoemd het opleiden en de deskundigheidsbevordering van jonge museummedewerkers*" (Indonesian stakeholders expressed a desire to collaborate more intensively with Dutch museums in provenance research, specifically requesting training and capacity building for young museum professionals) (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020).

Thus, while Dutch policy documents appear to support collaborative engagement, the narrative structure continues to frame Indonesia as a recipient of technical support rather than an equal partner. These representations sustain a subordinate image within the postcolonial relationship, in which the recognition of technical and epistemic capacity remains conditional upon validation by the former colonial power. Despite rhetorical shifts toward cooperation, Dutch cultural policy continues to reproduce structural asymmetries rooted in the legacies of colonial domination.

Representing Decision-Making: Postcolonial Governance

In postcolonial relations, the decision-making capacity of formerly colonized states serves as a key indicator of whether they are treated as equal partners or remain positioned within a subordinate structure. This subsection examines how Dutch government policy during the 2023–2024 period represents the decision-making agency of formerly colonized countries in determining the course of colonial collection repatriation. The analysis focuses on how these states are portrayed in processes of negotiation, historical assessment, and the attribution of meaning to returned cultural objects—whether as autonomous and rational actors or as entities requiring technocratic validation from the former colonizer.

Dutch policy discourse reflects a shift from unilateral dominance toward the recognition of the discursive autonomy of countries of origin in decision-making processes. The explicit statement from the Advisory Committee on Colonial Collections Policy Framework. that policies concerning colonial collections "*niet eenzijdig gebaseerd zijn op opvattingen van de voormalige koloniale mogendheid, maar mede op de opvattingen, wensen en verwachtingen van het betreffende herkomstland*" ("should not be based solely on the views of the former colonial power, but also on the perspectives, desires, and expectations of the country of origin") (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020) signals an opening toward a more balanced relational framework.

This commitment is not only normative but also institutionalized in practice. The Advisory Committee on Colonial Collections Policy Framework. engaged in preliminary online consultations with representatives from countries of origin, as stated in the document: "*de Commissie heeft via het internet verkennende gesprekken gevoerd met vertegenwoordigers van deze landen*" ("the committee has conducted exploratory discussions via the internet with representatives of these countries") (Adviescommissie Nationaal Beleidskader Koloniale Collecties, 2020). This initiative demonstrates a deliberative involvement of formerly colonized states and signals that they are beginning to be treated as discursive partners in shaping policy.

Furthermore, the Dutch government supports the active participation of experts from the country of origin in provenance research, as reflected in the statement: "*Ik vind het ook belangrijk dat deskundigen uit het herkomstland betrokken worden bij het herkomstonderzoek. [...] Gezien de grote hoeveelheid collecties uit Indonesië in de Rijkscollectie heeft de Indonesische regering aangekondigd een commissie in te stellen om gesprekken tussen deskundigen te faciliteren.*" ("I also consider it important that experts from the country of origin are involved in provenance research. [...] The Indonesian government has announced the establishment of a committee to facilitate dialogue between experts.") (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2021). This statement marks a shift from unilateral control to collaborative decision-making, where the country of origin plays an active role in directing research and shaping the return process.

Nevertheless, Dutch policy also reflects underlying assumptions that the limited documentation of provenance in formerly colonized countries is indicative of their administrative limitations in decision-making. This is evident in the 2023 repatriation process, particularly in the case of Sri Lanka. The provenance research on two *maha thuwakku* firearms noted that "over de herkomst van de maha thuwakku was nauwelijks informatie aanwezig" ("there was hardly any information available regarding the provenance of the *maha thuwakku*") , and for the silver *kastane*, it was stated that "the eighteenth-century archival trails of this object are less certain" (Commissie Koloniale Collecties, 2023d). Since repatriation relies heavily on provenance research, and such research is predominantly based on Dutch archival sources, while the committee frames

these limitations primarily as gaps in available information, the structural reliance on Dutch archival sources nevertheless reproduces asymmetry. Consequently, the decision-making power over repatriation outcomes remains largely in the hands of the Dutch state.

In this context, the Colonial Collections Committee stresses the importance of balancing diligence and expediency, as articulated in its operational principle: "*Uitgangspunt bij de werkwijze van de commissie en het reglement is een balans tussen zorgvuldigheid en voortvarendheid. (…) Nodeloze vertraging zou afbreuk doen aan de beleving van het gewenste herstel van onrecht*" ("The guiding principle for the committee's work and regulation is to strike a balance between care and efficiency. (…) Unnecessary delays would undermine the perception of the desired redress of injustice") (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 2022). While procedural in tone, this statement reflects a Dutch sense of urgency and implicitly reinforces the perception that formerly colonized countries may still lack the institutional capability to manage decision-making processes efficiently.

In sum, Dutch policy in 2023–2024 reveals an ambivalent representation of decision-making agency. On one hand, it acknowledges the deliberative capacity of formerly colonized states; on the other, it continues to imply doubts about their ability to govern efficiently. Within the framework of image theory (Herrmann et al., 1997), such representations position postcolonial states as increasingly rational and sovereign actors, yet still subject to verification and oversight by the former colonial power. As such, postcolonial relations in the context of repatriation remain embedded in a decision-making structure marked by asymmetry and lingering hierarchies.

Analyzing Dutch government documents through the lens of the colony image demonstrates that the representation of formerly colonized states continues to be marked by asymmetric patterns that shape the direction of repatriation policy. The motivations of former colonies are acknowledged as legitimate insofar as they are framed through narratives of decolonization; however, their capabilities are portrayed as inadequate and in need of external assistance, while their decision-making capacity is considered subject to verification by the former colonizer. These perceived limitations underpin the policy emphasis on provenance research and technical supervision, which places the burden of proof on the country of origin, while the final decision ultimately remains in the hands of Dutch authorities. This dynamic explains why, in cases such as *Lewke's Cannon*, repatriation only became possible once Dutch institutions validated the historical and scientific legitimacy of the claim.

As the image of former colonies shifts toward recognition as sovereign partners, the discursive implications for policy also transform. Restitution is increasingly reframed not merely as an administrative matter but as an issue of historical justice and cultural sovereignty. This shift is evident in Dutch policy documents from 2020–2024, which more explicitly acknowledge the political motivations of formerly colonized states and

establish institutional mechanisms enabling them to submit claims directly. The ability of countries such as Indonesia to actively select symbolic objects—such as the *Lombokschat* or the *Kris Klungkung*—demonstrates how recognition of agency alters the structure of negotiation: repatriation becomes a bilateral process in which formerly colonized states gain discursive and procedural space to shape outcomes.

Thus, the application of image theory highlights the close interconnection between perception and policy. As the colony image shifts toward recognition of sovereignty, policies correspondingly evolve toward partnership, dialogical exchange, and institutional collaboration. Nevertheless, the dimensions of capability and decision-making remain conditional, paternalistic, and often framed as concessions granted by the Netherlands. Dutch acceptance of claims submitted by Indonesia and Sri Lanka illustrates how changes in the perception of motivation, capability, and decision-making capacity produce transformations in policy discourse. In this sense, the trajectory of Dutch repatriation policy can be read as a reflection of the slow but tangible transition from a colony image toward a more equitable postcolonial partnership.

Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates that Dutch repatriation policy reflects a gradual shift from the colony image toward greater recognition of the symbolic sovereignty of formerly colonized states. Through the application of image theory, it becomes evident that the representations of motivation, capability, and decision-making capacity of source countries have undergone a transformation that progressively opens broader avenues for participation. Policy developments during the 2020–2024 period indicate an increasing opportunity for formerly colonized nations to submit claims and shape discourse, thereby positioning repatriation not merely as the return of cultural objects but also as a postcolonial political process oriented toward historical recognition and cultural sovereignty.

Moreover, the application of image theory reveals how shifts in Dutch perceptions of former colonies have direct implications for the policy framework. As long as the colony image remained dominant, repatriation policy tended to emphasize technical supervision and scientific validation by Dutch institutions, as illustrated in the historical process surrounding the restitution of *Lewke's Cannon*. However, once the representation of source countries began to shift toward recognition of agency and sovereignty, policy mechanisms likewise evolved toward more dialogical approaches, including the formal acknowledgment of the right of formerly colonized states to submit claims and actively participate in negotiation processes.

For Global South nations, on the other hand, repatriation seems to emerge as an arena to negotiate meaning, legitimacy, and their position within contemporary international relations. In 2024, Indonesia established a Ministry of Culture, signaling greater institutional attention to cultural issues. The establishment of the Directorate Gen-

eral of Cultural Diplomacy, Promotion, and Cooperation within this ministry indicates a strengthened state agency to negotiate repatriation more assertively. The presence of such a bureaucratic unit enhances the capacity for more active engagement in repatriation negotiations while simultaneously affirming the Global South's bargaining power in the sphere of international cultural politics.

This study, however, has limitations. Its focus lies primarily on perceptual and representational dimensions, without engaging in a deeper analysis of domestic political contestation in the Netherlands or the role of broader European regional dynamics in shaping repatriation policy. Future research is therefore needed to examine the extent to which domestic politics, regional pressures, and Dutch colonial perceptions of Indonesia interact to produce current policy outcomes. A multi-level approach would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the drivers behind policy change while enabling more accurate predictions regarding the future trajectory of Dutch repatriation policy.

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Khadiza Khatun

Book Review: "Society and Sociology in Bangladesh: A South Asian Perspective"
by Sadeka Halim, ASM Amanullah, and Rasheda Irshad Nasir (Editors) (1st Edition)

Book Review: "Society and Sociology in Bangladesh: A South Asian Perspective" by Sadeka Halim, ASM Amanullah, and Rasheda Irshad Nasir (Editors) (1st Edition)

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Society and Sociology in Bangladesh: A South Asian Perspective, a book written and edited by the current and former faculty members of the Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka, is a powerful analysis of sociological discourses, academic praxes, future prospects, and contemporary challenges and issues, highlighting national and international trends and prospects of sociology concerning tertiary education and academic research in Bangladesh and South Asia. This book, a combination of nineteen chapters by twenty-one contributors, is well articulated, comprehensive, and easy to digest for those readers who are interested in understanding social dynamics, their challenges, and the way forward. The book, which is methodologically grounded in findings from both empirical studies and systematic literature reviews, was published to commemorate the centenary of the University of Dhaka and designed to actively engage audiences within and outside the university related to social sciences.

In the first chapter, Professor

Rasheda Irshad Nasir and Professor ASM Amanullah, illustrate the history of the origin and development of the Department of Sociology at the University of Dhaka along with the identification of various academic traditions developed and nurtured by former faculty members and updated by the current scholars, linking up the courses of Sociology with 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and describing the potentiality of the department up in the near future. Connecting with the sociology of development, in chapter two, Professor S. Aminul Islam points to three paradigms focusing on the development and underdevelopment in agrarian structure, poverty, microcredit, and power structure. Similarly, Professor Monirul Islam Khan had a constructive discussion in the fourth chapter about the institutionalization of Sociology in Bangladesh in an attempt to review its present state of functioning and identify the underlying causes that shaped it in the given form based on real-life experiences and secondary literature.

In chapter three, Professor A. I.

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Mahbub Uddin Ahmed theoretically explains contemporary changes in Bangladesh society, which is inextricably intertwined with the emergence of a new accumulation regime - accumulation by dispossession under neoliberalism. He identifies that the mixed capitalist system of Bangladesh has initiated five major capitalistic changes in its socio-economic formation, based on a historical analytical method and content analysis. These changes include: the rise of an industrial capitalist society, the emergence of a new lumpen class structure from its well-entrenched colonial class structure, the transformation from a colonial democratic state to a democratically undemocratic state, a shift from traditional mechanical solidarity to an anomic society, and, the commodification of the entire superstructure. Further, he argues that "neoliberalism" or "new imperialism" is the main cause of contemporary social change in post-colonial Bangladesh.

Based on the two decades of experiences from the engagement with teaching and developing 'Sociology of Minority' course, Professor Sadeka Halim, in chapter five, critically analyzes the problems of conceptualization of minority, local literature on minority debate and the critical discourse of factors responsible for deprivation of the minority communities as well as the marginalized status of indigenous communities in Bangladesh. As a part of the practical application of this course--promoting equality and equity for all forms of communities--this chapter suggests several potential scopes for future research and improvements including the experience of social exclusion, oppression and marginalization as well as the integration of minorities into mainstream society, the acknowledgement of religious and ethnic plurality, effective census and disaggregated data, GO-NGO collaboration, land related disputes, 8th five year plan and SDG implementation, gender issues and the application of international instruments ratified by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB).

Differently, in chapter six, Professor Zeenat Huda depicts the contribution of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in imagining Bengali National Identity and framing the model of secularism according to sociological discourse and theoretical understanding based on a systematic literature review method. She highlights the significance of Mujibian philosophy for quality education at the tertiary level and sustainable development in Bangladesh, claiming that to ensure educational rights for all classes of people, the educational policymakers must embrace the philosophy of secularism, diversity, and cultural heterogeneity of Bangabandhu.

Regarding the problems and prospects of studying Medical Sociology in Bangladesh, Professor ASM Amanullah, in chapter seven, proposes a theoretical framework that fits well in the context of Bangladesh and demonstrates how the health challenges could be seriously related to national development agendas. He addresses discourses of the social construction of health, illness and medicine, unresolved structural problems

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in the health systems, challenges during the dominant era of neoliberalism, and finally critical examination of why sociologists need to engage theoretically and empirically on the social realities of communicable and non-communicable diseases. Although Bangladesh has made significant progress in the field of health in its 50 years of independence, it has some challenges as well as strengths toward achieving the SDGs in Bangladesh.

Similarly, in chapter nine, Professor Shah Ehsan Habib discusses the issues of health and illness from theoretical and practical contexts, providing insights into social construction of health and illness, sociology of pandemics, pandemics and social medicine responses, global health strategies and frameworks, and challenges of international health governance in addressing global pandemic like Covid-19. Professor Habib also explains the significance of Medical Sociology in achieving SDGs and provides constructive discussion about capacity building on infection prevention and control in Bangladesh. The main differences between these two chapters lie in their focusing issues, theoretical explanations, and analytical approach. While the previous chapter focuses on the academic development of medical sociology in Bangladesh using historical and theoretical analysis and linking them to the local context of health challenges, the next one explores the sociology of pandemic with a theoretical assessment of health and illness in the context of 'Risk Society and Covid-19 Pandemic'.

In chapter eight, Professor Fatema Rezina Iqbal discusses the significance of studying 'Sociology of Marriage and Family' in Bangladesh, taking into consideration of the theoretical perspectives, causal factors, and consequences of contemporary changes in family patterns in Bangladesh as well as critically reflecting on the dynamics of family in a changing industrial and neo-liberal society based on secondary sources of data. She finally relates this course as family studies is crucial in achieving SDGs in developing countries like Bangladesh, and suggests a strategic direction for further teaching, research, and collaboration with multiple stakeholders at the national and global level.

Focusing on the interrelationship among democracy, state, and vested interest groups in post-1990s Bangladesh, Professor A. K. M. Jamal Uddin and Israt Jahan Eyemoon, in chapter ten, illustrates that Bangladesh has been facing a crisis of democracy and democratic values, specifically when a democratic state is considered to be characterized by high levels of political involvement, numerous political parties, a growing middle class, a dynamic civil society and regular elections. At the last part of this chapter, they provide a strategic direction to reach international standards in teaching and research of nationalism and democracy, future activities to coordinate with the international arena, and support for national goals and interests.

In chapter eleven, Professor M. Anwar Hossain discusses the role of 'Environmental Sociology' aiming to provide an overview

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of the existing literature on environmental sociology and understanding the political ecology of water development, empirical analysis of Human Exceptionalism Paradigm (HEP) and New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) in the context of Bangladesh, and argues that since World War II, water development is dominated by Western techno-centric perspective under the policy prescriptions of liberal and neoliberal development. At the end, he suggests the tasks ahead in promoting this course that will contribute to addressing distributional justice, climate justice, and environmental justice.

Professor Jahangir Alam, in chapter twelve, elucidates the role of youth in achieving the global development agenda, like the MDGs and SDGs, as well as how such a global development agenda talks about youth in the changing society. He also sheds light on the benefits of the demographic dividend from youth employment, challenges ahead in maximizing the demographic dividend, and the youth unemployment challenge for Bangladesh towards the achievement of the SDGs. He focuses on the strategic directions to minimize youth unemployment and development challenges, and highlights that the population dividend, ensuring sustainable gender equality and decent work environment could be a far cry if the critical challenges ahead of Bangladeshi youth are not addressed properly through academic, public and private sector initiatives at the national and global level.

In chapter thirteen, Tahsina Akter focuses on the teaching of sociology and the significance of social science perspectives and constraints of sociological research in Bangladesh, highlighting the role of the Department of Sociology of the University of Dhaka in addressing social issues, demonstrating from qualitative approach that blends historical, thematic, and critical analysis. She recommends the strategies of quality teaching, research, and linkage possibilities of the department of sociology with other academic and industrial entities, and concludes that adopting a home-grown approach based on practical and theoretical knowledge that can boost the efforts of social sciences teaching and research in Bangladesh.

Samina Luthfa and Wasifa Tasnim Shamma demonstrate, in chapter fourteen, the scholarly contributions on social political movements of Bangladesh as well as a constructive discussion on the contextual factors, dimensions, and processes of social movement based on the review of literature on varied social movements that took place in the country from 1960 to 2020. They argue that although social movements are far from being anything new, the theoretical tools of subaltern studies, cultural studies, and history have been replaced by new analytical tools in sociology. Presenting a thematic and chronological analysis of social and political movements of Bangladesh, they identify research gaps and provide a clear roadmap for action-based initiatives for strengthening relationships with several stakeholders for research and development at home and abroad. They suggest that intersectionality, post-coloniality, anti-neoliberalism, and interdisciplinary is a major expectations from social movement researchers of the future.

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Professor Khairul Chowdhury, in chapter fifteen, attempts to rethink development strategies and pedagogy in Sociology in Bangladesh and critically reviews the theories of development and post-development, and how post-development theories challenge mainstream development theories characterized by Eurocentrism, colonialism, and neo-liberalism. He focuses on the meaning, practices, and the nature of development of Bangladesh based on secondary empirical data, as well as the identification of several critical social and economic challenges of development perspectives in Bangladesh, such as poverty and income inequality. Finally, the author emphasizes the need for a reevaluation of the Sociology of Development curriculum and teaching methods, as well as a persistent critique of Bangladesh's current development plans and accomplishments to achieve social justice.

In the next chapter, Debasish Kumar Kundu explores the conceptual dilemmas of "Peasant and Peasantry" and analyzes the peasant studies in global academia from the early period of industrialization to the post-colonial period and the re-examination of peasant studies in Bangladesh based on global and local literature. Furthermore, he focuses on the primary theoretical debates on the peasant society of Bangladesh and explains what sociology can contribute to further development of peasant studies, emphasizing the application of peasant studies for rural transformation in Bangladesh, possible forms of collaboration with national and international partners, and

the new manifesto for peasant studies in the age of 4IR and SDGs.

In chapter seventeen, Lipon Mondol discloses the transformation of Bangladesh from an agricultural society to a capitalist society. By drawing on relevant literature and empirical studies, he focuses on how unplanned urbanization and corrupt urban practices by power elites have made Bangladeshi cities unequal, unsustainable, and unlivable. He argues that governments have failed to build Bangladeshi cities that are inclusive and sustainable due to their unrealistic plans and passive responses to rampant urbanization. He also recommends how the governments can achieve their targets for SDGs by re-planning and remaking cities to be inclusive and sustainable for all.

In the next chapter, Humayun Kabir explains the scenarios of poverty and social inequality in Bangladesh, highlighting references from the RMG sector, gender inequality and violation of workplace rights, and modern slavery. He connects the situation with the 'marriage between poverty and inequality' through capital accumulation, focusing on the impacts on society. He highlights the role of the sociology discipline, focusing on workplace rights and contribution to national development, ensuring good governance, which mitigates the existing forms of poverty and social inequality in Bangladesh.

The nineteen and last chapter includes a keynote speech of the former Supernumerary Professor, K.A.M. Saa'duddin, on "Development and Sociology: A Theoretical Analysis", which

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was presented at the biannual conference of the Bangladesh Sociological Association in 1990. He focuses on the new phase of underdevelopment that more appropriately explains the conditions obtaining in Third World countries today. He acknowledged that social evolution as the principal determinant of social change, according to classical theorists, and contemporary theorists labelled progress as an inevitable trend of humankind. He also illustrates the modernization theory and dependency theory, arguing that underdevelopment is the inevitable result of capitalism. With the advancement of science and technology, scholars of the sociology of development will develop a suitable theoretical framework for exposing the exploitation as part of the struggle against neo-colonialism.

Nonetheless, the entire book is undoubtedly a pivotal and thought-provoking text for students and emerging sociologists, while also providing a timely critical voice on society and sociology in Bangladesh and a South Asian perspective. Through the engagement with various theories and disciplines, it positions the book as relevant for a variety of intended global audiences, yet it also skips (unintentionally) some other sociological issues such as social gerontology, social psychology, social demography, social issues and problems, as well as criminology. While the book primarily centers on the context of Bangladesh and South Asia, it inadequately incorporates examples from other South Asian countries, which may be perceived as a notable deficiency. In addition, the necessity and applicability of

the courses in this book have been analyzed in the context of the achievement of the 'Global Agenda' SDG-2030. It is expected that further analysis of the applicability and significance of these courses may be conducted with other significant variables that will help to understand the society and sociology in Bangladesh and South Asia in the age of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) and artificial intelligence (AI).

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Even pages: Author (edited by editor)

Title
Must be brief and informative, between 15-20 words
(16pt, bold, single pharagraph spacing, 0 before-after)

First Author; Next Author; Last Author – without academic title (12pt, bold)
First Author's Affiliation (Department, University, Country) (12pt);
Second Author's Affiliation;
Third Author's Affiliation;
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Abstract (13pt, bold)
Abstract should be typed in italic, font size 10pt, single-spacing format and justified. The abstract should briefly summarize the aim, findings, or purposes of the article. Authors encouraged to write clear explanation on methodology or conceptual framework used in the article, followed by short summary of the research findings. The end part of the abstract should give conclusion that indicates how this paper contributes to fill the gap in previous studies, or any practical implication that might occurs. The abstract should be written in one concise paragraph of no more than 250 words.
Keywords*: contains; three to five; relevant keywords; separated by semicolon; written in lower case, italic 10pt*

Guidelines (13pt, Bold, Title Case)

The manuscript should be written in English on A4-sized papers (21x29.7 cm), with custom margins as follows: left 2.5 cm, right 2 cm, bottom 2 cm, and top 2 cm. The manuscript should use Callisto MT, 12pt font size, 1.5 line spacing. Manuscript should consist of 4,000—7,000 words (research article) and 3,000—4,000 words (book review). Referencing and citing technique used is APA 6th edition, with in-text citation format

Guidelines - Introduction

All sources quoted or paraphrased should be listed in the reference list. Cite source using APA in-text citation format, by writing author's last name followed by the publication

year, for example: (Hudson, 2014). Direct quotations, tables, or figures referred should include the page number, for example: (Hudson, 2010, p. 44).

The introduction part should explore these elements: (1) Explanation about the research background and the general theme or topic; (2) Provide clear and convincing answer to the question: Why is this article is important? (3) A concise literature review of available literature or research. Please cite the most imperative part, theories, or debates from existing studies; (4) Indicate how your article will contribute to fill the gap to the current studies. This is also important to show that your idea is original; (5) Offer explanation on specific problem or question[1] and hypothesis

that will be the main point(s) of the article.[2] We encourage authors to bring only one or two questions.

Author should also describe objectives of the research and offer the brief structure of the article.

Guidelines - Methodology

Author is encouraged to describe methodology clearly. Put it in a dedicated subchapter if necessary. This part should contain a brief justification for the research methods used.

This part should contain enough detail to enable the reader to evaluate the appropriateness of your methods and the reliability and validity of your findings.

How To Write Your Subchapters

   [This is an example text]

Vivamus quis nisi ut diam vehicula mollis rhoncus et massa. Sed in sem felis. Nulla facilisi. Fusce lobortis vel nisl non viverra. Phasellus id molestie nunc.

   Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nunc nunc ligula, volutpat et nibh sed, hendrerit tincidunt eros. Nam scelerisque rutrum nulla, nec tempus purus ultrices et. Maecenas lacus ligula, pharetra sit amet nibh eu, pellentesque efficitur ex. Integer varius leo eget eros dapibus, a venenatis nulla consectetur. Fusce finibus nisi maximus lorem cursus, a bibendum sem euismod. Vivamus ac

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[1] Fewer question or hypothesis is better, we encourage author to bring only 1-2 questions

[2] Footnote may be used to provide additional description (terms, concept, specific event, etc.) that might be too excessive to be included in-text.

tempor odio, in porta orci. Phasellus scelerisque

est ac elementum ullamcorper. Duis ut lectus non nibh dictum malesuada. Quisque convallis lectus non justo posuere venenatis. Nam bibendum sem et nibh eleifend placerat sit amet a nibh. Vestibulum quis varius purus.

<u>If You Have 2nd Level Subchapters, Use 12pt, Underline, Title Case</u>

   [This is an example text] Proin non consequat justo. Praesent tempor aliquam nibh vitae venenatis. Praesent pulvinar nulla ut ligula ultricies, bibendum pretium mi hendrerit. Quisque luctus, purus in tincidunt consequat, nibh metus laoreet ex, at rutrum nisi metus ut lacus. Integer commodo purus orci, non pharetra nisi iaculis non. Aenean eget rutrum risus, eu egestas erat. Sed lobortis diam dolor, at porttitor dolor consequat tempus. Etiam erat felis, porttitor sed enim a, aliquam commodo elit. Cras ac posuere est, eu interdum mi. Maecenas posuere lacus vitae nisi efficitur, sed malesuada erat tincidunt. Nullam a dignissim massa. Fusce molestie finibus augue id lacinia. Integer tincidunt at metus ac pharetra. Vivamus hendrerit, mauris quis pharetra fringilla, orci ipsum interdum lacus, et imperdiet massa mauris quis lorem. Pellentesque placerat fermentum imperdiet. Fusce scelerisque purus eget suscipit semper.

   If You Have 3rd Level Subchapters, Use 12pt, Italic, Title Case. Run the text on after a punctuation mark. **[This is an example text]** In hac habitasse platea dictumst. Nunc in euismod libero, vel interdum lacus. Proin ut dignissim risus. Nunc faucibus libero sed eleifend bibendum. Nam mattis, odio ac placerat euismod, mauris felis consequat nunc, ut porttitor ligula risus ac nisl. Nulla ullamcorper sapien non quam gravida, nec dignissim ligula

dignissim. Curabitur congue nunc sed eros luctus, sed dapibus arcu elementum. Mauris venenatis odio leo, ut placerat augue congue at.

Curabitur convallis nulla leo, sit amet auctor est vestibulum nec. Aenean ut neque vel quam egestas accumsan eu in elit. Nullam lobortis faucibus lectus posuere consequat.

- Duis convallis nulla ligula, ac congue ipsum cursus sed.
- Sed ut dolor eleifend, malesuada sem vitae, mollis risus.
- Sed sit amet massa felis. [This is an example te xt for 2nd level subchapter]

Guidelines - Conclusion

Conclusion is a brief summary of findings

and discussion. It is strongly recommended to avoid mere repetitive statements or phrase from the previous section. Author may also discuss implication of the findings and point out prospect for further research.

Conclusion should followed by reference list format. Reference list is based on American Psychological Association (APA) style. Reference list should appear at the end of the article and include only literatures actually cited in the manuscript. Citation should be sorted alphabetically and chronologically, written in single spacing and 0pt before-after spacing format.

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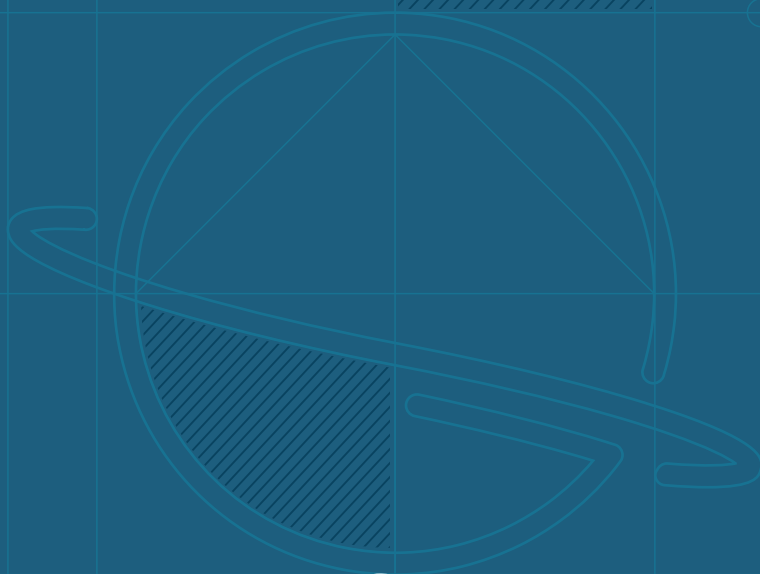
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