

RESEARCH ARTICLE



The Impact of Chinese Capitalist Business on Indonesia's Economic Policy and Leadership.

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Abstract

This study examines the roots of Chinese capitalist business in Indonesia, which has expanded significantly over the past two decades through increased foreign direct investment (FDI) and bilateral trade. It highlights the historical, economic, and political factors shaping this dynamic, while analyzing the Indonesian government's role in managing the influx of Chinese investment using a qualitative-descriptive approach. The findings indicate that China's economic involvement in Indonesia has deep historical roots, dating back to the colonial era, continuing through the post-independence period, and intensifying under China's "Go Global" policy. Major infrastructure projects such as the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway illustrate Beijing's broader geopolitical strategy. However, various challenges and controversies have emerged, particularly concerning environmental impacts, China's growing economic dominance, and Indonesia's increasing dependency. These issues have sparked public debate and raised questions about the long-term sustainability of such economic ties. In response, the Indonesian government has taken measures to address these concerns by implementing stricter regulations, diversifying sources of foreign investment, and strengthening domestic capacity in key sectors. These efforts aim to ensure long-term benefits while safeguarding national economic sovereignty. This study offers valuable insights for policymakers, scholars, and the broader public on how to manage Indonesia's economic relationship with China more strategically and sustainably, emphasizing the importance of balanced engagement and informed governance in an increasingly interconnected global economy.

Keyword: economy, policy, Chinese capitalist business.

Introduction

In the last two decades, economic relations between Indonesia and China have rapidly developed, marked by significant increases in foreign direct investment (FDI) and bilateral trade. China's role as one of Indonesia's largest trading partners and a major source of investment has sparked discussions regarding the influence and impact of Chinese capitalism in Indonesia. This study aims to uncover the roots of Chinese capitalism in Indonesia, highlighting the historical, economic, and political factors that shape these dynamics. The history of Chinese economic involvement in Indonesia can be traced back to the colonial era. During that time, Chinese traders played a crucial role in the local economy, particularly in the trade and banking sectors. This influence continued into the independence era, albeit with various political challenges, including the discriminatory policies implemented by the New Order government against the Chinese ethnic community (Anwar, 2019).

Since the economic reform in the early 2000s, China has begun to expand its economic influence globally through the 'Go Global' policy, which encourages Chinese companies to invest abroad (Rivai, 2023). In Indonesia, this policy is evident through a number of large infrastructure projects funded by Chinese investors, such as the construction of toll roads, ports, and the

Jakarta-Bandung high-speed train (Yamin & Windymadaksa, 2017). The existence of these projects not only reflects China's economic power but also demonstrates Beijing's geopolitical strategy to strengthen its influence in the Southeast Asian region. The main factors driving Chinese capitalism in Indonesia are economic and strategic interests. China views Indonesia as a large market with significant economic growth potential. Furthermore, Indonesia's strategic geographical position along international trade routes makes it an important partner in the Belt and Road Initiative (Gede., et al, 2019).

China is striving to build a global infrastructure network that connects Asia, Europe, and Africa, with Indonesia as one of the important nodal points in this network. However, the influx of Chinese investment also presents various challenges and controversies. On one hand, this investment has made a tangible contribution to infrastructure development and job creation in Indonesia. On the other hand, there are concerns regarding environmental impacts, China's economic dominance, and an increasing dependency on foreign capital. These issues often become sources of political and social tension at the local level (Fitriani, 2019).

This study will also explore the role of the Indonesian government in managing the flow of Chinese investments. Government policies in welcoming foreign investments, including from China, significantly influence the direction and impact of Chinese capitalism in Indonesia. The Indonesian government, under various regimes, has exhibited diverse attitudes towards Chinese investments, ranging from open acceptance to the reevaluation of specific projects to ensure economic benefits for local communities. Based on the above, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the roots of Chinese capitalism in Indonesia, uncovering the historical, economic, and political dynamics that shape this relationship. Therefore, this study is expected to provide

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important insights for policymakers, academics, and the general public on how to optimally manage and utilize economic relations with China (Liu, 2024)

Method

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative methodology. As articulated by Beins (2024), qualitative research methods aim to interpret phenomena through an in-depth, interpretative analysis. Sekaran and Bougie (2016) further emphasize that the employed research techniques consist primarily of literature review and interpretative analysis of diverse data sources. The literature review serves to systematically map existing knowledge accumulated by previous scholars. This approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the current body of knowledge pertinent to the research topic, thereby establishing a solid theoretical foundation for the present study. Such a conceptual framework is essential, as it enables the identification of gaps and underexplored areas within the scholarly discourse. Consequently, this method supports the generation of novel insights and contributes meaningfully to the advancement of the field.

Results and Discussion

China's International Trade Policy and Economic Integration

Since joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, China has been active in initiating regional trade agreements. China prioritizes regional trade to expand the distribution of domestic product exports, which is embodied in cooperation with regions outside East Asia such as China-ASEAN, China-Pakistan, China-Chile, and China-New Zealand. This enhancement of economic relations allows China to reap the benefits of global economic liberalization. Through the Belt and Road Initiative, China has successfully expanded its economic and trade territory (Kenderdine, 2018).

Before the economic reform, China was known as a socialist and protectionist country. However, since 1991, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) introduced the concept of 'socialist market system with Chinese characteristics'. From that moment on, China began to design radical changes in economic policy across various sectors including finance, banking, taxation, trade, state-owned enterprises, labor, and government administration. This economic reform positioned China as a new economic power in East Asia alongside Japan. By implementing an open-door policy, China's average GDP growth over the past 30 years has nearly approached 10%. China's exports have made it the largest manufacturing and exporting country in the world (Seung-soo, 2016). China's economic liberalization was further expanded through participation in the WTO and regional trade agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

Since the year 2000, China has increased its global export target to 6.1%, approaching the achievements of the United States, Germany, and Japan (Hart-Landsberg & Burkett, 2005). The market share of Chinese export products continued to rise to 10% in 2010 and reached 11% in 2013. China also became the second largest country in terms of production material imports, accounting for 10.32% of global imports in 2013 (Do et al., 2023). This achievement was attained after China lowered tariff and non-tariff barriers in accordance with its commitments to the Washington Consensus in 2001. China's involvement with the WTO since 2001 has influenced government intervention in the market. Nevertheless, the Chinese government continues to maintain stability and transparency while providing essential information on export and import trade, all while preserving national strategic sectors. In fulfilling its commitments to the WTO, China reduced non-tariff barriers by lowering the average tariff rate from 15.6% in 2001 to 9.7% in 2005. The tariff on manufactured goods decreased from 14.3% to 8.9%, and agricultural products fell from 23.2% to 14.6% in the same year (Bin, 2015). The reduction in China's trade tariff barriers decreased from 4.2% to 1.53% (Saygılı & Yalçıntekin, 2021).

The reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers has impacted the increase of foreign investment. Although there is a perspective that China is attempting to enhance its production surplus, two important points must be noted: first, China's manufacturing production focuses on the competition for product value in exports by driving down production costs up to distribution; second, the reduction of non-tariff barriers encourages foreign investors to expand capital flows into China. Like other countries in East Asia, China has also reduced distortions to its industries and commodity prices in order to achieve comparative advantage in market pricing (Suharmanto & Pramono, 2021). While market dominance may weaken the role of the state, China is considered capable of calculating which sectors require strategic state intervention and which can be minimized.

China's trade policies not only impact economic growth but also generate significant social and environmental repercussions. One notable social effect is the change in the labor structure. With the rise of foreign investment and the expansion of the manufacturing sector, there has been massive urbanization resulting in the migration of populations from rural to urban areas. This shift triggers increased demand for housing, infrastructure, and social services in urban settings, often leading to local governments' inability to meet these needs. Furthermore, the surge in foreign investment also affects employment by creating new job opportunities; however, these often come with less favorable working conditions and low wages (Chan & Ngai, 2010).

On the environmental side, rapid industrial growth has led to serious environmental degradation. Industrial emissions, air pollution, and toxic waste have become major issues that must be addressed. Aggressive industrialization policies often neglect environmental standards, resulting in ecosystem damage and threatening public health. The Chinese government has attempted to address these issues by implementing stricter environmental policies; however, challenges in implementation and law enforcement remain significant (Shapiro, 2012).

China is facing international criticism regarding trade practices that are deemed unfair. Several trading partner countries have accused China of dumping, which involves selling products at prices lower than domestic market prices or production costs, in order to win in global market competition. This practice is considered detrimental to local producers in the export destination countries and has led to international trade tensions (Bradsher, 2018). Overall, although China's trade policies have successfully boosted economic growth and welfare, the resulting social and environmental impacts require serious attention from both the government and the international community. Striking a balance between economic growth and social-environmental sustainability is a key challenge that China must confront in the future.

Strategic Geopolitics of China's Infrastructure Investments

In recent years, China has increased its investment in Indonesia as part of its broader geopolitical strategy, particularly through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Infrastructure investment in Indonesia reflects China's efforts to strengthen economic and political ties with Southeast Asian countries, while expanding its global influence. The BRI, launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013, aims to build a network of trade routes and infrastructure connecting Asia, Africa, and Europe. Indonesia, with its strategic location and economic potential, is one of the main targets in this strategy (Gede et al., 2019).

Major projects funded by China in Indonesia cover a wide range of sectors, from port construction, toll roads, railways, to power plants. One of the most prominent projects is the construction of the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway, which is the first high-speed railway project in Southeast Asia. The project, estimated to cost around \$6 billion, aims to shorten travel time between the two major cities in Indonesia and improve economic connectivity in the region. The project is not only a symbol of economic partnership between Indonesia and China, but also part of China's efforts to promote its technology

and industrial standards in the international market (Yamin & Windymadaksa, 2017).

In addition, China's investment in the energy sector is also significant. China has invested in the construction of coal-fired and hydroelectric power plants in various parts of Indonesia. Hydroelectric power plants in Sulawesi and Sumatra, for example, have not only helped address energy shortages in those areas but have also strengthened bilateral ties through technology and knowledge transfer. These projects demonstrate how China is using infrastructure investment as a tool to build strong economic alliances while ensuring access to natural resources vital to its economic growth.

However, the influx of Chinese investment is not without controversy. Some are concerned about the potential for Indonesia to become more dependent on Chinese debt, which could pose long-term economic risks. Several major infrastructure projects have experienced delays and cost increases, adding to Indonesia's debt burden. The case of Sri Lanka, where the port

Hambantota had to be handed over to China due to its inability to pay its debts, often cited as an example of a "debt trap" that recipient countries of Chinese investment should avoid. These concerns have prompted the Indonesian government to be more careful in managing foreign investment flows, ensuring that each project has clear and sustainable economic benefits (Lew & Roughead, 2021).

In addition to economic concerns, there are also concerns about the environmental and social impacts of Chinese-funded projects. Large infrastructure developments often involve the displacement of local communities and environmental degradation, which can trigger social conflicts. In some areas, these projects have caused tensions between local communities and foreign workers from China. To address these issues, the Indonesian government needs to ensure that every infrastructure project is implemented with environmental and social impacts in mind, and involves the active participation of local communities.

Despite these challenges, China's geopolitical strategy through infrastructure investment in Indonesia still has great potential to bring economic and development benefits. By continuing to strengthen bilateral relations and leveraging investment for sustainable infrastructure development, Indonesia can benefit from this partnership while safeguarding its sovereignty and national interests. The success of this strategy will depend largely on the Indonesian government's ability to manage investments wisely and ensure that each project provides long-term benefits to the community.

Thus, China's geopolitical strategy through infrastructure investment in Indonesia shows how Beijing is leveraging its economic power to achieve global strategic goals. By building an infrastructure network connecting various parts of the world, China is not only strengthening its position as a global trade hub but also building strong political alliances with recipient countries, including Indonesia.

In the context of Indonesian policy, the acceptance of Chinese investment in infrastructure has a significant impact. On the one hand, this investment helps address the infrastructure deficit that has long been an obstacle to Indonesia's economic growth. Infrastructure development funded by China not only creates new jobs but also improves logistics efficiency and Indonesia's economic competitiveness in the global market. However, the acceptance of Chinese investment also raises a number of challenges and controversies. There are concerns that the dominance of Chinese investment could lead to excessive economic dependence on Beijing. In the long term, this could reduce Indonesia's economic independence and increase China's political influence in Indonesia. The Indonesian government must be careful in balancing the economic benefits gained from Chinese investment with the potential political and economic risks that may arise.

In addition, China's massive investment also raises environmental and social issues. Rapid infrastructure

development often ignores environmental impacts and results in the degradation of local ecosystems. For example, large projects such as the construction of ports and toll roads often require land clearing that can impact the lives of local communities. Therefore, the Indonesian government needs to ensure that Chinese-funded projects comply with strict environmental standards and pay attention to the welfare of local communities. On the policy side, the Indonesian government can take several strategic steps to manage Chinese investment more effectively. First, increase transparency in the negotiation process and implementation of infrastructure projects. This includes ensuring that contracts signed with Chinese investors are fair and beneficial to both parties. Second, strengthen environmental and social regulations to ensure that infrastructure projects do not harm the ecosystem and local communities. Third, diversify sources of foreign investment to reduce dependence on one country, by attracting investment from other countries to create healthy competition and improve investment quality. With a careful approach and the right policy strategy, Indonesia can leverage Chinese investment to accelerate its infrastructure development, while maintaining economic sovereignty and ensuring environmental sustainability and social welfare.

Discussion

Driving Factors of Chinese Capitalism in Indonesia

One of the main factors is China's economic interests in viewing Indonesia as a very potential market. With a population of more than 270 million people, Indonesia offers a large consumer market for Chinese products and services. In addition, Indonesia has a fairly stable economic growth and promising long-term prospects, which makes it attractive to foreign investors. Investments in sectors such as manufacturing, technology, and infrastructure allow Chinese companies to access this growing market and increase their market share (Hamid, 2009).

Indonesia also has abundant natural resources, including oil, gas, coal, and other minerals, which are in high demand by China to support its large industrial needs. China's desire to secure energy and raw material supplies has driven massive investment in the mining and energy sectors in Indonesia (Rival, 2023). For example, Chinese companies have been heavily involved in oil and gas exploration and production, as well as the construction of coal-fired power plants and renewable energy. Strategic interests also play a significant role in driving Chinese capitalism in Indonesia. Indonesia's strategic geographic position between the Indian and Pacific Oceans makes it a key point in global trade routes. China recognizes the importance of securing these trade routes to ensure the smooth flow of goods and energy (Kenderdine, 2018). Therefore, investment in maritime and port infrastructure in Indonesia, such as the Port of Kuala Tanjung and the Port of Makassar, is part of China's efforts to strengthen connectivity and improve logistics efficiency in the region.

In addition to economic and strategic factors, political factors also play a role in strengthening Chinese capitalism in Indonesia. Strong bilateral relations between the two countries, supported by various agreements and strategic partnerships, have created a conducive environment for investment. The Indonesian government, under the leadership of President Joko Widodo, has shown openness to foreign investment, including from China, as part of its efforts to encourage infrastructure development and industrialization. This policy is reflected in major projects such as the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway and various toll road and power plant development projects funded by Chinese investors. However, there are also challenges and controversies arising from the rise of Chinese capitalism in Indonesia (Coenen et al., 2021).

Some are concerned about the social and environmental impacts of these large investment projects. Issues such as the displacement of local communities, environmental damage, and dependence on foreign debt are the main highlights. In response, the Indonesian government needs to develop stricter regulations and policies to ensure that foreign investment

brings long-term benefits to local communities and does not damage the environment. In addition, there are concerns about China's economic dominance that could threaten Indonesia's economic sovereignty (Wang, 2023). Some observers believe that excessive dependence on Chinese investment could make Indonesia vulnerable to economic and political pressure from Beijing. Therefore, diversifying investment sources and strengthening domestic capacity are important to maintain balance in economic relations with China.

The Role of the Indonesian Government in Managing Chinese Investment

One of the main efforts of the Indonesian government is through increasing bilateral cooperation with China. Under the leadership of President Joko Widodo, Indonesia has strengthened diplomatic relations with China and signed various strategic agreements that include massive infrastructure investments. For example, the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway project costing around \$6 billion is a result of cooperation between the two countries.

The project not only aims to improve connectivity between Jakarta and Bandung, but is also expected to boost local economic growth by opening up new investment and job opportunities. In addition, the Indonesian government has developed policies aimed at ensuring that Chinese-funded projects are in line with national development priorities. Through the Investment Coordinating Board (BKPM), Indonesia facilitates and oversees foreign investment to ensure that each project has a positive impact on the local economy. BKPM also serves as a liaison between foreign investors and local governments, ensuring that licensing and regulatory processes run smoothly. However, managing Chinese investment in Indonesia is not without its challenges. One major issue is the **concern about a "debt trap," where the recipient country risks incurring a high debt burden to China** (Taruno et al., 2022).

The case of Sri Lanka's Hambantota port, which had to be handed over to China due to its inability to repay its debts, is often cited as an example by critics. To address these concerns, the Indonesian government has tightened oversight of projects involving foreign debt and ensured that any investment deals are based on a comprehensive risk analysis. In addition to the economic aspect, the Indonesian government also seeks to manage the social and environmental impacts of Chinese investment (Maulidi & Sakti, 2024). Large infrastructure projects often involve the displacement of local communities and significant changes to the environment. To address these issues, the Indonesian government has implemented stricter regulations on the environmental and social impacts of these projects. The government also encourages community participation in the planning and implementation process of projects to ensure that their rights and interests are protected.

The government's success in managing Chinese investment also depends on its ability to maintain a balance between attracting foreign investment and protecting economic sovereignty. Diversifying investment sources is one of the main strategies to reduce dependence on one country and increase Indonesia's bargaining power in negotiations. By opening the door to investment from various countries, Indonesia can create healthy competition and encourage wider technology transfer (Piliang, 2022).

On the other hand, increasing domestic capacity is also a focus of the government to ensure that foreign investment provides long-term benefits. Through education and training programs, the government seeks to improve the skills of the local workforce so that they can actively participate in projects funded by foreign investors. Thus, Chinese investment in Indonesia not only creates temporary jobs but also builds sustainable capacity and skills for the local workforce. The role of the Indonesian government in managing Chinese investment reflects an effort to balance economic interests and national sovereignty. With the right policies and strict supervision, Indonesia seeks to ensure that investment flows from China bring maximum benefits to national development while addressing emerging challenges. Through this comprehensive

approach, the Indonesian government hopes to leverage foreign investment to achieve inclusive and sustainable long-term development goals (Oriza et al., 2024).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that the roots of Chinese capitalism in Indonesia have started a long time ago. This can be seen in the last two decades, economic relations between Indonesia and China have experienced rapid development with a significant increase in foreign direct investment (FDI) and bilateral trade. The Indonesian government plays an important role in managing Chinese investment, strengthening bilateral relations through large infrastructure projects and policies that ensure that the projects are in line with national development priorities. Although Chinese investment has made a significant contribution to infrastructure development and job creation, there are concerns about the environmental, social impacts, and the risk of economic dependency. To address this, the Indonesian government has tightened supervision of investment projects, implemented strict regulations to minimize negative impacts, and encouraged local community participation. In addition, efforts to diversify investment sources and increase domestic capacity have also been made to reduce dependence and ensure long-term benefits from foreign investment. The success of this strategy depends on wise policies and strict supervision, so that investment flows from China can bring maximum benefits to national development while maintaining Indonesia's sovereignty and economic interests.

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