

# The Significance of India's National Identity in Foreign Policy to One Belt One Road (OBOR)

Alam Syamsidar Mutu Manikam and Irfa Puspitasari

*International Relations Department, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Airlangga*

**Keywords:** India, Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), emerging power, China, One Belt One Road (OBOR).

**Abstract:** When China declared to revive the 'silk road' in the era of Xi Jinping's leadership. The hope for the creation of world integration is felt by several countries that support this project now known as One Belt One Road (OBOR). However, there are some countries that reject Chinese foreign policy through this OBOR. One of them is India which is trying to reject OBOR by forming Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) with Japan. India's foreign policy to establish the AAGC in order to reject this OBOR is to try to author see through the national identity LoA. The national identity of India as a long-constructed emerging power forms the basis for the formulation of India's foreign policy. The construction of that identity is due to Indian history through Hindu religion and culture which says that India is destined to become a great country in the world.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The attitude of the state in building strength in the international world one of them can be observed from their foreign policy. One of the most significant phenomena in this contemporary era is China's foreign policy. China in Xi Jinping era is implementing the foreign policy one belt one road (OBOR). One belt one road is an economic, diplomatic, and multifaceted geopolitical effort through soft diplomacy that calls for the encouragement of the connectivity of the region (Albert 2017). The OBOR policy can be said as one of China's efforts to build a great power internationally and undoubtedly made the China's resurgence. Even former United States President Barack Obama also acknowledged the rise of China. "We welcome China's peaceful rise and a strong and prosperous China is one that can help bring stability and prosperity to the region and the world", one of Obama's quotes in 2015. Through OBOR project, China try to take the role of a superpower country as well as position itself as a champion of globalization (Albert 2017). The project itself is expected to create an infrastructure network that includes roads, railways, telecommunications, energy pipelines and ports. Thus it will enhance economic interconnectivity and facilitate development in Asia, Europe, and Africa (Jinchen 2016).

China policy through one belt one road actually trying to revive the ancient trade routes network that used to connect China with Central Asia and Arab region (Jinchen 2016). This trade route itself has begun since the era of the Zhang Qian empire and formerly known as the 'silk road'. The one belt one road project in the opinion of the author is one of the largest projects in the 21st century because of the expansiveness of the project. The project will involve approximately sixty countries across Asia, Europe, and Africa. China's seriousness in building the project became increasingly visible during the One Belt One Road Summit in Beijing on May 14-15, 2017. The summit was attended by nearly 130 countries, 70 organizations and more than 1500 participants. All parties who attended the summit had largely approved and supported the OBOR project.

However, the OBOR summit was not attended by one of the giants of South Asia, namely India. The absence of India at the summit at the same time indicates the Indian policy that rejects the initiative of OBOR. One of the causes of India's rejection of OBOR is the fear of losing their sovereignty. This can not be separated from this project that crosses Khasmir territory which is a conflict region between India and Pakistan. So when the project enters the territory of Khasmir, India is worried about losing claims over the region. In addition, another foreign policy made by India to reject and counter the

OBOR is the launch of Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) at the African Development Bank meeting on May 22-26, 2017 in Gandhinagar (Panda 2017). At the meeting, Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi stated that the AAGC program with Japan is trying to develop more cooperation with the African region (PMINDIA 2017). When viewed from the national identity of India, identity as emerging power can be said to be the basis of the formation of the AAGC. India seeks to play a major role in the international system. However, AAGC is slightly different from OBOR. AAGC is more bilateral by just involving India and Japan. Then OBOR is unilateral with China as the initiator (Panda 2017). The author will analyze Indian foreign policy using the national identity level of analysis (LoA).

### 1.1 Elaboration of National Identity Level of Analysis

National identity and culture plays an important role in every aspect of life including in the formulation of foreign policy. Hence the explanation of how the state acts and describes itself in international relations can be seen through the national identity LoA. Turner (1985) said that the importance of this aspect of national identity lays on its function to shape the behavior or attitude of individuals within a country. The importance of national identity itself is inseparable because all human activity is both a product and a component of identity and culture (Dharmaputra 2017). The national identity and its relation to foreign policy is retheorized and generating national identity (Campbell 1990). Identity and culture in a country describes the relationship of self and others which means the behavior of one individual is sometimes unable to understand how the individual understands his own behavior. Hudson (1999) explains that national identity is not only a product produced by the history of a country, but also become the product of interaction of a country with other countries in a certain period. The national identity as the LoA can be reviewed from several concepts. Some of these concepts can describe or represent the national identity of a country. Identity, national self-image, culture strategy, religion, national role, and ideology can be some conception to look at national identity of a country (Dharmaputra 2017).

The national identity LoA is heavily influenced by the approach of constructivism. This is because of the great contribution of constructivism in explaining national identity which emphasizes intersubjectivity and cultural understanding in explaining

state behavior. Then the influence of national identity on the formulation of foreign policy can be said much influenced by the dominant culture in the country. Alexander Wendt can be said to have a major influence in explaining social construction of foreign policy. Wendt (1992) says that state behavior can't be separated from the situation and conditions that exist. So there are interaction between structure and agency that able to shape the behavior of the state in the international system. This shows that in the international system the behavior of the state is dynamic.

In addition, this identity is also important because it can affect one's behavior. Any action or behavior is not determined by one value alone, the individual will take the value that corresponds to their identity (Swidler 1986). The definition of national identity as the LoA is part of the stereotype seen from within the nation itself then shared and culturally perpetuated (Neack 2008). The national identity and culture as the LoA itself has two views. First, Neack (2008) describes that national identity can be formed through cultural factors. This national identity able to determine the direction of a country's foreign policy. This national identity itself becomes part of the stereotype viewed from the domestic level. Then the second view is the national identity and culture of a country is an interpretation of the image of a country by another country (Clunan 2009). So the description of the state of a country is also able to establish the identity of a country itself.

This national identity is then shared through cultures over the years and has been constructed in society. The national identity of the LoA has some basic assumptions. The first assumption is that the dominant culture in a country will have an impact on the form of state institutions that can determine the national identity of the country. The second assumption is how as the author has mentioned above that the national identity is able to influence the formulation of a country's foreign policy. This is especially applied in the dominant culture that forms in the national identity of the nation. Refers to Hudson (2007 in Dharmaputra 2017), national identity can be categorized as who are 'we'? what do 'we' do? and who are 'they'? From this statement, it can be seen that national identity is able to distinguish one country from another. This can't be separated from how national identity represents the role of the state in the international system. In addition, the perception of other countries in view of a country can also differentiate national identity owned by a country.

## 1.2 Analysis of the Influence of India's National Identity on Foreign Policy

As the author mentioned earlier, India is not participating in this one belt one road mega project. Through the national identity LoA it can be seen that there are several national identities in India that are able to influence India's foreign policy in rejecting OBOR. There are at least several Indian national identities, such as emerging power, regional power, and developing country. Some of these identities can be said to have been constructed in such a way since the era of colonialism and imperialism. The national identity of India as a country with great power even seen since the era of British imperialism. There was some resistance to England by the holy warriors in India. This proves the greatness of India as a modern state that embodies a great civilization. In addition India feels that they represent the past of Europe as well as its future because in the past Europe, India has grown intensely with industrialization and modernization (Guha 2007).

Based on its history, India is divided into three periods namely Hindu, Muslim and British. Each of these periods has influenced the social and cultural life of Indian society. However, for the majority of Indian society, the Hindu period became the most dominant culture. This can be seen from the period of Hinduism that developed over the centuries at the same time laid the foundation of social and philosophical thought of India. This also strengthened with the dominance of Hindus in India that lasted for centuries as well. Baxter et. al. (2002) describes the overwhelming dominance of Hinduism despite the challenges of Buddhism seeking to dominate Indian identity. But the strength of Hindu dominance is unshakable, so it remains able to become the majority culture and religion in India. Culture and Hinduism with its dominance in India can influence and shape the mindset of foreign policy makers in formulating India's foreign policy. One of the Hindu teachings in India which states India is destined to become this great country also influences the mindset of Indian society and foreign policy.

The national identity of India as a great country has been embedded and became a widespread belief in Indian society. This developed especially when India had gained independence from colonialism and imperialism. With its national identity, India strives to keep pace with the industrial world. Not only that, India also has a purpose to improve people's living conditions. Then they believe that India will one day play an important role in the international system.

With the ever-growing modern development, it can be an asset for India to support their national identity. One of these beliefs can be seen through India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who firmly says that with India's strategic location, the historical tradition of India can play an important role in the region and Asia.

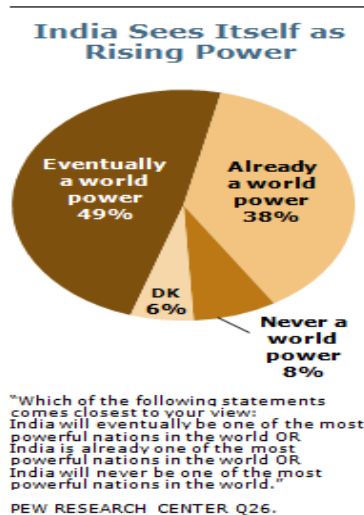
*"India, constituted as she is, cannot play a secondary part in the world. She will either count for a great deal or not count at all. No middle position attracted me. Nor did I think any intermediate position feasible."* (Nehru 1956).

In addition, the leadership of the prime Minister of India is considered capable of reaching a high enough level, but still far below expectations. Relating to the sluggishness of the Indian economy, there are two images of India that contrast with the Indian economy. First is the hope and aspirations of the Indian elite against India's position as a big country. But India fails to reduce the great disparity in society as well as India's second image. It is a dilemma for the Indian government. Because India's efforts as a great country are hindered by some internal problems that have not been able to be resolved. Unevenness of development in India is still a problem other than infrastructure that has not met the standards.

Basically, India does have the potential to become a big country. With all its attributes and resources it should be a tool for India to reach great power level. But this is a contradiction because slow economic growth is one of the inhibiting factors of India's ambitions. There have been several attempts to lift India's economy. One of them was in 1991 which enacted neo-liberal economic reforms that began to open international trade and investment, deregulation, tax reform, initiation, and privatization. It is slowly able to bring India as a country with a fairly stable economic rate. With the stability of the Indian economy, it is expected to be able to facilitate the way India to become a major country in the international world.

In addition, another identity that exists in India is emerging power. The rise of India as a country with a new great power in the international system slowly began to be seen. One of India's strategic steps is to become a regional power. India is a country with considerable influence and dominance in the South Asian region. This is at the same time the beginning of India's progressive to become a new force in the international system. In addition, India's incorporation of BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) has become one of the potentials to increase rapid growth over the next 30 years. India's conviction,

especially for some strategic political communities in New Delhi, further reinforces that India with its history and civilization destined to become a great country (Cohen 2001).

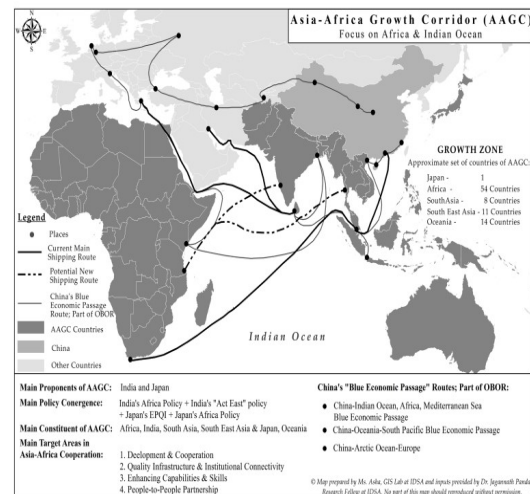


Source: Pew Research Center, Survey in 2010.

The picture above described the perception of Indian society regarding India as an emerging power. Almost half of Indian society (49%) agree that India has become a country with great power. As many as 38% of Indians or four out of ten people in India call India has become one of the greatest forces in the world. The change in Indian society's perception aside from its historical factor, is also driven by India's strategic behavior. Electronic ownership is one of India's steps to improve prestige and autonomy at the international level. Although the neighboring country, Pakistan also has nuclear weapons, India still dominated military power in the region. Surveys conducted in 2010 ago became a fact of dominant perspective of India's national identity community as a country with great power can be used in foreign policy.

One of India's foreign policy is to reject the one belt one road initiative that initiated by China. As the authors mention above that India's concern over the loss of sovereignty due to Khasmir region crossed by OBOR. This is because India considers Khasmir as one of India's identity as a big country. Their full control of the Khasmir region against Pakistan sought to be defended by several Indian Prime Ministers who had served. To cope with that, Narendra Modi as Prime Minister of India seeks to create a rival project for OBOR namely Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) which in cooperation with Japan. The idea of India through the AAGC is also

because of India's identity as a big country that encourage India to be a leader in the project to create international integration.



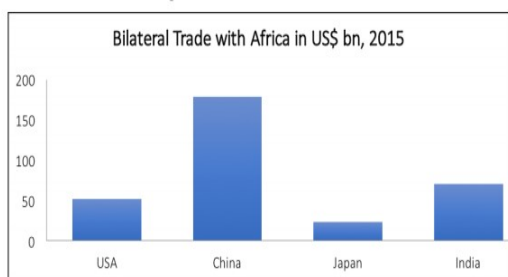
Source: AAGC: A Vision Document

Through the picture above can be seen the spread map of the AAGC project. Focus on the Asia-Africa region and the Indian Ocean became the first step for India and Japan to compete with OBOR. India with Japan trying to expand its influence by implementing development in the African region through AAGC. The meeting in November 11 between Narendra Modi and Shinzo Abe resulted in an agreement that should promote the corridor and network of industrialization in Asia and Africa in particular. The AAGC focuses on four key targets. The first is development and cooperation in Asia, Africa and the Indo-Pacific region. The second is the improvement of infrastructure quality and institutional and digital connectivity. The third is to improve the capability of human resources in the region. Then the last is to improve the cooperation between individuals from each region.

India's seriousness to compete with OBOR through AAGC is also conducted in collaboration with the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi, the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA), Jakarta, and the Institute of Developing Economies (ID-JETRO), Tokyo. All these parties have developed several strategies for this project to bring sustainable development in the Asia-Africa region. Not only that, good relations with Africa add India's confidence to set foot as a major country in the region. Relationship with Africa, by Narendra Modi is based on cooperation on new development that forming cooperation



model which need good condition. Cooperation in the fields of energy, easier market access, development of infrastructure, and also to stabilize more integrated maritime relationship. Through the graph below can be seen bilateral trade relations with Africa. Although India is still less than China, it is not an important issue for India to keep its cooperation with Africa through AAGC.



Source : PMINDIA.gov

In addition, other relevance in India's efforts to lead and influence the world through the AAGC can be reviewed through economic and geopolitical issues. In the economic aspect, as the author has mentioned above that India has experienced good bilateral trade relations with Africa. As a country that has both experienced colonialism and imperialism, India and Africa are connected to the anti-colonialism and anti-political struggle of apartheid. India's interest is also well responded by Africa, which so far Africa is interested in diversifying more focused trade to the Asian region. In addition to good relations through the AAGC, India and Africa are also able to achieve progressive bilateral relations. One of them can be seen in 2008 which is the India-Africa Forum Summit and then added with the number of Indian companies that have a good reputation in Africa (Ganaphati 2014).

Then in the geopolitical aspect there are several reasons that can be explained why the bilateral relations of India and Japan so harmonious to form AAGC. The harmonious relations between India and Japan have been formed since the last two decades. Especially when Shinzo Abe era that further strengthen bilateral relations with India. India also showed a good attitude with Japan through allowing Japan to be the only country that invests in India's North Eastern Region and the Andaman Nicobar Islands. Japan's interest in working with India is partly due to the fact that India is beginning to show the rise as a major country in Asia (Basu 2014). In geopolitics perspective, AAGC is more emphasis on maritime, as evidenced by the trade through the sea

as much as 99.6%. With focus on the sea corridor, the AAGC is like trying to control the Indian Ocean as it is in the picture above. The presence and strength of maritime both from India and Japan in the region are needed here. From the Indian side, reinforce their identity as a major country so that the need for maritime supremacy in Asia, Africa and the Indian Ocean also important for them

Through some of the above explanation, the author argue, using the national identity LoA with India's foreign policy regarding one belt one road is enough to give a significant influence. The author here will attempt to use analysis through Alexander Wendt's structural constructivism. Some of the major assumptions of structural constructivism are that the state is the main unit as the actor being analyzed. This can't be separated because only countries able to apply and enforce foreign policy. The second is that the international structure is inter-subjective not material. The third is the national identity of a country is not something that is given away. Rather it is formed because of the construction of the social structure (Wendt 1999).

The analysis through structural constructivism offered by Wendt (1999) can be explained like this. First is the identity of a country that refers to what and who the actors in the international system. In this case, the actor is India. India here seeks to assert India's position as emerging power. This also makes the second analysis of the interests of a country. The third is behaviors that refer to the behavior of what the country is doing to achieve its national interests. In this case, India try to reject OBOR because of India's identity as a big country. India needs the status to be a leader and initiate to integrate the world. Therefore, India and Japan created Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC). In addition, with the majority of Hindus in India, which is becoming such a dominant culture. In accordance with the first assumption of national identity LoA. The dominant Hindu culture here can influence the attitude of Indian foreign policy makers in formulating foreign policy. Hindu cultural impulse based on its history is destined as a big country increasingly reinforce India's attitude to reject the OBOR and form AAGC to become a major country in the world.

The Indian identity as an emerging power influence foreign policy in rejecting OBOR. From the long history of India, since the era of British imperialism. India is trying to fight against imperialism. The sense of greatness as a civilization and a nation underlying India to fight. Then, it is formed and constructed into an Indian identity as a country with great power. In addition, the formation

of national identity which is also influenced by the state relations with neighbors in the region and other countries in the international system. India relations with the country in the region quite well, and India has significantly big influence. Through this great influence in the region, writers can say it is an important capital for India to assert its identity as a great country. So India needs to be an initiator in creating international integration, so an AAGC is formed. India here also doesn't want to follow China which is also the same as a great emerging country.

## 2 CONCLUSION

India's foreign policy to reject OBOR can be seen from its absence at the OBOR Summit. In addition, the initiative to form AAGC is also one of India's policies to counter OBOR. Through the national identity level of analysis (LoA), the author argue that the long history of India since the era of imperialism have influence the formation of national identity of India. The rise of Hindu values which became the religion of the majority of India also influenced the resistance to the imperialism. This resistance is due to India being predestined and outlined as a big country and should not be colonized by imperialists. In addition, the majority of Hindus in India are also influential in the formulation of foreign policy. Identity as a major country has been constructed in Indian society. India itself has indeed become a major country, especially in the South Asia region. India's position within the region also influences their foreign policy towards the international world. India's reputation as a dominant country in the region has prompted some Indian foreign policy to propagate its dominance to become a major country. In order to achieve a more significant position in the international system in accordance with the national identity that has been constructed, India formed the AAGC. With the AAGC project that seeks to embrace the Indian Ocean, Asia and Africa, at least it can be a strategic capital for India to further assert its identity as a major country. The bilateral relations that are well established with Japan, and some African facilitate India's ambition to become a major country in the international system.

## REFERENCES

- Albert, Eleanor, 2017. "China's Big Bet on Soft Power" [online] in <https://www.cfr.org/background/chinas-big-bet-soft-power> [accessed on 22 November 2017].
- Basu, Titli. 2014. "India –Japan Relations: An Enduring Partnership", *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, Vol 10.
- Baxter, Craig et al. 2002. *Government and Politics in South Asia*. Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford: Westview Press.
- Cohen, Stephen P. 2001. *Emerging Power India*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings.
- Dharmaputra, Radityo, 2017. *Foreign Policy Analysis: LoA Culture & National Identity*. Universitas Airlangga, FISIP Universitas Airlangga pada 27 September 2017.
- Ganapathi M. 2014. "India-Africa Partnership" in Ruchira Beri ed. *India and Africa: Enhancing Mutual Relationship*, Delhi : Pentagon Press.
- Guha, R. 2007. *Outlook Magazine*, 21 May 2007.
- Hudson, Valerie M. 1999. "Cultural Expectations of One's Own and Other Nations' Foreign Policy Action Templates", *Political Psychology*, 20(4).
- Jinchen, Tian. 2016. 'One Belt and One Road': *Connecting China and the world*. [online] in <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/capital-projects-and-infrastructure/our-insights/one-belt-and-one-road-connecting-china-and-the-world> [accessed on 10 Desember 2017].
- Neack, Laura, 2008. *The New Foreign Policy: Power Seeking in a Globalized Era*. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Ch. 4 & 5.
- Nehru, Jawaharlal. 1956. *The Discovery of India*. 6th edn, Calcutta, Signet Pr.
- Panda, Jagannath. 2017. *The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor: An India-Japan Arch in the Making? Focus Asia*. Institute for Security & Development Policy.
- PMINDIA, 2017. "PM's address at the inauguration of the Annual Meeting of the African Development Bank" [online]. in [http://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news\\_updates/pms-address-atthe-inauguration-of-the-annual-meeting-of-the-african-development-bank.html](http://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pms-address-atthe-inauguration-of-the-annual-meeting-of-the-african-development-bank.html) [accessed on 21 November 2017].
- Swidler, A. 1986. "Culture in action: Symbols and strategies". *American Sociological Review*, 51.
- Wendt, Alexander. 1999. *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
1992. "Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics," in *International Organization* Issue 02, no. 4