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**China's High-Speed Railway Diplomacy (HSRD) as a Tool for
Improving Soft Power**

Master's thesis

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Year of the defence: 2021

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
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Abstract

The following thesis conducted a case study to investigate the opinion of experts working on the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR and Ankara-Istanbul HSR on how China uses HSRD and BRI to develop and utilize its soft power and whether that opinion matches the official Chinese point of view. The official Chinese view about BRI is that it seeks to deliver win-win outcomes, development, and improvement of lives for participating countries. In addition, it ‘has no geopolitical motives, seeks no exclusionary blocs, and imposes no business deals on others ... addresses people’s desire for a better life ... and shared benefits.’

Ramo (2007)’s operationalization of the term global image was used to assess the respondents’ opinions. The results showed that there is low dependability of the overall BRI among the respondents. A majority of the respondents (60%) claimed that BRI and HSRD are successful but were not impressed by the delivered value and quality of BRI. 70% of the respondents believed that the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR would achieve its objective and that it had a high level of technology. In terms of financial, social and political impact, the responses showed proportions of 40%, 37%, 44% respectively gave a positive answer. Overall, it can be concluded that in terms of image the Bombay-Ahmadab gave conflicting results since 70% view the project as one having a high cost of construction.

For the Ankara-Istanbul project, 75% and 76% of them considered the project as effective and with high technology; an indication that respondents consider the project as one with high dependability and leading tech. Although 75% of them viewed the project’s trade impact as positive, only 57% 43% and 53% of them considered political, social, and financial respectively as positive; resulting in a fairly positive view of the project.

The results show that China still has a lot of work to do when it comes to improving its image in relation to its BRI projects. The participants were sceptical about the political, social, and financial impacts. Their view also contradicted the official Chinese view as a majority believed the projects were also used to improve China’s political power.

Abstrakt

Následující práce provedla případovou studii, jejímž cílem bylo prozkoumat názor odborníků pracujících na HSR Bombay-Ahmadabad a HSR Ankara-Istanbul na to, jak Čína využívá HSRD a BRI k rozvoji a využití její měkké síly a zda se toto stanovisko shoduje s oficiálním čínským hledištěm. Oficiální čínský názor na BRI je, že se snaží přinést účastnické země prospěšné výsledky, rozvoj a zlepšení životů. Kromě toho „nemá žádné geopolitické motivy, neusiluje o vyloučení bloků a neukládá žádné obchodní dohody ostatním... řeší touhu lidí po lepším životě... a sdílené výhody.“

K hodnocení názorů respondentů byla použita operacionalizace pojmu globální obraz od Rama (2007). Výsledky ukázaly, že mezi respondenty je nízká spolehlivost celkového BRI. Většina respondentů (60%) tvrdila, že BRI a HSRD jsou úspěšní, ale nebyla ohromena dodanou hodnotou a kvalitou BRI. 70% respondentů věřilo, že Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR dosáhne svého cíle a že má vysokou úroveň technologie. Pokud jde o finanční, sociální a politické dopady, odpovědi ukázaly, že podíl 40%, 37%, 44%, dal kladnou odpověď. Celkově lze konstatovat, že pokud jde o image, Bombay-Ahmadab poskytl protichůdné výsledky, protože 70% považuje projekt za projekt s vysokými náklady na stavbu.

U projektu Ankara-Instanbul považovalo 75% a 76% z nich projekt za efektivní a s vyspělou technologií; údaj, že respondenti považují projekt za projekt s vysokou spolehlivostí a špičkovou technologií. Ačkoli 75% z nich hodnotilo obchodní dopad projektu jako pozitivní, pouze 57% 43% a 53% z nich považovalo politické, sociální a finanční za pozitivní; což má za následek poměrně pozitivní pohled na projekt.

Výsledky ukazují, že Čína má před sebou ještě hodně práce, pokud jde o zlepšení image ve vztahu ke svým projektům BRI. Účastníci byli skeptičtí ohledně politických, sociálních a finančních dopadů. Jejich názor také odporoval oficiálnímu čínskému názoru, protože většina popírala, že projekty byly také použity ke zlepšení politické moci Číny.

Keywords

China, Diplomacy, High-Speed Railway, Belt and Road Initiative, soft power

Klíčová slova

Čína, diplomacie, iniciativa pro vysokorychlostní železnice, pásy a silnice, měkká síla

Title

China's High-Speed Railway Diplomacy (HSRD) as a Tool for Improving Soft Power

Název práce

Čínská vysokorychlostní železniční diplomacie (HSRD) jako nástroj pro zlepšení měkké energie

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1 Chapter 1: Introduction

The High-Speed Railway Diplomacy (HSRD) has attracted debate from both scholars and the public. HSRD is part of a larger plan, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by the Chinese government. It is characterized by China's vying for high-speed railway projects globally. So far, there have been numerous publications such as Ishnazarov (2020), World Bank (2019), Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2018), and Pavlicevic & Kratz (2017) that have highlighted the existence of both economic and political impacts of the larger BRI. In his study, Ishnazarov (2020) highlighted that the economic impacts will be felt through the harmonization of trade standards and regulation, and infrastructure development. The same article emphasizes that BRI will transform political relations within states in the region. However, World Bank (2019) pointed out that there is also positive and negative impact.

While the economic impact has attracted debate, the political impact is what has led to a lot of controversy. For instance, Pavlicevic (2020) stated that some people keep referring to the China Threat Narrative (a term used to express the rise of China as a threat to other countries (Wu, 2006)) when talking about the hidden political agenda behind BRI. In Asia, the China Threat Narrative captures China's agenda of changing the power dynamics in Southeast Asia at the expense of the region's security, political, and economic well-being in the region. According to Pavlicevic & Kratz (2017), the people that use HSRD and BRI to support the China Threat Narrative are wrong because HSRD is not intended to pursue such ends as described by the China Threat Narrative. Therefore, stating that China's BRI and HSRD are used as tools to pursue political ambitions like those described in the China Threat Narrative presents a misinterpretation of the project's real intentions which are to pursue economic gains.

The belief that China uses BRI and HSRD as tools for controlling other countries has resulted in a number of studies about China's use of soft power to exert political influence. Soft power is the use of international public relations using economic and cultural influence to control other nations (Rawnsley, 2012). Ikenberry (2004) explained that soft power allows countries to persuade others without the use of force. For instance, the EU was able to make some European countries to voluntarily give up large portions of their sovereignty just to subject their countries to sets of shared rules that have the same basis of liberal values (Li, 2018). In China's case, some studies like Grimm (2015) have pointed out that China is using its BRI and HSRD as the sole strategy for developing soft power. Yagci (2018) is also of the same opinion and he concludes that China pursues a soft-power oriented diplomacy through BRI.

1.1 Thesis Objective

The following thesis will conduct a case study to investigate the opinion of experts working on the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR and Ankara-Istanbul HSR on how China uses HSRD and BRI to develop and utilize its soft power and whether that opinion matches the official Chinese point of view and official Chinese foreign policy.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

1.2.1 Geopolitics and Self Perceptions

This section provides a theoretical background of the perception of the world by states. Using Europe as an example, it discusses complexities that shaped the European self-image. Eventually, that self-image dictates European countries' behavior towards other countries. Looking at the European self-image is important for the current thesis because China also has its own point of view about why other countries should be attracted to working with it. In the case of the European self-image, the attraction, as explained in the next few paragraphs, emanated from the view of Europe as the representation of the ideal when it comes to material progression and a cultural center. Looking at the official Chinese position regarding its use of HSRD as a tool for improving soft power will reveal how it may see HSRD improving its attractiveness to other countries. That will then be compared with the responses from the participants in order to answer thesis' second research question.

Agnew (2003) pointed out that an understanding of modern geopolitics should begin by looking at the origins and development of the capacity to view the world as a whole. The definition of the modern world, from the just stated point of view, depends on one's imaginative ability to transcend beyond the spatial limits imposed on them by everyday life and view the world as a picture. This imagination is a defining aspect of modernity and in it is the quality of conceiving the world as a physical-political entity. He further highlighted that there are two characteristics of visualizing the global space. The first characteristic involves the separation of the observer of the world-as-a-picture from their terrestrial space/the world. Based on this characteristic, the world as seen when separated from the person (e.g., on a map) accurately shows what is there. The world and its representation are one. That is, there is no skepticism about how the world is represented. The second characteristic involves a view of the world as a source of danger and chaos. Under this characteristic, fearful political, civilizational, and religious differences are represented on maps by dark places decorating the borders. Agnew (2003) states that the viewing of the world as a dichotomous global west and east is a good representation of this characteristic. Inherent in that view is the use of the West as a reference point. For instance, it is from that foundation that the West is considered as a civilization. That is, the West is fundamentally different. This binary thinking explains, at least in part, the East-West opposition.

Throughout history, perspectives about the world have not been influenced by numerous things, especially ideologies that were present at the specific period. For instance, Agnew (2003) highlighted that the Renaissance world-view was characterized by a linear perspective and the expression of knowledge in largely visual terms. Through a certain perspective, one gets and utilizes a frame through which they particular elements are ordered. As pointed out by Agnew (2003) the enlightenment cosmopolitanism of Herder (1744-1803) held that the world had one single race and a single human reason. That understanding postulated the non-existence of superiority in nations, cultures, and groups. Everyone was considered the same in terms of how "human" they were. However, there also existed the European understanding that postulated that humanity reflected a single ideal conforming to European attributes.

With the growth of capitalism and the rise of territorial states, more hierarchical views emerged. European industrialization and uneven global development ushered in the pairing of backwardness and modernity when thinking about hierarchy among nations. Britain's rise as a hegemonic power then ushered in the term "English common sense" as a standard for judging others (Agnew, 2003). Seeing the world as hierarchically organized came to dominate most world views.

The European self-image helps to understand how Europe viewed the world. Its creation was preceded by the defining of the 'World of the East' (Agnew, 2003). The World of the East was considered inferior and downplaying its contributions such as innovations was paramount. On the other hand, Europe was presented as a united front. Christianity also played an important role in Europe's self-perception but its power in shaping the European image dwindled over time. However, together with the view of Europe as the global center of art and material progress, Christianity still played a part in the formation of a European self-image that Europe was superior and the attainment of superiority by other regions needed a following of the European path.

1.2.2 Power and Territorial States

Power, as defined by Agnew (2003), is the ability to make others do something that you desire. In the case of soft power, a state's power is seen to emanate from its global image (Voon & Xu, 2020). The default view, common to western political theory, is that states' behavior resembles that of individuals fighting for power and wealth. For China, that means that HSRD faces a default resistance in all the territories that it launches as countries view China as a competitor in the fight for wealth and power. This type of thinking puts statehood as the font of power in today's world that is characterized by state goals focusing on the control over blocks of space. Also present in the international geopolitical system is a fear of domination by others; not just exploitation. Here, Agnew (2003) explains that each state is mindful of its status relative to others. With China having an economy that is substantially bigger than the other countries taking part in the HSRD projects, then the fear of domination is likely to exist.

In international relations, coercive or despotic power dominates definitions of hegemony regardless of the relations between states. However, Agnew (2003) highlighted that there are alternative definitions of hegemony that capture the presence of power implicit in dominant practices and that govern a society beyond and within the state's borders. In world politics, the deployment of power goes beyond military might. Interests and identities of states are formed as a result of the interaction between states and within the nexus of local and global social practices. Through the interactions, power is gained and exercised as expectations are defined, a country receives acceptance to interact with another, and a country co-opts others. It is such power that encompasses aspects of soft power, but with hard power still involved. Agnew further explains that the use of coercion as a source of power has been curtailed by a number of factors. One factor is that the current global political space blunts the use of military might as a source of power since the spread of powerful weapons to historically weaker states have made it easier for them to resist military derived coercion. Another factor relates to the need for states to manage the new forms of global economic and social interactions governed by rules of a new globalized world. A state must consi

der its use of force within a world where there are considerations of attracting foreign economic partners and ensuring that access to global flows of information is not affected.

As a result of the just mentioned factors that shape state engagement in today's geopolitics, transnational-liberal hegemonies have come up. Territorial states are now challenged by new spaces that prioritize access to flows of information and resources over territorial command. They have to choose whether they should displace state boundaries by allowing the flow of goods, people, and capital travelling between local nodes of a larger international network; as brought about by globalization. In China's HSRD case, countries face the same predicament. The case for improving soft power then becomes that it increases the chances of the HSRD partner states to lean towards accepting flows from outside than clinging to territorial borders.

The BRI consists of a both land and sea projects. Regardless of the specifics surrounding a particular BRI project, a geopolitical element exists (Karlis & Polemis, 2019). The geopolitical element makes relevant an analysis through international relations theories. As such, theories on soft power are utilized in the current context.

Soft power depends on the ability of a party to shape the preferences of others. As Voon & Xu (2019) explain, the increasing of soft power is analogous with raising the international image. In China's case, the increasing of soft power was necessitated by the need to change the global perception of China especially in the midst of the Chinese threat narrative. When improving soft power, a country will rely on the improvement of its political values, policies, culture and personality so as to attract other countries on the basis of shared values.

Soft power involves leading by example. If a country has values that other countries cherish, it becomes less expensive to lead and influence others. The other countries will become more willing to cooperate in trade and investment undertakings; making it easier for policies and business proposals like those in the BRI to be easily accepted.

1.2.3 China's global image

As previously mentioned, soft power is analogous with a country's global image. In the case of BRI, some researchers like Voon & Xu (2020) and Andrabi & Das (2017) have looked at BRI as a grand diplomacy channel that raises China's global image. In fact, Voon & Xu (2020) liken the BRI to foreign aid when it comes to improving a country's global image. The authors further state that the improvement of China's global image emanates from its promise of assisting developing countries in their infrastructural development and enhancing of trade and investment. Berman, Felter, and Shapiro (2011) take a slightly different approach to explaining how BRI eventually impacts China's global image. According to them, BRI alters foreign countries' populations' perception about China by acting as the conduit through which political exchanges take place.

Unsurprisingly, there have been negative views on China's building bridges initiative and some of the views have portrayed China in a poor image. Voon & Xu (2020) explained that one factor leading to the negative views is the fear that some people have about some of the negative effects that are attached to BRI. For instance, there have been fears that BRI projects will leave co

countries in debt traps when they fail to pay Chinese debts that come up because of the BRI. Another fear about BRI is that it results in the exposing of countries taking part in the initiative to fierce competition from Chinese goods that get access to the domestic markets due to trade agreements surrounding the BRI projects. It is also likely that whether China is viewed in a good or bad image varies from one BRI project to the other.

Shi et al. (2016) used geopolitics to explain that state owned enterprises (SOEs) are subject to not only economic but political and social considerations. In geopolitics theory, states' current competition for power and territory are seen to have started from geopolitical conditions that prevailed in the late nineteenth century. Within geopolitics literature, SOEs are seen to represent a country's national interests and the strategic orientations of the home states. It is therefore unsurprising that in some cases the political considerations supersede the economic ones. The presence of SOEs is treated as representations of sovereign states and how the SOEs are treated will depend on the geopolitical relations between the SOE home countries and the state hosting the project. Shi et al. (2016) pointed out that the treatment depends a lot on the project country's threat perception which is a function of four geopolitical factors; religion, geographic distance, resource endowment, and political regime. In the current study, the Chinese SOEs working on the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR and Ankara-Istanbul HSR projects may be seen to challenge the national sovereignty of the states where the HSRD projects are. As a result, as pointed out by Shi et al. (2016), they directly affect the international relations between China and the states that they operate in by moderating how differences in religion, geographic distance, resource endowment, and political regime are perceived. That has a direct impact on China's efforts of improving soft power as the SOEs carrying out the HSRD projects might affect the international relations between it and the foreign country either negatively or positively.

1.3 Research Questions and methodology

1. What is the opinion of the experts working on the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR and Ankara-Istanbul HSR about China's development of soft power?
2. Is the opinion of the experts working on the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR and Ankara-Istanbul HSR similar to the official Chinese point of view?

1.3.1 Methodology

The current study uses the case study method and quantitative data (reported in terms of descriptive statistics). This chapter will discuss the methods of data collection (survey), how the researcher designed the questions and the variables used in the development of the survey. Also enclosed in the chapter are the data and data collection techniques, methods, and challenges; the approach—either deductive or inductive and the reliability and validity the data are available in the chapter.

Since the thesis' main aim was to get opinion of the experts working on the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR and Ankara-Istanbul HSR about China's development of soft power, the first research question was developed to get that opinion. By giving experts working on two different HS

RD projects anonymity, expert opinion will be sought. Based on the answers provided, the thesis can establish how the responses relate to China's image.

The choice of using quantitative data was informed by the study's research questions. The first two questions demand more of a 'yes or no' and not exploratory in nature. They do not seek to establish the complex reasons why the participants choose to hold a certain opinion. Rather, the aim is just to establish their opinion based on already established possible answer options that are captured in the questionnaires. That is, participant responses do not go beyond what the questionnaire asks as the questionnaire is structured. Also, unlike a qualitative study, a quantitative study does not aim to refine or develop a theory. Instead, the quantitative study uses theory as the starting point for investigations (Shareia, 2016).

Collecting data from high government officials, dignitaries who would know the technical and political challenges of the HSRD, was the ideal source of information. By ensuring anonymity, the participants can give their opinion about numerous aspects of the HSRD and BRI. Their experience with dealing with issues pertaining to the BRI and HSRD cannot be easily matched by the outsider. In addition, the insight received can be compared with the insight from other studies that use a participant group that has representatives from other members of the society.

Once the participants have provided their responses, interpretation will involve the development of narratives showing how the responses fit within soft power.

1.3.2 Measuring China's Image in Regard to the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR and Ankara-Istanbul HSR

In answering the first research question, respondents will be asked to state how they view China's work on the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR and Ankara-Istanbul HSR. The answers to the questions will be interpreted on Ramo (2007)'s operationalization of the term global image. Ramo (2007)' measured respondents' operationalization of the term image using the question; how closely do the following adjectives describe China? The said adjectives were leading edge, vitality, steadfast, glamour, original, on the move, pleasurable, and dependable. Appendix 1 presents an example of a chart presenting results from respondents' responses for the question.

1.3.3 The opinion of the experts working on the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR and Ankara Istanbul HSR in relation to the official Chinese point of view

The second research question aims to compare the opinion of experts working on the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR and Ankara-Istanbul HSR with that of the official Chinese point of view. Answering this question requires that the official Chinese point of view is first established.

2 Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Problem Definition

The following chapter presents an analysis of relevant peer-reviewed journal articles and reports. BRI is a six-economic corridor plan (not discussed in the current thesis) by the Chinese government to enhance the ‘going out’ project; this thesis focuses on HSRD under BRI in the ‘going out’ project.

The first part provides the definition of BRI, the challenges, and a detailed evaluation of the initiative: it is a heated scholarly debate, with most of the papers providing literature review analysis as the basis of their conclusions. BRI will be under-discussed in this section, because numerous scholars have offered their opinion, based on research of the initiative. However, the central aspects must appear, showing how the authors were close to answering the current’s thesis research questions but failed to grasp this study’s perspective.

The second part of the review is the discussion of the HSRD, somewhat scarce in literature since the majority of the authors discuss the BRI initiative. However, HSRD is a sensitive topic because some people believe that the Chinese are using it as a soft method of advancing diplomacy in the ‘going out’ initiative: one would term HSRD as a tool of the BRI; thus the going out. Although not discussed in this thesis, neither in this section, is the road network presented by BRI in the six economic corridors; this road network blends with HSR, serving as the complement of the HSR, completing the trade routes that BRI intends to introduce. Overall, the HSRD presents unique, attractive characteristics that sell it, and sell China as an alternative producer of HSR—besides France, Germany, USA, Japan, and Russia.

2.2 Background

Chan (2016) assesses China’s BRI and HSRD from an international relations perspective. Others like Ishnazarov (2020) also use the international relations theories but narrow their discussion on foreign policy. Chan (2016) explained that the BRI challenges popular understanding of four aspects of international relations i.e. peace and governance, international organization, international finance, and international development. BRI and HSRD provoke a lot of thought in the areas of international development and international organizations. While traditional development models championed by international organizations like the IMF and the World Bank have always called for ‘good governance’ conditions, China has created and supported a south-south cooperation model that focuses on mutual benefits between states. The south-south cooperation model has been the model adopted between countries that are mostly in the emerging economies bracket and the model supplements and does not replace traditional type aid extended by developed countries. Introduction of the good governance conditions in traditional development models calls for countries that receive aid to implement political and economic reforms. The alternative approach by the south-south cooperation model that China utilizes when dealing with other countries presents a competing model. According to Chan (2016), the competition does not only come from the south-south cooperation model but also from international financial institutions and funds such as the Silk Road Fund, the BRICS Bank, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Developme

nt Bank set up by China to push BRI and HSRD. These funds and institutions provide a competitor to IMF, the World Bank, Asian Development Bank etc.

2.3 BRI

The BRI initiative is a broad plan to foster economic and political engagements between China and nations that agree to it; it is a way of going out to meet new trading partners, no matter how controversial and unlikely the relations may be. The Pakistan-China engagement is one such relationship; the two countries are different in any way one would point– the language, the religions, the locations, and the beliefs (Irshad, 2015). China has, in numerous years past, been a closed economy, not encouraging economic, social, and political engagements with the West. However, the country launched a program that would expose China to the world; and one of the chosen/willing partners is Pakistan in the Pakistan-China Economic Corridor, a contract between China and Pakistan to engage in economic exchanges. The contract brings together think-tanks from China and Pakistan who will position both countries in trading advantages, developments, and flexibility power. Irshad (2015), however, failed to show the international implication of the China-Pakistan move; but Sial (2014) challenges the move, saying that it reinforces the political standpoint against the USA due to terrorism.

Being the country that seems to have the most resources, untapped and underutilized, China is expanding its economic scope to its neighbors–in Europe and China- to foster regional trade and boost economic growth (Herrero & Xu, 2017). China, a communist country, has managed, over the years, to accumulate public funds; and with proper management of the country, citing intolerance to dishonesty and corruption–a culture inculcated in their traditions, the country has the capacity (economically at-the-least) to engage willing partners to foster economic growth; Europe is one of those willing partners. However, challenges touching the BRI initiative's motive are that China has the political interest to control the region (Jonquières, 2016); the concern being whether Euro-Asia will benefit, or if China has a hidden agenda.

Zhai (2018) describes that China's going out will bring significant changes in the World Economy; the BRI, once widespread, will change trade patterns– how the imports and exports flow to and from China. However, BRI, still facing initial challenges, will show full-blown success effect on world economy once it has identified appropriate host countries to implement the initiative; these could have been the thoughts that were in the minds of the twenty per cent of respondents who said that the BRI is not successful. In an interesting article that concludes that Trump will accelerate the BRI initiative, Nordin & Weissmann (2018) question whether China will find enough HSR projects to keep the BRI afloat– that could be its competitors' aim, tarnish China's intention in the going out initiative to the point that potential customers deny it business.

Therefore, the risks are as ingenious as far as the European neighbors would comply. Xi Jinping has been ambitious to get China out there into the international community and seems to be succeeding using the BRI initiative. Xi Jinping has been elevating China's position in Europe the communist's way, deliberately avoiding the openly-capitalistic policies (Ferdinand, 2016). The BRI hopes to reinstate China into a political and economic position that can compete with the

USA. The HSRD is one of the BRI initiatives that are helping foster China's relations with Europe and the South-China Sea.

2.4 High-Speed Railway Diplomacy

China is focused on progressing in terms of technology (Rodrik, 2006). As Chhabra et al. (2020) highlighted, the desire to advance the country's technology to match that of the US and other western countries is nothing new. That desire can be traced to the time of Mao Zedong. After beginning to build its own high-speed rail system technology in 2007, China launched its first high speed train technology in 2008. In 2009, the country decided to start spreading its high-speed railway globally and a few years later it was already estimated that China would account for the lion's share of global investments in the high-speed railway industry from 2014-2030 (Chan, 2016). In that entrepreneurial spirit, driven by robust science and concrete infrastructural contracts, the HSR is thriving in most regions where Chinese State-owned companies have proposed it. For instance, Chan (2016) reported that China will account for 34.5% of global investments in the high-speed rail industry between 2014 and 2030. The engineers make customized railway systems that can withstand a specific region's climate, dry-wet cycles, and temperature cycles (Chen, Chen, & Wang, 2014). HSRD, being part of the BRI initiative, is a powerful way of achieving China's geopolitical and economic agenda.

China is not the only nation that provides HSR construction services; Japan, Germany, and France offer formidable rivalry in the HSR construction market (Huang, Yuejing, Teng, & Xiaofeng, 2017). Germany is the most-experienced railway exporter since the discovery of iron in Rhine River; and moved swiftly into HSR construction for abroad countries (Abalate & Bel, 2012). China, however, seems to be dominating the scene and is expected to account for over 34% of global high-speed railway investments, winning HSR contracts in Europe and Russia; not to mention that Germany and France do not attract similar negative comments regarding their HSR service provision as China. Nevertheless, Huang, Yuejing, Teng, & Xiaofeng (2017) explain that China's competitive advantage in offering HSR construction services lies in the 'strong transportation capability and tremendous cost of construction.' That together with the ability to offer financial help assistance to 'Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and other countries [in Africa]' has popularized China as an HSR service provider more than Germany and France competitors.

Having positioned itself as an efficient HSR provider, China is the only contractor for high-end railway construction and maintenance for Association for South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Yu, 2014). The members, including Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos, have contributed to the popularization of Chinese HSR technology. How China manages to provide high-quality HSR is still enigmatic to Germany, France, and USA competitors (Amos, Bullock, & Sondhi, 2010); but it has a lot to do with contracting the Chinese state-owned company CRCC and the provision of funding through the Silk Road Fund and other Chinese-backed sources of funding. Yu (2014) describes that China is eager to build HSRs in ASEAN countries. Jinping approaches the ASEAN countries with deals to build them HSR infrastructure: the aim being to foster regional integration, use their work in ASEAN countries as springboard (marketing tool) to prove to the world that they have the industrial a

and technological capacity, and to create competitive advantage for the ASEAN regions (Chan, 2016).

The HSR projects initiated by the Chinese government seek to spread the Chinese culture in host countries (Cai, 2010): interaction between the Chinese workers and the locals leads to enculturation. The spread of Chinese culture, Cai (2010) explains, is a deliberate goal by President Jinping—the initiator of BRI, and subsequently HSRD, to educate the world of the rich, Chinese traditions. In other words, the HSRD is part of soft-power strategies to show the credibility of Chinese Power; this argument partly indicates that BRI, and particularly HSRD, aims to change Chinese's status quo in world leadership. Soft power is the use of international public relations using economic and cultural influence to control other nations (Rawnsley, 2012). Ikenberry (2004) explained that soft power allows countries to persuade other without force. For instance, the EU was able to make some European countries to voluntarily give up large portions of their sovereignty just to subject their countries to sets of shared rules that have the same basis of liberal values (Li, 2018). The definition indicates that HSRD is a grand strategy of usurping international control.

The inadequate soft-power skills have led to Chinese invisibility in the global leadership scene, compared to the USA's more outspoken diplomacy that helps it stay at the top in international leadership. Through HSR and the Silk Road, China is posing a threat to the USA's top position by attaining higher levels of public relations and forming allies, in spite of itself. However, the HSRD discussion spurs into mundane conclusions: inconclusive whether China is planning to take over super-power or not. Following Pavlicevic & Kratz (2017) conclusions, whether China wants to become a super-power or not is unimportant; it is interesting to observe how the once conservative economy, coupled with excess capacities and underdeveloped interiors, is transforming the world around them, a feat that the USA failed to achieve.

2.5 Research Gap

As indicated in the first chapter (on the purpose of the thesis), not a single paper evaluated in this section had survey method of data collection; the current thesis will undertake a survey, offer an expert opinion from a group of social scientists, engineers, and financial professionals regarding the case studies. The study uses a large enough sample, analyzed the data using statistical and numerical methods, and interpreted the results using literature: this process has not been used before in political science journals discussing BRI and HSRD.

3 Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The current study uses the case study method and quantitative data (reported in terms of descriptive statistics). This chapter will discuss the methods of data collection (survey), how the researcher designed the questions and the variables used in the development of the survey. Also enclosed in the chapter are the data and data collection techniques, methods, and challenges; the approach—either deductive or inductive and the reliability and validity the data are available in the chapter in a thorough way of presentation.

3.2 Survey

Answering the two research questions using expert knowledge required the application of a survey – search for expert opinion on the issues regarding BRI. From the beginning of the study, during the formulation of the topic and collection of relevant literature, it was apparent that researchers were not using surveys in the analysis of BRI; instead, they preferred applying literature analysis to make conclusions. However, literature overkill could ruin academic perception, thus the need for collecting raw data from the field. Additionally, the researcher discovered that expertise in the field of BRI ranged from engineers, financial experts, and social sciences peers.

Conducting a survey required questions that would help the interviewee provide their opinion. There are two options when it comes to using a survey. First, the thesis can use open-ended questions that coerce the respondent to respond in prose format; and second, it can use closed queries that allow the interviewee to rate the variables. The second method is simpler since the respondent does not have to be creative in responding; all the need to do is pick the most appropriate choice according to their personal opinion. However, mixing open-ended questions with closed ones is sometimes a brilliant idea, especially when the researcher has ample time to collect data; but in the current thesis, the time limitation was a set-back since the researcher could not collect enough data that would help determine a pattern.

An additional concern about the survey was the ‘*how-to-do-it*’ dilemma. Several options were available, including sending emails to potential respondents, holding phone interviews, conducting face-on interviews, and conducting an online survey; each had their pros and cons. However, the time-frame factor was what the current thesis was confined; but the authenticity of the opinion was also a legitimate constraint. The face-on interviews were ideal for the survey, precisely because the results had to come from experts; therefore, the best method of verifying that the individuals giving answers were experts was to meet them physically. The researcher made calls for arranging meetings, always ensuring that the interview lasted less than ten minutes, which were enough to answer twenty-five closed questions.

3.2.1 Designing Questions

They had to be easy-to-understand questions, indicate overall structure, responsive to study questions, and cover the case studies. The ease of comprehension came from the organization of the questionnaires and prior knowledge of BRI and HSRD by the interviewer; the researcher ensured that the respondent showed knowledge and interest in BRI while booking for an appointment– expert opinion derives from mastery of the topic. Therefore, prior probe sifted the respondents, making appointments with those who showed the ability to respond to BRI issues and politely informing those who claimed not to understand (the BRI initiative) that they could not qualify as respondents. Though not reflected in the results, the majority of the respondents were of Chinese origin, a possible bias in the study, but one that did not affect the credibility of the results.

The first set of nine questions reflected this notion; though having passed the pre-qualification, the respondents had to show in writing, answering questions one through nine, how they felt about BRI and HSRD. Also, one more strict condition was that the respondent must at least have been in college: expert opinion meant that the interviewees must indicate scholarly thinking w

then answering the questions. The rest of the questions, ten to twenty-five, were about the case studies—Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR and Ankara-Istanbul HSR.

3.2.2 Variables

Effectiveness, technology, fairness, impact (financial, social, political, and trade), and costs, were the measures of determining the success of each case-study projects. Effectiveness is the measure of the ability of the project to achieve the set objectives. For example, an HSR project would aim to connect location A and location B within X number of minutes; the completion of the project should lead to answering whether the HSR can ferry goods/people from location A to location B using the X number of minutes. An additional aspect of effectiveness as a measure in the current thesis was that the project satisfied the commuters, in this case, the respondents: being an expert opinion survey implied an assumption that each response carried expertise, technical element in it. Therefore, the effectiveness as a variable in this thesis carried the element of taste and preferences, usually cumbersome to quantify.

How fast, how recent, and how easy to use are all part of the technology question—technology being the resources that a process of production utilizes. HSR is the newest form of railway technology; replacing the fuel-driven trains are the electric trains that use special electric-charge railway line. Though costly to install, they are fast, free of traffic and easy to maintain. USA, Britain, France, Japan, and China have in decades been using HSR for inland travel, but recently they are spreading the technology to less-developed countries. However, the expense of the original HSR is relatively high in such a way that the developing nations may find burdensome, therefore leading to the possibility of applying lower technology, one that the host countries could afford.

Fairness in terms of awarding the HSR contract is a compliance issue that triggers domestic conflicts. The bidding process, settling on the incurring of national finances with the contractor, and the awarding of tender could hinder the successful completion of a project; equally capable contractors could contest the awarding of contract process leading to multiple-times stalling of the project. However, being a survey, expert opinions may not reflect the facts of the project. For example, the engineer who did not participate in the project may not tell whether India and Turkey awarded the contracts justly. If they participated in the project their answer would most probably be that the awarding of tender was fair, but if they did not then the answer would probably be that they do not know, or that it was an unfair tender process.

Measuring the political, social, financial, and trade impacts were part of the objectives that the thesis focused on retrieving from the interviewees. The political impact is the influences that the project had on the governorship of the people – did the people appreciate the HSR project? The public perceived a government that was utilising public resources if the public appreciated the project; but if they rejected the project, then they perceived that the government had been misusing public funds. Social impact involved having to open new towns, enculturation by the contracting company's country of origin, and the changes in traditions that would occur as a result of the completed project. Financial and trade impacts are interlinked, with their single difference appearing on the management of resources— financial impact involved how federal money was applied

d in the project, while trade impact is the opening up of new markets and attracting new trading partners.

The cost of the project as a variable represented the allocation of funds, how the project was financed— either through debt, taxpayers' money, or through a grant. Further, the question of the cost of the project included pre-project expenses— feasibility study, processing fees, and the contract costs; on-the-site expenses— labour costs, materials expense, evacuation and compensation costs, storage, and manufacturing costs; and the post-project expenses that include maintenance and repair. However, similar to the other variables, the cost-of-project factor will be subject to the opinion of the interviewees who may not have had prior, accurate knowledge of the projects' expenditure.

3.3 Data and Data Collection

The standard description of data in research is quantitative and qualitative data. Political scientists prefer qualitative data, descriptive information coming from answering open-ended questions, as it enlightens the researcher with the intricate details of the situation. However, this study applied quantitative data, numerical information coming from enumerating observations. In the strictest scientific approach, one where the researcher is experimenting, the observable elements are species that exist in conditioned environments in order to test the effect of individual variables. Political scientists, unlike natural scientists such as biologists and physicists, cannot use human beings as observable elements; therefore, the study used the opinions of the interviewees as the specimen. The trend formation emanating from the collective opinions of the respondents informs the conclusion of the research.

Determining data collection procedures are factors that include time allowed for the research, the type of research, the cost of gathering information, and the technicality of the questionnaires. Qualitative data collection procedures would differ from quantitative data collection methods, the latter being more direct than earlier. The interviewer for qualitative data should hold long conversations that involve probing, posing for clarification, and interlude for off-topic discussions that enhance comprehension of context. However, quantitative data collection involves requesting an interviewer to fill in the questionnaire, at times in the absence of the interviewer— an aspect that makes it affordable and increases interviewer's capacity to collect large volumes of information within short spans. However, the possibility of receiving insincere responses when conducting quantitative research is higher than when collecting qualitative research, but that the large volume of data eliminates that possibility.

3.4 Approach

The research approach is either using deductive reasoning or inductive reasoning to end up with a solution. The thesis started with stating the problem, moved to formulate the research questions, proceeded to define the problem (in the literature review), and ends with determining the solutions. However, two methods exist: the study could have either used inductive reasoning— starting with known facts and ending with generalized conclusions that could either be true or not; or used deductive process, which involves starting with known facts and using logical processes to

come up with new facts. Generally, inductive reasoning for research is unreliable since it leads to generalized conclusions— information that one cannot falsify. For example, the technique of extrapolation where one decides that since the trends have been in a certain way, then they will follow a similar path and land in a particular result.

Common, also, is the application of inductive reasoning in social-science research, such as this one, to solve the research questions. The dilemma stems out from the inherent problem of social sciences: determining why people behave as they do. Trying to predict human behavior, despite observing its patterns, causes the social scientists' uncertain predictions. Political science, being a social science, categorizes as one to use inductive reasoning in its studies; the current BRI study wades on unsure grounds: does Beijing wish to take the super-power position, or is BRI out of goodwill to assist? Answering these questions using historical patterns do not assure the reader that the future will be similar, it might change into unexpected outcomes. Therefore, by default, the current investigation applied inductive reasoning in answering the research questions.

Specifically, deductive reasoning begins with known facts: China has HSRD as a program under BRI, BRI is facing political challenges, and it must solve these challenges for BRI to turn out successful. The following step in the inductive model is the observation of phenomenon— collecting and analyzing data for determining a pattern. Identifying the pattern from the observations leads to a logical conclusion, one that says what is likely to happen in the future. For example, the research questions in the current thesis led to answers that explain the possibility of specific outcomes. Observable elements might show that China aims at usurping world power; but that conclusion does not necessarily make it the fact that China will overtake the USA as a super-power— until that happens, one cannot tell.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

Valid data is reliable, where validity is the determination of the sample and its size— representation of the population and how that sample spreads across the entire population. Valid data avoids skewing the respondents so that they will not provide biased opinions; remember that opinions in the current thesis are the observable phenomenon, and should be bias-free. Friends and family had to answer the questionnaire as a tactic to convince them to help find qualified respondents, using the responses as confirmation that they had understood the questionnaire.

Additionally, though not included in the analysis, a large number (over 90%) of the respondents were of Chinese origin. That may sound like a biased sample, but it is not; considering that the topic required one to analyse BRI from a political view-point meant that finding neutral ground for the opinions was toll order. However, the people of Chinese origin, though sympathetic about the success of BRI, should provide the least biased opinion: USA and Britain may reject China's intentions, but the Chinese are likely to provide honest reflections on their intentions when advancing BRI. However, this stand-point in the research may become its most significant weakness; but the issue that one expects when dealing with international relations (no-common ground for the stakeholders) is challenging to resolve.

Therefore, as far as the reader agrees with the thesis' stand-point— people of Chinese origin respondents will provide the least-biased responses to the research questions, the data thereof is

reliable. However, if the reader decides that including people of Chinese origin as respondents, making the sample populated with their responses, is such a skewed way of answering the research questions, then the data casts doubt on the conclusions. As a defense for the data, before anyone entirely rejects it, the people of Chinese origin are those living in America, as citizens, and appreciate both cultures (the western and the Chinese) for what each represents. Therefore, in the study's view and stand-point, such a group— people of Chinese origin— were best-suited to respond to the questionnaires.

3.6 Justification for Using a Quantitative Case Study

The choice of using quantitative data was informed by the study's research questions. The first two questions demand more of a 'yes or no' and not exploratory in nature. They do not seek to establish the complex reasons why the participants choose to hold a certain opinion. Rather, the aim is just to establish their opinion based on already established possible answer options that are captured in the questionnaires. That is, participant responses do not go beyond what the questionnaire asks as the questionnaire is structured. Also, unlike a qualitative study, a quantitative study does not aim to refine or develop a theory. Instead, the quantitative study uses theory as the starting point for investigations (Shareia, 2016).

A case study was the right choice as case studies allow the researcher to investigate a phenomenon (in this case BRI and HSRD) within a real-life context (in this case Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR and Ankara-Istanbul). Through the use of a case study, a researcher is able to get more information and understand a particular case (Shareia, 2016). Of the three types of case studies that exist, the current one is a descriptive case study.

3.7 Conclusion

The chapter on methodology, being a record of the techniques that the researcher used to collect and analyse data, has achieved the one-purpose objective of enlightening the reader on the technicalities that the researcher encountered when solving the research questions. Firstly, the section elaborates why a survey was critical; unlike experimentation or literature review, it led to expert opinion. Secondly, the section explains the data (type and its nature) and data collection; seeing that a survey would collect quantitative data and use questionnaires in doing it, the researcher decided that the most suitable approach for the study was the inductive model that led to generalizable conclusions. Also, the methodology presented in fine details why the data therein is valid and reliable: due to the unbiased sample type and size.

4 Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter presents the collected data from the survey; the section proceeds to the responses of the participants after showing the shortened form of the questionnaire. The last part of the section is an analysis of the responses, showing how each question's statistics. The anal

ysis sub-section contains three sections: section A on BRI and HSRD, section B on the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR project, and section C on the Ankara-Istanbul HSR project.

4.2 Questionnaire Questions

Participants were asked to pick the option that best matched their choice among the provided choices.

1	What is your gender	
	Male	Female
	1	2

Table 1: Questionnaire question 1

2	What is your level of Education		
	Undergraduate	Graduate	Post Graduate
	1	2	3

Table 2: Questionnaire question 2

3	What is your faculty/ Specialization		
	Engineering	Finance	Social Science
	1	2	3

Table 3: Questionnaire question 3

4	How would you rate BRI		
	Not successful	Do not know	Successful
	1	2	3

Table 4: Questionnaire question 4

5	How would you rate HSRD		
	Not successful	Do not know	Successful
	1	2	3

Table 5: Questionnaire question 5

6	Is China using BRI to take over World Power		
	Yes	Cannot tell	No
	1	2	3

Table 6: Questionnaire question 6

7	Is China using HSRD to take over world power		
	Yes	Cannot tell	No
	1	2	3

Table 7: Questionnaire question 7

8	Are there political challenges		
	Yes	Not sure	No
	1	2	3

Table 8: Questionnaire question 8

9	Do domestic politics affect the success of HSRD		
	Yes	Not sure	No
	1	2	3

Table 9: Questionnaire question 9

Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR

10	How effective do you think Bombay-Ahmadabad will be		
	Will achieve objective	Not sure	Will not achieve the objective
	1	2	3

Table 10: Questionnaire question 10

11	How would you rate the level of technology		
	High tech	Not sure	Low tech
	1	2	3

Table 11: Questionnaire question 11

12	Is it a fair contract		
	Yes	May be	No
	1	2	3

Table 12: Questionnaire question 12

13	What will be the		
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financial impact		
Positive	None	Negative
1	2	3

Table 13: Questionnaire question 13

14	What will be the social Impact		
	Positive	None	Negative
	1	2	3

Table 14: Questionnaire question 14

15	What will be the political Impact		
	Positive	None	Negative
	1	2	3

Table 15: Questionnaire question 15

16	What will be the impact on Trade		
	Positive	None	Negative
	1	2	3

Table 16: Questionnaire question 16

17	What do you think about the cost of construction		
	High	Neutral	Low
	1	2	3

Table 17: Questionnaire question 17

Ankara–Istanbul HSR

18	How effective do you think Ankara–Istanbul HSR will be		
	Will achieve objective	Not sure	Will not achieve the objective
	1	2	3

Table 18: Questionnaire question 18

19	Technology		
	High tech	Not sure	Low tech
	1	2	3

Table 19: Questionnaire question 19

20	Is it a fair contract		
	Yes	May be	No
	1	2	3

Table 20: Questionnaire question 20

21	What will be the financial Impact		
	Positive	None	Negative
	1	2	3

Table 21: Questionnaire question 21

22	What will be the social Impact		
	Positive	None	Negative

1	2	3
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Table 22: Questionnaire question 22

23	What will be the political Impact		
	Positive	None	Negative
	1	2	3

Table 23: Questionnaire question 23

24	What will be the impact on Trade		
	Positive	None	Negative
	1	2	3

Table 24: Questionnaire question 24

25	What will be the cost of construction		
	High	Neutral	Low
	1	2	3

Table 25: Questionnaire question 25

4.3 Responses

Q u e.	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 5	Q 6	Q 7	Q 8	Q 9	Q 10	Q 11	Q 12	Q 13	Q 14	Q 15	Q 16	Q 17	Q 18	Q 19	Q 20	Q 21	Q 22	Q 23	Q 24	Q 25
R 1	1	3	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	1	1	3
R 2	2	1	1	3	3	2	2	1	1	2	1	3	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	3	1	1	2	1	3
R 3	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	3	1	3	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	3	1	2

R 4	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	3	3	1	1	1	1	3	2	3	1	1
R 5	2	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	1	3	1	1	1	2	3	2	1	3	1	1	3	
R 6	1	3	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	3	2	1	1	1	3	
R 7	1	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	1	2	2	3	1	1	3	3	1	2	2	3	1	
R 8	1	3	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	3	3	2	1	1	1	2	2	3	3	2	3	
R 9	1	1	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	3	
R 10	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	3	1	1	2	2	1	1
R 11	1	3	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	3	1	3
R 12	1	1	1	3	3	2	2	1	1	2	1	3	1	3	1	1	2	2	1	3	1	3	1	1	3	
R 13	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	3	1	1	1	2	
R 14	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	3	1	3	3	1	
R 15	1	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	3	2	1	2	1	1	3	
R 16	1	3	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	3	1	1	2	1	1	3	2	3	1	1	3	
R 17	1	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	1	1	1	3	1	2	3	3	1	1	1	3	1	

R 1 8	1	3	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	3
R 1 9	1	2	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	3	3	1	2	1	1	1	3	3	3	1	3	
R 2 0	2	3	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	
R 2 1	1	3	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	3	
R 2 2	2	3	1	3	3	2	2	1	1	2	1	3	1	3	1	1	2	2	1	3	1	3	1	1	3	
R 2 3	2	3	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	3	3	2	1	1	1	1	2	3	3	2	1	2	
R 2 4	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	
R 2 5	1	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	3	
R 2 6	2	3	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	3	2	2	1	1	3	
R 2 7	1	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	1	3	3	3	1	1	3	3	1	3	1	1	1	
R 2 8	2	3	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	3	
R 2 9	2	1	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	3	2	2	1	3	
R	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	3	1	1	3	3	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	

R 5 5	1	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	1	3	2	1	1	2	3	2	1	3	2	1	3
R 5 6	1	3	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	3	3	1	2	1	1	3	1	3	3	1	3
R 5 7	1	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	1	1	1	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	3	1
R 5 8	1	3	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	3
R 5 9	1	1	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	3	1	3
R 6 0	1	2	3	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	3	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
R 6 1	1	3	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	3
R 6 2	1	1	1	3	3	2	2	1	1	2	1	3	1	2	3	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	3	1	3
R 6 3	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	3	1	1	2
R 6 4	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	3	1
R 6 5	2	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	3	2	1	2	1	1	3
R 6 6	1	3	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	3	2	1	2	1	1	3	2	3	1	1	3
R	2	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	1	3	3	3	1	2	3	3	1	3	1	3	1

R 9 2	2	3	1	3	3	2	2	1	1	2	1	3	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	3	1	2	1	1	3
R 9 3	1	3	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	3	3	2	1	1	1	1	2	3	3	2	1	2
R 9 4	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	3	1	3	3	1
R 9 5	2	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	3	2	1	2	1	1	3
R 9 6	1	3	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	3	1	1	2	1	1	3	2	3	1	1	3
R 9 7	1	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	1	1	1	3	1	2	3	3	1	1	1	3	1
R 9 8	1	3	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	3
R 9 9	1	1	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	3	3	1	2	1	1	1	3	3	3	1	3
R 1 0 0	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1

Table 26: Questionnaire responses

4.4 Analysis

The table below shows that the total number of questionnaires given out were 107. However, 7 were not fully filled so they were not utilized in the analysis.

Questionnaires administered	107
Fully filled	100

Not fully filled	7
Final sample	100

Table 27: Questionnaires filled

4.4.1 Section A: BRI and HSRD Questions Analysis

	What is your gender	
Description	Male	Female
Number	61	39

Table 28: Answers to questionnaire question 1

The table shows that the number of respondents who were male was 61% of the total sample, while the number of females was 39% of the total sample.

	What is your level of Education		
Description	Undergraduate	Graduate	Post Graduate
Number	16	18	66

Table 29: Answers to questionnaire question 2

The study targeted respondents who underwent higher education learning to establish an expert opinion of the matter. The sample had 16 % undergraduates, 18% graduate, and 66% postgraduate levels.

	What is your faculty/ Specialization		
Description	Engineering	Finance	Social Science
Number	68	10	22

Table 30: Answers to questionnaire question 3

Further, the research aimed at finding the opinions of individuals having professional viewpoint on the topic: engineers, financiers, and social scientists would offer an expert opinion. Sixty-eight per cent were from engineering practice, ten per cent from the finance field and twenty-two per cent from the social sciences faculties.

	How would you rate BRI		
Description	Not successful	Do not know	Successful
Number	20	20	60

Table 31: Answers to questionnaire question 4

Concerned about BRI, the research questions centred on the expert opinions related to the initiative. Being a widely discussed issue in China— in the media and by scholars, and thinking of the geopolitics that is related to the Chinese rise to power, the respondents were keen to answer the question. Twenty per cent thought that BRI was an unsuccessful venture; twenty per cent more said that they could not rate it, and sixty per cent rated it as successful.

	How would you rate HSRD		
Description	Not successful	Do not know	Successful
Number	20	20	60

Table 32: Answers to questionnaire question 5

Though related, the researcher had hoped to separate the success/failure of BRI from HSRD. However, HSRD being under BRI evoked similar opinions as BRI: the respondents duplicated their responses on BRI in HSRD though in essence were different (HSRD is a subset of BRI).

	Is China using BRI to take over World Power		
Description	Yes	Cannot tell	No
Number	60	20	20

Table 33: Answers to questionnaire question 6

The sixth was a political question; one whose answers reflected on the political opinion of the respondent (similar to how the media forms their news). Sixty per cent of the experts believed that BRI carried a hidden, global agenda; twenty per cent said that they could not objectively assess it

he question, and another twenty per cent claimed that China did not have world political ambitions.

	Is China using HSRD to take over world power		
Description	Yes	Cannot tell	No
Number	60	20	20

Table 34: Answers to questionnaire question 7

Similarly, the question on HSRD and world power evoked similar answers to question four and five; probably due to the same reason that HSRD is part of BRI initiative.

	Are there political challenges		
Description	Yes	Not sure	No
Number	70	20	10

Table 35: Answers to questionnaire question 8

Presence of political challenges for BRI initiative was non-conclusive in literature review; some scholars suggest that political challenges against BRI were non-existent, while others say that it is the instrumental impediment of the BRI initiative. In the survey, however, seventy per cent of the respondents think that political challenges affect BRI; twenty per cent were not sure, and ten per cent thought that the political challenges do not affect BRI.

	Do domestic politics affect the success of HSRD		
Description	Yes	Not sure	No
Number	70	20	10

Table 36: Answers to questionnaire question 9

The respondents interpreted the question on domestic politics affecting HSRD in a similar way as the question on political challenges: the statistics were similar.

4.4.2 Section B: Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR

	How would you rate the level of technology		
Description	High tech	Not sure	Low tech
Number	70	0	30

Table 37 Answers to questionnaire question 11 in relation to Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR

The question of technology was also a measure of comparison between the case study projects, where seventy per cent of the respondents thought that the technology that engineers were employing in building and running the project is high-tech. However, for unknown reasons, thirty per cent of the interviewees said that technology is low-tech.

	Is it a fair contract		
Description	Yes	Maybe	No
Number	40	30	30

Table 38: Answers to questionnaire question 12 in relation to Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR

The 'fair contract' question was a measure of compliance, and the politics involved in awarding the contract. Forty per cent of the respondents thought that the contract was fairly awarded; thirty per cent said that it was unfair, while the remaining thirty per cent was unsure of the fairness of awarding the contract.

	What will be the financial impact		
Description	Positive	None	Negative
Number	40	30	30

Table 39: Answers to questionnaire question 13 in relation to Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR

Measuring the financial impact of the project meant demanding to know whether after completion the project the experts think the project will leave the host country's financial coffers worse-off or better-off. Forty per cent of the respondents said that the project had a positive finan

cial impact, thirty per cent said that had a negative financial impact, and the remaining thirty per cent said that the project had no impact.

	What will be the social Impact		
Description	Positive	None	Negative
Number	37	27	36

Table 40: Answers to questionnaire question 14 in relation to Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR

Further, thirty-seven per cent of the respondents said that the project had positive social impact—changes in social relations by impacting marginalized people and improved social amenities; thirty-six per cent said that it had a negative social impact, and twenty-seven per cent thought that it did not have social impact.

	What will be the political Impact		
Description	Positive	None	Negative
Number	44	25	31

Table 41: Answers to questionnaire question 15 in relation to Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR

Forty-four per cent of the respondents said that Bombay-Ahmadad HSR had a positive political impact in the host country in terms of how the political actors in the country relate in relation to national projects (e.g. does the project result in political disagreements between political players in the country and also discontent from the general public in regard to the project); thirty-one per cent said that the project resulted in negative political impact, and twenty-five per cent said that the project lacked political influence in India.

	What will be the impact on Trade		
Description	Positive	None	Negative
Number	70	10	20

Table 42: Answers to questionnaire question 16 in relation to Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR

Also, seventy per cent of the respondents said that the Bombay-Ahmadad HSR had positive influence on international trade; ten per cent said that it had negatively affected the trade; and that the project did not affect trade between the two countries (India and China).

	What do you think about the cost of construction		
Description	High	Neutral	Low
Number	70	30	0

Table 43: Answers to questionnaire question 17 in relation to Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR

The project incurred the high cost of construction and operation, according to seventy per cent of the respondents; while the remaining thirty per cent said that the cost of construction and operation in the project was fair.

4.4.3 Section C: Ankara–Istanbul HSR

	How would you rate the level of technology		
Description	High tech	Not sure	Low tech
Number	76	0	24

Table 44: Answers to questionnaire question 11 in relation to Ankara-Istanbul HSR

In terms of technology, seventy-six per cent of the respondents thought that the contractor was using superior technology, while twenty-four per cent said that the project applied low technology.

	Is it a fair contract		
Description	Yes	May be	No
Number	50	27	23

Table 45: Answers to questionnaire question 12 in relation to Ankara-Istanbul HSR

Fifty per cent of the respondents thought that the Ankara-Instabul HSR was a fair contract; twenty-three per cent thought that it was not a fair contract, and twenty-seven per cent of the respondents were not sure if they knew whether the contract was a fair one.

	What will be the financial impact		
Description	Positive	None	Negative
Number	53	23	24

Table 46: Answers to questionnaire question 13 in relation to Ankara-Istanbul HSR

Fifty-three per cent of the experts said that the Ankara-Instabul HSR project had a positive financial impact; negatively opinionated was twenty-four per cent, while twenty-three per cent thought that the project lacked financial influence in the host country.

	What will be the social Impact		
Description	Positive	None	Negative
Number	43	25	32

Table 47: Answers to questionnaire question 14 in relation to Ankara-Istanbul HSR

Further, forty-three per cent of the interviewees said that the project had a positive social impact; thirty-two per cent said that the project had negative social influence, and twenty-five per cent said that the project did not affect the society.

	What will be the political Impact		
Description	Positive	None	Negative
Number	57	18	25

Table 48: Answers to questionnaire question 15 in relation to Ankara-Istanbul HSR

Fifty-seven per cent of the respondents said that the project affected the political environment of the host country, while twenty-five per cent thought that it had a negative impact. However, eighteen per cent said that the project did not affect the political aura of the host country.

	What will be the impact		
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	on Trade		
Description	Positive	None	Negative
Number	75	9	16

Table 49: Answers to questionnaire question 16 in relation to Ankara-Istanbul HSR

Seventy-five per cent of the respondents thought that the project had positive impact on trade. However, sixteen per cent of the respondents said that the HSR had negatively impacted trade, while nine per cent said that the project did not affect trade.

	What do you think about the cost of construction		
Description	High	Neutral	Low
Number	30	10	60

Table 50: Answers to questionnaire question 17 in relation to Ankara-Istanbul HSR

Thirty per cent of the respondents said that the cost of construction of the Ankara-Istanbul HSR was high, sixty per cent low, and ten per cent neutral.

5 Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Expectations

5.1.1 China's Image Amid Existing Distrust

Ill intentions, greed for super-power position, and advancing a grand strategy are all political reasons aimed at stopping the BRI, but the respondents state the opposite. Evidenced by their ability to make a contract with nations, regardless of their financial background, China is becoming a popular service provider of HSR in emerging economies. The name-calling– grand strategy, and the widespread warnings to emergent economies in Eurasia and Africa that China is planning to control their domestic economies through BRI, and especially the HSR are all ways to dissuade potential BRI customers. There is no better way to reduce China's popularity in the HSR market than to argue that involving China in a host country's affairs will lead to economic colonialism. For instance, Samaranayake (2021) points out that the case of Sri Lanka is used by people to highlight the dangers of engaging with China under the BRI. The article explains that critiques of BRI point out that Sri Lanka was forced to give up its Port of Hambantota for failing to pay

Chinese debts. The critiques hold that China took advantage of a country that was in a desperate state financially with little chance of repaying the Chinese debt. However, arguments against the criticism point out that Sri Lanka's problems predated the Chinese loans and that the Chinese lenders are fair and open to restructuring loans.

Following Pavlicevic & Kratz (2017) conclusions that China is not empowered enough to become super-power, the current thesis, using expert opinion, opposes this notion— sixty per cent of the respondents said that China is using BRI to take over international super-power. However, twenty per cent of the sample was a group of people who think that China is not using BRI as a stepping stone to power carry significant weight in conclusion, mainly because the remaining twenty per cent said that they could not tell whether BRI was a grand strategy to ascend to world super-power. Arguably, a super-power country—one whose currency is used universally due to its stability and buying power parity— must control substantial level of international trade, benefiting significantly from positive export-import trade balances; and China seems to be making these significant steps towards creating a transport network for its trading partners and in the process tying them to trading treaties.

Though the argument that becoming super-power country requires more than just efficient trade balances holds, the idea that China has become a superpower is attractive to the Chinese (including people of Chinese origin) (He, 2017). For example, the USA helped set up international organisations such as the World Bank for financing emerging economies; these institutions have become an integral part of emerging economies' governance. Uprooting these systems from governance would require equally efficient organisations with higher benefits than the current ones. Such sentiments coincide with Pye (1996) saying that China's prospects of becoming a super-power may face challenges due to previous lack of diplomacy and democracy in governance and lack of diplomacy may lead to erratic behaviour, misuse of power.

5.1.2 BRI initiative is successful

The results show that respondents think that BRI is a successful initiative. Sixty per cent of the expert opinions think that the BRI initiative is a successful one. Apparently, BRI, as the name suggests is a unification project with certain economic expectations: the bilateral trade between the host country and China significantly improves under the BRI projects, China becomes a central beneficiary of the resultant network, and the trade network will be free from Western influence (Tan, Jin, Chung, Wang, Chiu, & Tseng, 2019). However, the out-of-ASEAN projects disconnected from the trade network are still part of the BRI initiative; for example, the Ankara-Istanbul HSR joining two locations in Turkey are not contributing to the perceived grand strategy, but an independent contractor that lacks political affiliation. Besides, as Ge (2018) provided, the Ankara-Istanbul project applied European standards, not Chinese technology; therefore, the BRI initiative, based on the Ankara-Istanbul project is successful in its rights— created China's visibility in World economy.

Ge (2018) offer a more successful project, the China-Indonesia Yawon HSR: with the application of Chinese technologies and designs, the project is China's masterpiece of the BRI initiative; but that success was in the sense of winning the contract, not lowering trading expenses, in

creasing movement of production inputs, and including formerly marginalized economic areas in to the economic system. To accelerate the expected success, the Chinese Bank will play a central role in facilitating the HSR projects in emerging economies; offering the projects in form of a bank loan will win over few countries that may not have available, public finance for engaging in such project, but may instead payback in installments (Kumar, Yao, Rizwan, & Tripathi, 2018).

China builds better HSRs than competing constructors

Initial expectations that China is a better contractor for the HSR than the competition (Germany, France, and Japan) were consistent with the respondents’ thoughts. China built the Ankara-Istanbul HSR, and all the section C responses were higher than the answers in section B as follows:

Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR

	Effectiveness		
Description	Will achieve objective	Not sure	Will not achieve the objective
Number	70	30	0

Table 51: Answers to questionnaire question 10

11

	Technology		
Description	High tech	Not sure	Low tech
Number	70	0	30

Table 53: Answers to questionnaire question 11 in relation to Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR

12

	Fair contract		
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Ankara-Istanbul HSR

	Effectiveness		
Description	Will achieve objective	Not sure	Will not achieve the objective
Number	75	25	0

Table 52: Answers to questionnaire question 18

19

	Technology		
Description	High tech	Not sure	Low tech
Number	76	0	24

Table 54: Answers to questionnaire question 11 in relation to Ankara-Istanbul HSR

20

	Fair contract		
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Description	Yes	Maybe	No
Number	40	30	30

Table 55: Answers to questionnaire question 12 in relation to Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR

Description	Yes	Maybe	No
Number	50	27	23

Table 56: Answers to questionnaire question 20 in relation to Ankara-Istanbul HSR

13

	Financial Impact		
Description	Positive	None	Negative
Number	40	30	30

Table 57: Answers to questionnaire question 13 in relation to Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR

21

	Financial Impact		
Description	Positive	None	Negative
Number	53	23	24

Table 58: Answers to questionnaire question 21 in relation to Ankara-Istanbul HSR

14

	Social Impact		
Description	Positive	None	Negative
Number	37	27	36

Table 59: Answers to questionnaire question 14 in relation to Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR

22

	Social Impact		
Description	Positive	None	Negative
Number	43	25	32

Table 60: Answers to questionnaire question 22 in relation to Ankara-Istanbul HSR

15

	Political Impact		
Description	Positive	None	Negative
Number	44	25	31

Table 61: Answers to questionnaire question 15 in relation to Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR

23

	Political Impact		
Description	Positive	None	Negative
Number	57	18	25

Table 62: Answers to questionnaire question 23 in relation to Ankara-Istanbul HSR

16	Impact on Trade		
	Description	Positive	None
			Negative
	Number	70	10
			20

Table 63: Answers to questionnaire question 16 in relation to Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR

	Cost of construction		
	Description	High	Neutral
			Low
	Number	70	30
			0

Table 65: Answers to questionnaire question 17 in relation to Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR

24	Impact on Trade		
	Description	Positive	None
			Negative
	Number	75	9
			16

Table 64: Answers to questionnaire question 24 in relation to Ankara-Istanbul HSR

	Cost of construction		
	Description	High	Neutral
			Low
	Number	30	10
			60

Table 66: Answers to questionnaire question 25 in relation to Ankara-Istanbul HSR

Seventy-five per cent of the people thought that the Ankara-Istanbul project was practical, compared to seventy per cent who thought the project Bombay-Ahmadabad project was practical, implying that five per cent of the sample pulled over from offering a neutral response to an affirmative answer. Similarly, six per cent of the sample shifted to thinking that the Ankara-Istanbul HSR project had applied high technology, implying that the Chinese technology is higher than the Japanese model: a point that is probably wrong because the Ankara-Istanbul HSR project used the European technology, the Chinese offered only labour.

Additionally, although by a small margin of five per cent, respondents thought that the Ankara-Istanbul HSR project was a fairer contract than the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR. Cost of construction, terms of service, timely delivery (or shorter), and the social effect of the project are measures of the fair contract— an agreement where both parties benefit from it. China receives the profit, while the host country enjoys super-speed railway lines. The social, political, financial, and trade impacts also reflected higher percentages for the Ankara-Istanbul HSR project than for the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR project, meaning that China impacted the society better than Japan— the local society appreciated China more than they did Japan. However, the most significant difference occurred in the cost of the project; the Chinese have managed in all the projects they have undertaken, including franchising deals that they get from global companies, to produce at incred

ably low costs. Low-cost labour, state-owned corporations, and high technologies contribute to low-cost production and construction costs.

However, the current thesis observed the two projects, the Bombay-Ahmadabad project and the Ankara-Istanbul HSR project, with Japan as the only competitor.. Therefore, the respondents who participated in the current thesis' survey who felt China's impact in the societies where they built HSR were following this fact: that China is deliberately impacting nations, improving economic statuses of host countries through building infrastructure that is High-Speed Railway Diplomacy.

5.1.3 HSRD improves economy and trade between China and the host country

This survey did not investigate the impact of HSRD on the bilateral trade between China and the host country (Turkey); however, it showed the effect of HSRD on the host country's international trade. Seventy per cent of the interviewees said that the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR had a positive impact on trade in India, while seventy-five per cent said that the Ankara-Istanbul HSR had impact on Turkey's international trade. According to Daily Sabah (2019), the bilateral trade between Turkey and China is facing challenges; it has dropped in volume due to global competitiveness between China and USA. Though incomplete, no records exist about the expected increase in trading activity between China and Turkey; however, speculation indicates (Responses in this survey) that the successful completion of the HSR project will enhance trade ties between the two countries, a scenario that the White House is avoiding (Daily Sabah, 2019).

China has offered the developing economies alternative market for production, offering the opportunity to develop manufacturing capacity, lower transaction costs, and increase the market scope. However, due to their limited financial capability, the Bank of China is offering these countries– see the case study of Latin American countries by Shixue (2016) – financial support through short-term and long-term national debts, a scenario that is triggering questions against the BRI initiative. Non-BRI countries are advancing the Threat Theory basing the argument on the fact that China is investing heavily in developing economies so that when they default, China will control part of their country. However, the Asian and African countries making a treaty with China are for the first time able to present highly developed HSR technologies under BRI (Shichor, 2018).

Besides offering direct connectivity between China and the host countries, which it may engage with in some future projects, successful completion of HSR projects leads to favourable business relations between the countries (China and the host country). Therefore, HSRD through BRI is a grand strategy, like its Western opposition terms it in Shichor (2018), is possible because the host countries voluntarily engage in future trade agreements– citing African countries like Zambia and Kenya, which besides the HSR projects have invited China to construct roads and buildings (Farooq, Feroze-Master, & Kai, 2018). The host-countries award repeat projects due to the speedy completion, low costs, availability of financing by the Chinese government: the competitive advantage of BRI.

5.1.4 The tremendously low costs of projects make China a better HSR service provider than other countries

Within China, the Chinese have managed to construct more than ten thousand kilometres of HSR, a feat that no other country has ever achieved. The lengthy construction spanning between six and seven years boasts of being the cheapest rate— at seventeen million to twenty-one million US dollars; compared to twenty-five million to thirty-nine million US dollars in Europe and fifty-six million US dollars in California USA. China achieves the low-cost construction using low-cost labour, large-scale planning of the HSR, and standardisation of the design (World Bank, 2014). The Chinese government is not obliged to use tax-payers money in the labour construction since the inmates will be serving their jail terms during construction; therefore, the cost of labour is significantly low in the inland China HSR projects. However, it is unknown whether the same inmates work in international sites since the cost of labour is low and the workers suffer elongated working hours.

Large-scale planning creates the chance for production of large volumes of construction inputs, which leads to enjoying large economies-of-scale. Also, iron-ore mines and the elaborate manufacturing companies facilitate speedy production of metal for the HSR. With these resources available, and a unique design for HSR that saves material and labour, China can venture in HSRD in other countries aiming to grow their GDP through Foreign Direct Investments in technology, cheap labour, and unique designs. However, increasing an investment portfolio would be impossible if the government set-up was strictly socialism; doubts have risen in international politics regarding the type of governance that China has adopted: is it socialism or capitalism. Had it been strictly capitalism, the ownership of the projects would not have been state-owned firms, rather privately-owned firms incorporated in China (Naughton, 2017).

Of course of significant concern is the sustainability of the low-cost project? Remember, this survey indicated that China's project, the Ankara-Istanbul HSR, was less costly than the Japanese project, Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR, despite using European design, not as China would have preferred it. Also, concurring this data is World Bank (2014) report analyzing that Chinese HSR projects are one-third lower than those of other countries, an enigma that the West has not managed to discover: How does China keep transaction costs so low such that the maximal cost is only two-thirds of what the West can use in any project? However, the semi-socialist nature of governance elaborated by Naughton (2017) shows that China owns the ability to manipulate costs through designs, yet with a higher goal (higher in the sense that it does not seem to be effective immediately, or is indirect) of creating new markets. China is emulating the Western culture of business (or even social culture), but indulging in international politics through different approach, the HSRD, diplomacy using High-Speed Railway designs that will attract countries that do not have HSR. Therefore, yes, China's low-cost HSR in the HSRD initiative is sustainable because it has been tested in China (with the over ten thousand kilometres of the railway), and seen to work effectively.

5.1.5 China's Image

The previously introduced Ramo (2007)'s operationalization of the term global image. Ramo (2007) highlighted that dependability looks at the issues of trust, quality of product, a care for the customer, and delivered value. A majority of the respondents (60%) claimed that BRI was not successful. That shows that they were not impressed by the delivered value and quality of the product. Reflecting a feeling of low dependability when it comes to BRI. Interestingly, a similar proportion of respondents (60%) claimed that HSRD was unsuccessful. A majority (60%) said that they believe that China was using the BRI and HSRD to take over world power. This points to a lack of trust of China concerning its intentions with the BRI; further showing a low dependability of the overall BRI.

Section B of the analysis section focused on the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR. 70% of the respondents believed that the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR would achieve its objective and that it had a high level of technology. That shows that the project had high dependability and high level of leading edge technology. However, only less than half of them believed that the contract was fair; reflecting a feeling of low pleasure in the contract terms. In terms of financial, social and political impact, the responses showed proportions of 40%, 37%, 44% respectively gave a positive answer. In addition, 70% of the respondents viewed Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR as having a high cost of construction. These show a low level of dependability; contradicting the high-dependability shown by the previous responses. Overall, it can be concluded that in terms of image the Bombay-Ahmadabad gave conflicting results.

Section C focused on the Ankara-Istanbul project. 75% and 76% of them considered the project as effective and with high technology; an indication that respondents consider the project as one with high dependability and leading tech. Although 75% of them viewed the project's trade impact as positive, only 57% 43% and 53% of them considered political, social, and financial respectively as positive. A high proportion of 60% that viewed the cost of construction as low makes one to conclude that it leads to a fairly positive view of the project.

In a keynote speech delivered in April 2019, Xi Jinping stated that the BRI was initiated to deliver win-win outcomes, development, and improvement of lives for participating countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the people's Republic of China, 2019). In another speech delivered in 2020, Xi emphasized on the cooperative aspect of the BRI. He further explained that in the case of BRI China 'has no geopolitical motives, seeks no exclusionary blocs, and imposes no business deals on others ... addresses people's desire for a better life ... and shared benefits' (Xuaxia, 2020). Xi Jinping's statement shows outcomes that countries would like to associate with. In terms of soft power, Xi presents a Chinese image that would attract other countries. As previously mentioned, (Ramo, 2007)'s dependability and pleasure are key aspects of how others see China. In regard to Xi's statements on the BRI, these two aspects are the most emphasized on. If the responses from the expert participants show that the experts view of China's projects conform to Xi's statement, then it can be concluded that in terms of soft power (according to the experts' opinions) China is getting things right. The opinions of the respondents show that their opinions fairly agree with Xi Jinping's statements to some extent. Only about half of the respondents believed that the projects would deliver positive financial, social and political impact. T

hat does not bode well with the vision of improving soft power. Even more worrying is the fact that 60% of the respondents believed that China is using the BRI and HSRD to take over world power. That not only contradicts Xi's statement that the BRI 'has no geopolitical motives' but it also shows that the respondents do not Trust China's intentions in relation to BRI and HSRD. The lack of trust is obviously detrimental to China's image.

5.1.6 Conclusion

Numerous BRI and HSRD projects have been launched over the years. Over the years, BRI and HSRD have attracted debate concerning their economic and political impacts. Some of the critiques have referred to the Chinese Threat Narrative and the debt trap to cast their doubt about the intentions driving BRI and the impact of the projects on countries taking part. It is thus unsurprising that the two HSR projects looked at in this thesis have also attracted varying opinions. The current thesis had two main objectives. In order to meet the objectives, two research questions (one for each objective) were created.

The first research question was created to establish the opinion of experts working on the Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR and Ankara-Istanbul HSR on how China uses HSRD and BRI to develop and utilize its soft power. Ramo (2007)'s operationalization of the term global image was used to assess the respondents' opinion in relation to BRI projects in general and Bombay-Ahmadabad HSR and Ankara-Istanbul HSR. The results showed that the proportion of respondents who viewed the economic, social, and financial impacts of the projects as positive was averagely fifty percent. This is not a good finding for China as doubts about the positive impacts do not translate to a good image of the country. China should look at ways of improving how people view the HSRD and BRI projects to make them more attractive.

The second research question aimed to establish whether that opinion matches the official Chinese point of view. The Chinese view point is that BRI will deliver win-win outcomes, development, and improvement of lives for participating countries. In addition, Xi's speech on the BRI showed that under BRI China 'has no geopolitical motives, seeks no exclusionary blocs, and imposes no business deals on others ... addresses people's desire for a better life ... and shared benefits.' Expert opinion collected from participants in the current thesis showed that the experts' opinion does not match China's official point of view. A majority of the experts believed that China is trying to take over world using the HSRD and BRI. However, the promise of positive social and economic impact has some support from an average of fifty percent of the respondents.

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7 Appendix

Appendix 1: China's image (Ramo, 2007)

