

Literature Review: Evaluating the Cultural and Economic Impacts of the Belt and Road Initiative on Türkiye's Tourism Sector

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How to cite this paper: Camlibel, B. B., Zakirullah, Z., & Yang, K. J. (2025). Literature Review: Evaluating The Cultural and Economic Impacts of the Belt and Road Initiative on Türkiye's Tourism Sector. *Open Journal of Business and Management*, 13, 426-458. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojbm.2025.131024>

Received: December 3, 2024

Accepted: January 20, 2025

Published: January 23, 2025

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Abstract

This research thoroughly assesses and explores the impacts of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), on Türkiye's tourism industry from economic and cultural perspectives. The study highlights its impact on interaction, critical infrastructure growth, and mutual economic ties. Türkiye's strategic location between Europe and Asia positions it as a player in the BRI plan enabling prospects, for connectivity, tourism expansion, and cultural exchanges. The study investigates how investments, in transportation networks driven by the BRI, have enhanced accessibility and diversified Türkiye's tourist demographics while facilitating cultural interactions. The research also looks at Türkiye's efforts to advance diplomacy through joint events and preservation projects that strengthen its role as a connection, between the East and the West. The objective is to evaluate how BRI-driven investments in transportation infrastructure have improved accessibility, diversified tourist demographics, and fostered cultural interactions, while also analyzing Türkiye's cultural diplomacy efforts through joint events and heritage preservation. The research emphasises the impacts of the BRI, on Türkiye's tourism income and infrastructure development while acknowledging the issues related to the growing trade deficit with China and environmental sustainability concerns in a manner, by conducting a review of sources such as academic studies and governmental reports along with international policy documents in an integrated way, adopting a systematic literature review methodology. The results show both outcomes and obstacles associated with the BRI. Key findings reveal that while the BRI has significantly boosted Türkiye's tourism revenues and infrastructural development, challenges persist, including a widening trade deficit with China and environmental sustainability concerns, which offer practical recommendations for decision-makers and stakeholders interested in capitalizing on its advantages while mitigating its social, economic, and environmental consequences. This

study adds to the discussion, on economic collaboration and cultural diplomacy by offering a detailed insight into the transformative impact of the BRI. The implications of the study underscore the need for sustainable tourism practices, strategic economic policies, and strengthened cultural exchanges to maximize the BRI's benefits while mitigating its socio-economic and environmental impacts. This research contributes to the discourse on international economic cooperation and cultural diplomacy, offering actionable recommendations to position Türkiye as a sustainable and culturally vibrant hub within the global economy.

Keywords

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Tourism Development, Cultural Exchange, Infrastructure Investment, Economic Cooperation, Sustainability, Türkiye-China Relations

1. Introduction

China introduced the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013 to boost connections and foster trade partnerships, among regions such as Asia, Europe, and Africa (Zaki et al., 2023). Regarding tourism and cultural interactions, the BRI opens up plenty of prospects and potential effects on Türkiye. Enhancing connectivity by investing in infrastructure ventures, like highways, railways, ports, and digital networks stands as the aim of the BRI. This results, in enhanced accessibility and ease of travel for tourists within the tourism industry (Gürel, & Kozluca, 2022). Türkiye's ideal geographical positioning between Asia and Europe means improved connectivity leads to tourist pathways and transit options. With visitors from nations within the BRI finding it easier to incorporate Türkiye into their travel itineraries; this may lead to a rise, in tourists (Zan & Tao, 2018). The BRI emphasizes the significance of fostering partnerships and business interactions that go beyond aspects in the countries (Zaki et al., 2024). Enhancing cooperation, within the tourism sector between Türkiye and BRI-associated countries could potentially lead to strategies like marketing campaigns and travel deals being launched collaboratively. This alliance aims to facilitate the sharing of resources and successful strategies that can contribute to an approach, towards tourism development overall. Joint efforts focusing on tourism practices may include cultural events showcasing the rich diversity of the participating nations (Pashtoon et al., 2022). As, its history of attracting visitors from Europe in the past Türkiye is, in a position to benefit from the BRI's ability to expand its range of tourists.

The effort creates chances to draw tourists from a wider variety of Asian and African nations. In addition to being beneficial economically and lowering the risks associated with relying too much on any one market, this variety provides a range of cultural influences to Türkiye's tourism scene. A wider variety of visitors' exchange of cultural customs and preferences can enhance the tourist experience as a whole (Chen, 2022; Gürel & Kozluca, 2022; Koçakoğlu, 2021).

Exchanges of cultures represent a key component in the BRI (Tian et al., 2024). Türkiye will actively take part in cultural events, festivals, and exhibitions arranged in cooperation with BRI partner nations, given its rich historical and cultural legacy. This encourages tolerance, understanding between people, and international education. Sharing customs, art, and ancestry strengthens bonds between individuals and promotes a feeling of international community. Türkiye's cultural diplomacy will be essential to establishing connections and building understanding between the BRI's participating countries. Türkiye's tourism industry will be significantly enhanced by the BRI's priority for infrastructure development, particularly transport networks. In addition to making it easier for tourists to see various parts of the country, upgraded roads, railroads, and airports also aid in the creation of new travel hotspots. As the desire for unusual and off-the-beaten-path travel experiences rises, so does the physical structure associated with tourism, establishing Türkiye as a major and competitive role in the world economy (Asgary & Ozdemir, 2020; Li et al., 2021).

The BRI promotes cooperation in tourism and historical preservation projects. Türkiye can work with BRI partner nations on collaborative initiatives to protect and promote common heritage because of its huge number of historical and cultural sites. The creation of cultural routes, the introduction of sustainable tourist practices, and the creation of educational programs are all part of this relationship. Also, the rich cultural legacy of the world and the preservation of cultural landmarks invite tourists keen to dive into Türkiye's rich historical past (Chen, 2021; Yang & Xie, 2022).

Türkiye's advantageous position is set to gain from a rise, in tourism due to connectivity brought about by the BRI. The project aims to improve transportation connections which could increase tourists coming to Türkiye from BRI member nations. This surge in visitors could play a role in boosting the economy by increasing tourist expenditures and creating job opportunities while also generating income for the tourism sector overall. The investments made by the BRI in ports, railways, and other transport infrastructures in Türkiye have become more accessible, on the whole. Travel limitations have been eased up. Türkiye is now more accessible, to visitors from BRI partner countries as it enhanced connectivity improvements in place. As the BRI emphasizes enhancing transportation links the travelers can now easily navigate through routes and transition between regions conveniently. This development also implies that visitors hailing from BRI member nations will encounter smoother experiences in exploring Türkiye's locales. The array of travel choices empowers tourists to not just visit destinations but also uncover gems and lesser-known spots, for a richer and more fulfilling journey (Altunışık, 2022; Zan & Tao, 2018). Increased tourist expenses are a direct result of the growing number of visitors from BRI partner nations. Now there are more travel places in Türkiye, tourists spend money on food, accommodation, shopping, and other tourism-related activities. This financial infusion into the community boosts enterprises in a variety of industries and promotes economic

expansion through a multiplier effect. Improved transit connections lead to an increase in tourism, which generates employment opportunities for several small businesses. There is a greater need for services in industries including hospitality, travel, sales, and tour operations, which generates increased employment. This has a particularly adverse impact on nearby towns because jobs associated with tourism give people an income and improve their general well-being (Tokhirovich, 2021). The tourism industry generates revenue concerning the increase in the number of visitors. This increase in revenue makes it possible for the tourism sector to invest again in more improvements, including new construction, expanded services, and the adoption of sustainable practices, all of which strengthen the industry's long-term competitiveness and stability (Pashtoon et al., 2022). Türkiye's economy is becoming more diverse as a result of the steady rise in portable BRI partners. While other industries could see ups and downs, tourism develops into a steady and dependable source of income for the country. By reducing the effects of crises in other businesses, diversity improves economic stability overall. Facilities associated with tourism must be continuously improved due to the steady number of tourists (Rita, 2000; Tokhirovich, 2021; Zan & Tao, 2018).

Investments in the creation and maintenance of hotels, roads, internet, transit networks, and other facilities are encouraged by an awareness of demand. This not only improves the entire experience for tourists but also establishes Türkiye as a competitive and already prepared destination in the world travel industry (Rita, 2000; Tokhirovich, 2021; Zan & Tao, 2018).

Moreover, the BRI offers the potential for diversifying Türkiye's tourist markets. Traditionally reliant on European tourists, Türkiye can now tap into new opportunities to attract visitors from Asian, African, and other participating countries. This diversification helps reduce risks associated with heavily relying on specific tourist markets and contributes to the long-term sustainability of Türkiye's tourism industry (Uçar & Topal, 2018).

One crucial aspect of the BRI involves fostering interchange to facilitate communication and collaboration, across countries within the initiative's membership network. To enhance understanding and appreciation of cultures the BRI encourages cultural activities, such as events and exhibitions. These endeavours do not celebrate diversity and sincerity. Also, work towards bridging cultural divides and fostering a connected global society. Türkiye's rooted historical and cultural heritage enables it to engage actively in interactions, with its partners, in the BRI, fostering tolerance and mutual understanding while promoting cross-cultural learning (Kulaksız, 2019a; Zaki et al., 2023).

The BRI encourages exchanges by providing a platform, for institutions and individuals in the fields of academia and art to collaborate closely with each other. By showcasing its legacy unique traditions and ancient historical sites Türkiye actively fosters mutual respect and cross-cultural awareness. Türkiye not only showcases its cultural diversity but also extends a warm invitation to members of the BRI to explore its historic landmarks and engage, in local festivals and traditions

for a firsthand experience. This initiative fosters understanding and a deeper appreciation of Türkiye's legacy. Overall, the cultural exchanges facilitated by the BRI serve as an avenue, for fostering connections that celebrate diversity while Türkiye contributes significantly to interlinking the histories of civilizations. The BRI fosters an environment that advocates for tolerance and mutual respect by promoting comprehension and admiration of cultures worldwide. The active involvement of Türkiye, in these interactions positions the country as both an envoy and a tourist hotspot, by showcasing the richness of its past and contributing to the mosaic of traditions. Besides the advantages derived from these engagements, a lasting heritage of shared encounters and connections is nurtured that enriches the global legacy (Wan & Wen, 2017; Sheng et al., 2023; Chen, 2021).

Improving infrastructure is a priority of the BRI. It also has positive effects, on tourism in Türkiye. Investing in infrastructure like transportation systems and accommodations such as hotels and other tourist facilities in Türkiye will enhance the experience for visitors to the country making it easier for them to travel around and explore various regions thereon which not only helps boost tourism but also aids in creating new exciting tourist spots within Türkiye itself. Additionally, "the BRI promotes collaboration on efforts to cultural heritage sites and tourism." Türkiye boasts a tapestry of historical landmarks that have earned recognition, on the revered UNESCO World Heritage List (Teo et al., 2019). Through participation, within the UNESCO framework, Türkiye has the opportunity to access practices, knowledge, and expertise regarding the preservation of cultural heritage. Developments in projects and initiatives could ensure the safeguarding of these sites for generations to come. The rising interest of tourists, in these areas also contributes to the expansion of tourism and its associated economic benefits (Chin et al., 2021). UNESCO offers a platform, for member countries to collaborate and exchange information and conservation methods regarding sites and cultural landmarks like cities in Türkiye and beyond. Through sharing practices and knowledge with nations we aim to uphold international standards in preserving these significant cultural sites for the benefit of future generations. Partnerships established by UNESCO often involve seeking funding and support. By forming alliances, with countries Türkiye can access resources for enhancing infrastructure preserving historical sites, and implementing educational projects. To undertake enduring projects that surpass preservation efforts adequate funding is crucial (Tian, 2016). The BRI could bring about changes, in Türkiye's tourism sector and cultural interactions by enhancing connectivity and expanding tourist market diversification as well as fostering a better understanding of diverse cultures through infrastructure improvements and joint efforts, in preserving heritage sites (Chen, 2020; Kulaksız, 2019).

Limited studies, on what drives Türkiye's involvement in the BRI highlight the importance of exploring the factors that influence its role further research is needed to understand how Türkiye's location richness and economic goals align with BRI objectives with a focus on infrastructure travel and cultural interchange

this study aims to delve into the specific requirements of the initiative and how they affect host countries intending to gain a nuanced insight into Türkiye's participation and its potential for long term growth, within the initiative. The paper is organized in the order; Significance of the study, Methods, Status Quo Development of China-Türkiye Relations, The Political Economy of China-Türkiye Relations, Strategic Importance of Türkiye in the BRI, Tourism and Cultural Exchanges in Türkiye, Infrastructure Development Related to Tourism and Culture Exchange in Türkiye, Impact of BRI on Tourism and Cultural Exchanges, Potential Impacts of the BRI on the Turkish Economy, Environmental Impacts of Tourism Growth Under BRI, Bilateral Trade Between China and Türkiye, Cooperation between China and Türkiye Based on the "Türkiye Dream" and the "BRI", Comparative analysis with other BRI countries, Conclusion and policy recommendation for sustainable tourism.

2. Significance of the Study

This study offers an in-depth examination of the BRI impact on Türkiye's tourism sector, cultural landscape, and economic relations, providing critical insights into Türkiye's evolving role within this expansive international framework. By investigating Türkiye's unique geopolitical position and its potential as a cultural bridge between East and West, this study highlights how the BRI enhances Türkiye's connectivity, broadens its tourism market, and deepens cross-cultural interactions. The findings underscore the strategic benefits of BRI-linked infrastructure developments, such as improved transport networks, which not only facilitate increased tourist arrivals but also support Türkiye's ambitions in cultural diplomacy and global engagement (Chen, 2020; Kulaksız, 2019; Teo et al., 2019).

Furthermore, this study addresses essential economic challenges and opportunities, particularly the implications of the trade imbalance between Türkiye and China, and identifies areas where BRI-driven tourism growth could contribute to sustainable economic development. By synthesizing perspectives from tourism studies, economic relations, and cultural diplomacy, this research adds to the existing literature on international economic integration and the socioeconomic impacts of large-scale infrastructure initiatives.

The findings of the study offer guidance, for decision-makers in the tourism sector and cultural groups aiming to leverage the advantages of the BRI while addressing its obstacles effectively. This research also contributes to enhancing our comprehension of global collaboration, within the framework of the BRI with a focus on developing economies. In the end, this study provides a view, of how major projects such as the BRI can reshape a country's plans, cultural decisions, and global connections laying the groundwork for future research, on eco-friendly tourism, cultural interaction, and economic partnerships.

2.1. Practical Significance

This research offers information, for researchers, policymakers, and business

executives looking to make the most of Türkiye's involvement in China's BRI initiative. The study underlines the improved infrastructure and increased tourism opportunities as factors that can help Türkiye broaden its tourist demographics and enhance gains. Furthermore, the study promotes tourism approaches. Advises decision-makers to strike a balance between economic advancements and environmental conservation. It also provides recommendations, on utilizing diplomacy within the BRI framework to bolster Türkiye's impact and global connections. The research supports collaboration by offering data for making well-informed decisions in similar endeavours; it enhances understanding of the broader effects of the BRI, on local and worldwide dynamics and assists in establishing norms and effective approaches for global projects. Moreover, this study contributes to decision-making guided by data to promote Türkiye's cultural goals, within the BRI.

2.2. Theoretical Significance

This research significantly enhances information about the initiative and framework concerning relations and economic collaboration, within the BRI. Through an analysis of Türkiye's role in the BRI framework, this study sheds light on how major global endeavours can impact national economies promote cross-cultural exchanges, and shape geopolitical landscapes. By delving into the connections between tourism, cultural diplomacy, and economic unity this research lays the groundwork for the development of theories on the growth of worldwide collaboration and shifts, in global influence. This study expands the discussion, in academia regarding the influence of the BRI presenting a framework for evaluating global partnerships in developing nations. The theoretical structures outlined in this work offer perspectives on comprehending these endeavours and their implications, for reshaping global power dynamics within the geopolitical landscape of the current era.

3. Methods

The methodology utilized in this study takes an approach to thoroughly collect and analyze the literature regarding the impacts of the BRI, on tourism and cultural exchange and interactions, in Türkiye (Vass et al., 2017). A research methodology entails a strategy that includes gathering data and conducting measurements to guide the study cohesively (Snyder, 2019). This study utilizes a methodical review approach to gather studies and offer an insightful insight into the impact of the BRI, on Türkiye's tourism industry and cultural interactions, with China.

The researchers chose to conduct a review to gather insights and offer a detailed examination of the BRI impact, on promoting tourism and cultural relations in Türkiye due to the interdisciplinary nature of this subject. Unlike meta-analyses that pool data from studies to analyze compiled results (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). Systematic reviews are well suited for topics that encompass economic aspects as well as cultural and diplomatic perspectives without requiring original

data, from each study (Cathlin et al., 2019; Dziopa & Ahern, 2011). Considering the diverse Impacts of the BRI, on Türkiye was analyzed through a review method in this study to incorporate academic research papers along with government documents and reports from non-governmental organizations, for a comprehensive analysis framework. The search method included targeting keywords like “The Belt and Road Initiative” “Impact of tourism” “Cultural exchange, between China and Türkiye” “Cultural diplomacy within the BRI” “Growth of tourism in Türkiye due to the BRI” and “Economic integration in Türkiye through the BRI.” This approach enabled us to discover studies from the last twenty years that delve into both the historical backdrop and current progress, in Türkiye’s tourism and cultural domains influenced by the BRI (Gough et al., 2017; Zaki et al., 2023). The data that is included in the literature review meets the criteria that require only peer-reviewed articles that were published between the years 2003 and 2024 and which concentrate on the analysis of the BRI’s impact on Türkiye’s tourism sector and cultural exchange with China. All empirical and theoretical research in English and Turkish languages is considered to make the literature review as comprehensive as possible. The following exclusion criteria have been applied to ensure that only relevant studies are included in the review; studies that do not concentrate on Türkiye or the BRI, anecdotal studies, studies which are before 2003 and studies which have focused on other geographical locations. Databases consulted include Google Scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest, ScienceDirect, and Elicit, which provided access to a broad spectrum of academic and policy-oriented sources. Where relevant, policy reports, thesis, and documents from international organizations and Turkish government agencies were also incorporated, ensuring an up-to-date and comprehensive understanding of the BRI’s multifaceted impacts. This inclusive approach facilitated a nuanced assessment of the BRI’s role in Türkiye’s tourism and cultural landscapes, enhancing insights into both economic and cultural dimensions of Türkiye’s evolving relationship with China under the BRI framework.

4. Current Dynamics and Evolution of China-Türkiye Relations

Since the year 2010, China-Türkiye relations can be said to have gone through the following two stages with the political, economic and cultural relations of the two countries changing at different times. The first stage of the partnership could be considered to have begun in 2010 when the two countries entered a strategic partnership and ended in 2016 following the attempted military coup in Türkiye. This period was characterized by the steady development of the relations as well as some crises (Chen, 2022). This phase can be aptly described by the metaphor of “two steps forward, one step back.” Significant efforts were made to foster bilateral ties, particularly through cultural initiatives.

In the first phase (2010-2016), notable efforts included the Chinese Culture Year in Türkiye (2012), which showcased Chinese art exhibitions, music performances, and film festivals across Türkiye to highlight the richness of Chinese culture (Chen, 2022; Wang, 2021). Similarly, the Turkish Culture Year in China

(2013) featured traditional Turkish music, dance, and cuisine, alongside exhibitions of Ottoman-era artefacts in major Chinese cities such as Beijing and Shanghai. Additionally, educational and academic exchanges flourished during this period, with bilateral agreements enabling student exchanges and fostering collaborations between Turkish universities and esteemed Chinese institutions like Tsinghua University and Peking University (Soylemez, 2017). This phase of the relationship also was influenced by the geopolitical environment of the time and the direction that it was taken. The two countries shared similar views on key foreign policy concerns such as terrorism, environmental changes and institutional changes which helped foster political relations. At the same time, the economic aspect of their cooperation was expanding. The announcement of the BRI by China created more possibilities for the development of infrastructure and commerce with Türkiye being one of the countries that expressed interest in this global project. However, China did not relent in its efforts to deepen its relationship with Türkiye China-Türkiye despite relations which was Turkish the delays period between the 2016 coup time attempt to and time. February The 2019 second phase was a significant change in the dynamics of the relationship (Koçakoğlu, 2021; Zan & Tao, 2018). The second phase (2016-2019) witnessed a deepening of cultural initiatives, emphasizing solidarity and mutual trust. The Silk Road Film Festival (2017) emerged as a significant event, celebrating cinematic collaboration and cultural storytelling while attracting filmmakers and audiences from both countries. Furthermore, joint heritage preservation projects were undertaken to restore historical Silk Road-era sites in Türkiye, supported by Chinese cultural organizations (Isık, 2020). Language and educational collaborations also expanded, with Confucius Institutes in Türkiye offering enhanced Chinese language courses and cultural workshops, while Turkish language programs gained prominence in China (Koçakoğlu, 2021; Zan & Tao, 2018). Also, this period saw several high-profile diplomatic engagements that underscored the deepening ties between the two countries. In August 2016, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming visited Türkiye, followed by a visit from Chinese Vice Premier Liu Yandong in April 2017. These visits, conducted during a time of political turmoil in Türkiye, were widely interpreted as a show of solidarity and a demonstration of China's respect for Türkiye's sovereignty and unity. Such gestures not only reinforced diplomatic trust but also paved the way for broader cooperation across various sectors, the aftermath of the 2016 coup attempt witnessed an intensification of collaborative efforts between China and Türkiye, particularly in the realms of economic and political engagement (Altunışık, 2022; Yilmaz, 2022; Zhang & Zhang, 2021). Bilateral discussions regarding investment opportunities gained traction, with a focus on strategic sectors such as energy, technology, and transportation. The BRI emerged as a cornerstone of economic collaboration, providing a framework for enhanced connectivity and mutual economic growth. These developments underscored the practical dimension of China-Türkiye relations, as both nations sought to capitalize on shared opportunities for economic advancement.

Cultural exchanges also played a pivotal role during this period, fostering mutual understanding and strengthening societal ties. Initiatives promoting educational and cultural collaboration created a deeper appreciation of each other's history, values, and traditions, thereby reinforcing the foundation of the bilateral relationship. Such efforts contributed to building a sense of solidarity and mutual respect between the peoples of China and Türkiye, further solidifying the partnership. Key international forums provided additional opportunities to enhance bilateral relations. President Erdogan's participation in the G20 Summit in Hangzhou in September 2016 and the First Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing in May 2017 highlighted Türkiye's growing recognition of China's global leadership. At those events, President Erdogan emphasized Türkiye's commitment to exploring partnership opportunities and underscored the potential for mutual economic benefits through initiatives such as trade connectivity and infrastructure development. These engagements demonstrated Türkiye's willingness to deepen its collaboration and relationship with China while affirming China's respect for Türkiye as a key regional partner (Altunışık, 2022; Erdenebileg, 2019; Wolff, 2016).

The evolving dynamics of China-Türkiye relations during this period reflected a shift towards a more comprehensive and forward-looking partnership. Through sustained efforts in cultural, economic, and political collaboration, both nations succeeded in strengthening their bilateral ties. By addressing shared global challenges and leveraging mutual interests, China and Türkiye transitioned into a phase of greater political understanding, expanded economic cooperation, and enriched cultural exchanges, ultimately setting the stage for a more robust and enduring partnership.

5. The Political Economy of China-Türkiye Relations

The political economy of Sino-Turkish relations has gained strategic importance due to rising trade volumes between China and Eurasian countries, Türkiye's proximity to the European Union (EU), and the significance of Central Asia and the Caucasus for Chinese investments. Türkiye has emerged as a crucial participant in the BRI's Western Asia corridor (Gürel & Kozluca, 2022; Yıldırımçakar, 2019). After a series of agreements, including a strategic cooperation pact in 2010, Türkiye's entry into the BRI marked a notable move towards enhancing economic ties with China. Historically, Türkiye's alignment with the United States and the EU limited its involvement with Asia, resulting in short-term and fragmented attempts to enter China's large market (Altay, 2024). Following the 2016 coup attempt, strengthening ties with China became a priority for Türkiye, aligning with its assertive regional approach and anti-EU and anti-US rhetoric under President Erdogan's leadership (Chen, 2022). This shift included prioritizing relationships with states that challenge Western liberal values, such as China and Russia, as Türkiye sought "assertive autonomy" in foreign policy to appeal to nationalist sentiments domestically (Aslan, 2024). Yet, Türkiye's limited economic capabilities

have constrained its assertive stance to rhetoric rather than policy, underscored by the fact that Türkiye's 2020 trade volume with the EU (\$143 billion) dwarfed its trade with BRICS countries (\$43 billion) (Dilek et al., 2022; Erşen & Köstem, 2019). While Turkish officials express optimism about the BRI's potential to bolster development, specifically in sectors like energy and telecommunications, overemphasis on individual investments risks overlooking broader socio-economic outcomes (Altunışık, 2022). China's larger economic scale, accounting for 16.83% of global GDP in 2018, starkly contrasts with Türkiye's 0.91% share, highlighting the power imbalance in Sino-Turkish relations (Arrighi, 1994; Morrison, 2019). Trade data illustrate these dynamics: from 2016-2021, Türkiye imported nearly \$113 billion from China, while exports totaled only \$13 billion, contributing to its current account deficit (Yılmaz, 2022). Türkiye's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in China remains modest compared to its investments in the US and EU (Atlı, 2021; Gümüş & Topoğlu, 2022). These factors indicate that while the BRI brings opportunities, Türkiye's economic and diplomatic reorientation towards China remains constrained (Dilek et al., 2022).

6. The Strategic Importance of Türkiye in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Türkiye plays a role, in the BRI because of its position at the intersection of Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Situated as a gateway to the Middle East Central Asia and North Africa Türkiye supports land, sea and air connections, within the BRI structure (Akçay & Qingye, 2020; Kuşak & Bir, 2022). The Baku Tbilisi Kars Railway project, along with the Edirne Kars High-Speed Railway has greatly improved transportation efficiency between China and Europe by shortening travel distances and enhancing infrastructure development. Additionally, Türkiye's maritime pathways including ports like Kumport, Candarlı and Mersin are crucial in connecting Asia, Africa and Europe, through the "Century Maritime Silk Road" (Akçay & Qingye, 2020; Üngör, 2024). Türkiye sees the BRI as a way to enhance its position, as a transportation hub in Eurasia and attract investments in energy and mining sectors while building partnerships in green technologies and nuclear energy fields. Additionally, Türkiye uses the BRI to strengthen its political relationships with countries along the corridor such as Central Asia, China and neighbouring areas. This strategy provides an alternative to alliances, particularly in light of strained relations, with the United States. Türkiye's dedication, to the initiative is showcased through infrastructure developments such as the Marmaray railway system expansion project. These projects serve as a means for Türkiye to strengthen its connections, with regions globally while also expanding its collaborations. This strategic approach aims to elevate Türkiye's standing on the stage (Atlı, 2018; Kuşak & Bir, 2022; Wang & Sun, 2024; Yıldırımçakar, 2019).

7. Tourism and Cultural Exchanges in Türkiye

With significant cultural and geographical value, it is an example of a place that

has continuously drawn tourists from all over the world. Without appropriate planning and development principles, Türkiye has seen an unusually rapid growth in the volume, value, and physical structure of tourism. Türkiye embraced tourism as a substitute for other methods of economic growth and as a means of improving its reputation globally by showing rapid development.

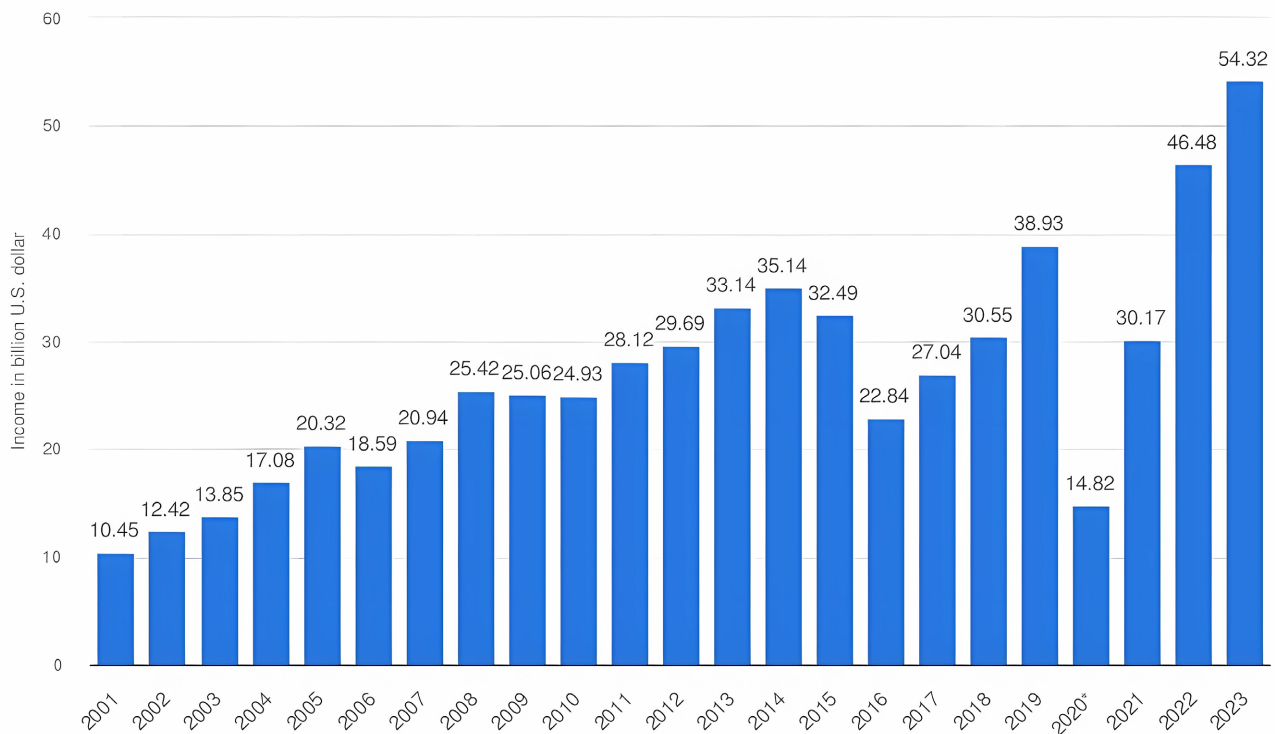
Türkiye's historical and cultural assets, including well-preserved archaeological sites and architectural landmarks, contribute significantly to its appeal as a global tourism destination. Its millennia-old legacy includes historic sites, archaeological digs, and ancient remains, including well-known sites like Ephesus, Troy, Hierapolis, and Cappadocia. Particularly, Istanbul, a famous city, is home to numerous historical and architectural wonders, such as the Top Kapi Palace and the Hagia Sophia. Other than Istanbul, Türkiye has several ancient cities, including Ephesus, Antalya, and Trabzon. These cities provide insights into Türkiye's revered past through their well-preserved architectural wonders and historical remains (Topal & Uçar, 2019).

The rich cultural diversity, in this nation is a draw for visitors. Türkiye's heritage mirrors a fusion of influences from civilizations, like Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman. The culinary traditions, architectural wonders, and societal customs are all indicative of this fusion. Türkiye has been actively working towards broadening the scope of tourist offerings and promoting culturally immersive travel experiences in times. Travelers seeking a blend of history, culture, nature, and excitement can discover a range of adventures, in this country which remains a player in the global tourism sector. In Türkiye interactions showcasing culture forms a crucial aspect of the nation's character and global engagement. Türkiye boasts a cultural heritage thanks to its strategic position, at the intersection of Europe and Asia. Throughout history spanning millennia the area has been a melting pot, for cultures such, as the Hittites, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, and Ottomans. The rich tapestry of culture has been heavily shaped by its history resulting in a unique fusion of practices, arts, and customs (Dijk & Martens, 2016).

Türkiye emphasizes cultural diplomacy heavily to improve relations with other countries. Through cultural events, exchange initiatives, and the transmission of Turkish language, music, dance, and food, the nation actively promotes Turkish culture overseas. To promote this interchange, Turkish cultural centres and institutes are active in many different nations (Sterling, 2018). Participating in international academic exchange initiatives, Türkiye welcomes researchers and students from all over the world. Universities in Türkiye collaborate with institutions abroad to promote intellectual and educational exchange. In Türkiye, cultural contacts include an extensive variety of issues, from the diversity of modern artistic and intellectual pursuits to historical and archaeological legacy. People from different backgrounds can connect and learn about each other's cultures through these interactions (Aegean, 2010).

Figure 1 shows Türkiye's annual tourist income, from 2001 to 2023 is presented in billions of U.S. dollars in the report sourced from Turk Stat and compiled by

Annual tourism income in Turkey from 2001 to 2023 (in billion U.S. dollars)



Source
TurkStat
© Statista 2024

Additional Information:
Turkey; 2001 to 2022; tourism income from international tourists and Turkish citizens resident abroad

Figure 1. Annual tourism income in Türkiye from 2001 to 2023 (in billion U.S. dollars).

Statista in 2024. During the period spanning from 2001 to 2014, Türkiye experienced a growth in its tourism earnings starting at \$10.45 billion and peaking at \$35.14 billion in 2014. This surge, in tourism, can be credited to Türkiye's tourism sector which is likely shaped by its rich cultural heritage, favourable geographical location and proactive promotional campaigns (Statista, 2022).

Türkiye has implemented several policies to mitigate tourism-related environmental issues, focusing on sustainable development and environmental protection. One key initiative is the establishment of Special Environmental Protection Areas (SEPA) in 1988, designed to protect ecologically significant regions from the adverse effects of tourism and other activities (Taşeli, 2016; Yalçın, 2017). The National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) outlines comprehensive strategies to combat environmental degradation and promote sustainable tourism practices (Savaşan, 2020). Additionally, Türkiye's efforts to align with European Union environmental standards have resulted in policies addressing deforestation, marine pollution, and climate change (Uğurlu, 2024). Sustainable tourism initiatives also encourage the adoption of eco-friendly practices, such as cleaner technologies in tourism services, to minimize environmental impact. Furthermore, Türkiye's ratification of the Paris Agreement and its pledge to achieve net-zero carbon emissions

by 2053 underscores its commitment to sustainable practices across all sectors, including tourism. These policies highlight Türkiye's proactive approach to addressing the environmental challenges posed by tourism while fostering sustainable development (Savaşan, 2020; Taşeli, 2016; Uğurlu, 2024; Yalçın, 2017).

8. Infrastructure Development Related to Tourism and Culture Exchange in Türkiye

Türkiye has made large investments to update and extend its airport system. Large-scale improvements have been made to major international airports in Istanbul, Ankara, Antalya, and other locations. The Istanbul Airport, established in Istanbul, is among the biggest and most modern airports in the world, offering passengers better connections. These improvements have increased Türkiye's appeal as a global travel centre, promoting tourism and cross-cultural interactions. Türkiye boasts an extensive system of highways and roads that make travelling both domestically and internationally easier. The country's infrastructure has been developed to facilitate easy access for tourists to different places (Zameer et al., 2020). Türkiye has become a spot, for cruise vacations because of its location along the Mediterranean and Aegean coastlines. The increase in sea arrivals has enhanced exchanges thanks to infrastructure. One way to showcase Türkiye's heritage is through the establishment of cultural hubs such as museums and galleries. For instance, the inaugurated Atatürk Cultural Centre in Istanbul serves as a platform for displays and cultural events fostering cross-cultural understanding, between Türkiye and the global community (Aegean, 2010).

The exchange of cultures relies on maintaining and restoring sites and cultural treasures to allow access, for visitors and scholars alike to explore Türkiye's rich history and heritage through its museums and ancient ruins that have undergone extensive restoration efforts thanks to the country's investments in infrastructure development focusing on accommodations and transportation as well, as the preservation of its historical landmarks. Such efforts create an environment that encourages visitors to explore Türkiye's cultural heritage and engage, in cultural exchanges with tourists from both, within the country and abroad (Wan & Wen, 2017; Kanenga & Haggai, 2016).

9. Impact of BRI on Tourism and Cultural Exchanges

The impacts of the BRI can be observed in aspects using the Earth systems approach. The infrastructure development, under BRI, will affect systems across Eurasia over different time frames mainly due to alterations in land use patterns and connectivity, between landscapes leading to emissions (Teo et al., 2019). In light of my field of expertise and interest, I wish to explore the impact of the BRI on travel and cross-cultural exchanges, in aspects. The substantial investments made by the BRI in airports railways and transportation infrastructure have significantly enhanced connectivity among participating countries.

This enhanced transport network enables tourists to easily reach a range of

destinations thereby boosting travel. Improved facilities and enhanced connectivity within BRI nations have led to a rise in travel, between these countries. Tourism, across borders is on the rise due to tourists having access to natural and cultural attractions nowadays. The BRI supports programs that foster cultural interactions among member nations through activities like music festivals art exhibitions and educational collaborations. Tourism plays a role, in the development of several BRI countries by encouraging mutual respect and appreciation of diverse cultures. The development of hotels and restaurants, along with entertainment venues and other tourism-related amenities has had an impact on job creation and the economic growth trajectory in countries participating in the BRI. To attract a range of visitors from, around the world (Wan & Wen, 2017; Topal & Uçar, 2019). The BRI nurtures worldwide interaction by highlighting heritage and customs to improve international connections, through cultural diplomacy efforts. It encourages admiration, acceptance, and comprehension within communities through elevated exploration and cultural initiatives. By linking areas with heritages, the BRI enhances the cultural journey, for everyone involved fostering a deeper understanding of global diversity. Additionally, it has increased travel and tourism supporting development by investing in transportation infrastructure. To achieve long-term development success challenges, like consequences, must be tackled head-on. In the end, the BRI underscores the significance of ties, in the world (Li et al., 2021; Sterling, 2018; Zhang & Xu, 2017).

The BRI has significantly impacted Türkiye's tourism sector, as evidenced by notable growth in tourist arrivals and revenue from BRI-participating countries, particularly China. Key quantitative indicators demonstrate the initiative's influence.

1) Tourist Arrivals: Türkiye has experienced a substantial increase in Chinese tourist arrivals since its active engagement in the BRI. The number of Chinese visitors rose dramatically from 98,000 in 2012 to 426,000 in 2019, marking an impressive growth of over 330% (Eryılmaz, 2022; Güneylioğlu, 2022).

2) Tourism Revenue: The influx of Chinese tourists has significantly boosted Türkiye's tourism revenue. Chinese tourists, known for their higher per capita spending compared to other groups, contributed approximately \$500 million annually to Türkiye's tourism sector in 2019 (Bilimleri Enstitüsü et al., 2017; Bulgan et al., 2019; Zhuang et al., 2022).

3) Bilateral Agreements Impacting Tourism: Policies such as simplified visa procedures and the expansion of direct flight routes have further facilitated tourism growth. In 2019, Turkish Airlines expanded its operations to include key Chinese cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Xi'an, improving accessibility for Chinese tourists (Ma, 2021; Niu & Li, 2019).

4) Growth in BRI-Linked Tourism Infrastructure: Investments under the BRI framework have enhanced Türkiye's tourism infrastructure. Notable projects include Istanbul Airport, completed in 2019, which significantly increased Türkiye's capacity to accommodate international arrivals (Chen et al., 2023).

When compared to other BRI countries, Türkiye exhibits unique strengths and shared challenges in its tourism metrics, reflecting its strategic positioning and policy choices.

1) **Tourism Growth Rate:** Türkiye has experienced a remarkable increase in Chinese tourist arrivals, growing by 330% from 2012 to 2019. This growth is comparable to Thailand's 400% rise in Chinese tourists during the same period, driven by targeted marketing and favorable visa policies. Vietnam has also shown substantial growth through similar strategies, indicating a shared emphasis on attracting high-value international visitors (Bulgan et al., 2019).

2) **Revenue Per Tourist:** Türkiye's focus on high-spending tourists, particularly from China, has positioned it as a high-revenue destination. This is in contrast to countries like Kazakhstan, which primarily attract regional visitors and report lower per-tourist spending. Türkiye's strategic targeting of affluent international tourists provides a competitive advantage (Güneylioğlu, 2022).

3) **Infrastructure Investment:** Türkiye's significant investments in infrastructure projects, such as Istanbul Airport and high-speed rail networks, align with the infrastructure-driven development strategies of other BRI countries. For example, Pakistan's investments under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) follow a similar model, though Pakistan has faced challenges related to debt sustainability that Türkiye has largely avoided (Tian et al., 2024).

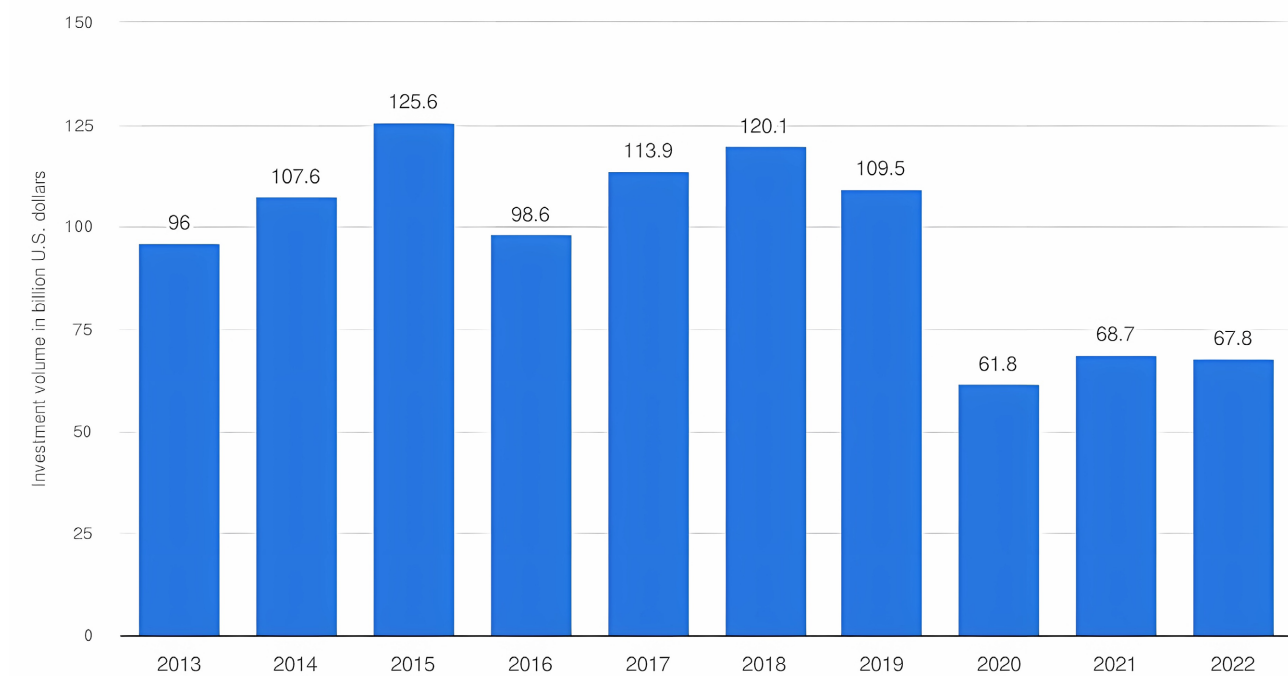
4) **Eco-Tourism Development:** While Thailand and Vietnam have made eco-tourism and sustainability central to their tourism strategies, Türkiye has traditionally focused on its historical and cultural heritage. However, efforts to integrate eco-tourism into its broader tourism policies are gradually gaining momentum, reflecting a shift towards more sustainable practices (Isık, 2020; Ren et al., 2019).

5) **Cultural Diplomacy:** Türkiye's cultural initiatives, such as the *Turkish Culture Year in China*, parallel similar efforts by Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, which utilize cultural festivals and academic exchanges to strengthen ties within the BRI framework. These initiatives enhance mutual understanding and position participating countries as culturally rich destinations (Custer et al., 2019; Kulaksız, 2019; Sterling, 2018).

By leveraging its strengths in high-value tourism and infrastructure development while learning from the eco-tourism and sustainability practices of other BRI countries, Türkiye can further enhance its role as a leading tourism destination within the BRI framework.

Figure 2 Shows China's outbound FDI, to countries involved in the BRI between 2013 and 2022 is shown in the data provided for analysis purposes. Starting at \$96 billion in 2013 and steadily increasing over the years until reaching a peak of \$125.6 billion, in 2015 suggests a move to enhance the impact and infrastructure footprint of the BRI. In 2022 though there was another drop, to \$67.8 billion which could indicate the end of investments or a reconsideration of investment strategies (Statista, 2022).

Chinese investments in countries of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) from 2013 to 2022 (in billion U.S. dollars)



Sources

Green Finance & Development Center; American Enterprise Institute
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Additional Information:

Worldwide; China: Green Finance & Development Center; American Enterprise Institute; 2013 to 2022

Figure 2. Chinese investments in countries of BRI from 2013 to 2022 (in billion U.S. dollars).

10. Potential Impacts of the BRI on the Turkish Economy

The BRI while bringing benefits and drawbacks to the economy is a topic of interest, for many analysts and policymakers alike. The BRI impact on Türkiye's unemployment rate seems promising as seen by the collaborations with China leading to job creation in sectors such as infrastructure development. Furthermore, foreign investment channels led through the BRI could boost sectors like industry, energy and tourism which are vital, for Türkiye's growth and stability. For example, the largest automotive producer worldwide and 5th, in Europe is Türkiye its commercial vehicle production is ranked second in Europe by the year 2018 BRI connectivity could improve access to regional markets leading to lower transportation expenses and time Similarly Türkiye's agricultural goods which are already sought after, in Eastern Europe the Middle East and North Africa could experience a boost in exports thanks to better trade infrastructure (Kuşak & Bir, 2022).

Türkiye's strategic location, as an energy crossroads linking Asia to Europe and the Middle East provides an edge by opening up avenues for increased energy commerce with China—an important player in the global energy market. Türkiye's energy collaboration projects under the BRI highlight its strategic aim to strengthen

its position as a regional energy hub and diversify its energy sources. A key project is the Hunutlu Thermal Power Plant, located in Adana province. This plant represents one of the largest Chinese investments in Türkiye and is spearheaded by China's Shanghai Electric Power and other partners. It significantly contributes to energy security by bolstering the country's power generation capacity (Ergenc, 2023). Another critical initiative is the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), a major infrastructure project connecting Azerbaijan to Europe via Türkiye. While TANAP predates the BRI, it has gained substantial interest from Chinese investors under the initiative, reinforcing Türkiye's pivotal role as an energy corridor between Asia and Europe. In alignment with the BRI's green development agenda, Chinese and Turkish firms have collaborated on solar energy projects in central and southern Türkiye. These initiatives aim to reduce carbon emissions and promote renewable energy, contributing to Türkiye's sustainable energy transition (Isik & Zou, 2019; Ergenc, 2023; Van Dijk & Martens, 2016).

Moreover, Türkiye's thriving tourism industry stands out on the world stage by securing the spot in terms of tourist footfall with 38 million visitors in 2017. This sector could see a boost from the BRI emphasis, on connections supporting Türkiye's ambition of attracting 50 million tourists by 2023. Enhanced connectivity won't lower expenses, for exports but also boost competitiveness by making Turkish goods more appealing in neighbouring economies like Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and Myanmar. Moreover, Türkiye's robust trading ties with Europe being the EU exporter and fifth largest importer could see a revival with the BRI initiative promoting increased stability, in Türkiye-Europe relations (Kuşak & Bir, 2022; Zan & Tao, 2018). The BRI also brings about challenges when not properly handled. The increased connectivity could lead to heightened competition, between goods and those from Asia-China which holds a strong market presence in Türkiye already. To illustrate this point further. In 2016 China stood as Türkiye's import partner, with imports valued at \$19.23 Billion compared to exports amount only 1.5 billion dollars in 2016 (Akçay & Qingye, 2020).

Implementation of free trade policies, within the BRI may expose businesses to affordable Chinese products potentially causing financial difficulties such as bankruptcies and job losses while increasing reliance on external financial assistance and loans for Türkiye's economy to survive without strategic interventions to protect domestic industries from global competition leading to economic instability risk undermining local industries in Türkiye. Furthermore, the success of Türkiye in the BRI project heavily relies on fostering cooperative relations with neighbouring countries along the corridor as well as China itself as any unfair trade tactics or excessive dependence on China could leave Türkiye vulnerable, to exploitation which in turn could weaken its independence. Therefore the degree to which Türkiye gains advantages from the BRI relies on its capacity to enact strategies to draw in lasting FDI and uphold connections, with all parties engaged (Kuşak & Bir, 2022; Zan & Tao, 2018).

Investments in Türkiye's energy and mining sectors under the BRI highlight its

strategic importance within this global framework. Türkiye's geographical position as an energy crossroads linking Asia, Europe, and the Middle East has made it a critical hub for energy commerce. BRI-driven investments have focused on positioning Türkiye as a key player in green technologies and nuclear energy projects, enhancing its role in regional energy transit. Chinese FDI has significantly increased, rising from \$502 million in 2012 to \$3 billion in 2023, with energy infrastructure as one of the primary areas of cooperation (Statista, 2022).

The mining sector has also attracted notable Chinese interest due to Türkiye's rich mineral resources, such as boron, chromite, and marble. These investments aim to modernize resource extraction technologies and boost exports to China, helping Türkiye integrate into global supply chains (Atli, 2018, 2021). Additionally, strategic agreements under the BRI have facilitated collaboration on renewable energy development, aligning with Türkiye's goals to diversify its energy mix and reduce reliance on fossil fuels. By fostering partnerships in sustainable energy and mining projects, the BRI has positioned Türkiye as both a regional transit hub and a reliable source of raw materials while contributing to its economic growth (Akçay & Qingye, 2020; Kuşak & Bir, 2022).

11. Environmental Impacts of Tourism Growth under BRI

The BRI has significantly influenced tourism growth in participating countries, including Türkiye, through large-scale infrastructure investments and improved connectivity. While the economic and cultural benefits are widely recognized, the environmental consequences of this growth raise concerns about sustainability. Existing literature identifies several key areas of impact, including environmental degradation, resource consumption, pollution, and threats to cultural heritage, necessitating strategies for mitigation (Gürel & Kozluca, 2022). Over-tourism has become a prominent challenge in Türkiye's major tourist destinations, such as Cappadocia and Hierapolis. The rise, in tourism in these regions has led to damage to the environment and put at risk ecosystems and cultural landmarks (Asgary & Ozdemir, 2020). They point out that the overuse of resources such as water and energy worsens these issues in areas that can't handle high demand. Likewise Koçakoğlu, (2021) stresses the pressure, on ecosystems caused by tourism may lead to lasting harm to the environment if left unchecked. Under the BRI the growth of infrastructure has also posed challenges, for the environment. Prominent projects like highways and airports have led to the destruction of habitats resulting in a decline in biodiversity and the fragmentation of ecosystems. Chin et al. (2021) argue that while these developments enhance connectivity and tourism they often come at a cost to the environment's well-being. Additionally, research by Teo et al. (2019) suggest that unregulated changes to landscapes risk causing harm, to Türkiye's biodiversity and ecological stability. Enhanced connectivity brought about by the BRI has raised concerns regarding carbon emissions in ways such, as air travel and high-speed rail systems contributing significantly to greenhouse gas emissions levels. Furthermore, the energy-intensive activities of tourist

establishments frequently depend on renewable sources of energy thereby expanding Türkiye's carbon footprint (Rita, 2000; Chen, 2021). These aspects underscore the two impacts of boosted tourism. While it promotes development it also exacerbates environmental issues linked to climatic conditions. Waste management poses a challenge linked to the growth of tourism driven by the BRI. The surge, in visitors, has strained waste management facilities in coastal areas notably. Disposing of waste and wastewater improperly has led to water pollution issues that endanger both life and public well-being (Tokhirovich, 2021). Gürel & Kozluca (2022) emphasize the need for updating waste management infrastructures to address the rising demands, from the expanding tourism sector. Türkiye's UNESCO-designated cultural landmarks are feeling the strain of increased tourism activity as uncontrolled visitor numbers result in accelerated wear and tear of the sites. This issue is exacerbated by development projects being carried out in proximity, to these heritage locations which further threatens their integrity and cultural significance (Altunışık, 2022; Teo et al., 2019). These obstacles highlight the line, between using heritage to boost the economy and safeguarding it for future generations. Strategies suggested in studies stress the importance of approaches to mitigate impacts, on the environment. (Tian, 2016) proposes conducting environmental impact assessments for projects funded by the BRI to minimize disruptions to ecosystems. (Chen & Li, 2021; Li et al., 2021) on the other hand support the development of infrastructure which includes integrating renewable energy and eco-friendly designs to lessen environmental damage.

Furthermore, (Uçar & Topal, 2018) emphasize the significance of promoting eco-tourism practices that engage communities and restrict access, to fragile environments. Implementing methods, for handling waste and fostering partnerships to safeguard cultural heritage are also recognized as essential steps (Kulaksız, 2019; Zameer et al., 2020).

12. Bilateral Trade between China and Türkiye

China and Türkiye have steadily strengthened their bilateral relationship, identifying and expanding areas of mutual interest. In 2009, the two nations signed eight agreements aimed at fostering collaboration. These included commitments to increase bilateral trade to USD 50 billion within five years, develop a high-speed rail system connecting Ankara and Istanbul, and promote cultural and technological exchanges. Türkiye's integration into the BRI marked a significant milestone, enhancing its trade ties with China, although the targeted trade volume of USD 50 billion was not fully achieved. Türkiye has also leveraged its strategic proximity to European markets to facilitate the transit of Chinese goods. As illustrated in Graph 20, the trajectory of trade between the two countries demonstrates significant growth, particularly in direct exports from China to Türkiye. Since 2005, trade volumes have accelerated, and by 2021, China emerged as the leading destination for Turkish exports, valued at USD 3.7 billion (Tekler et al., 2023).

While trade between Türkiye and China has grown significantly, the trade

deficit with China remains a persistent challenge for Türkiye. In 2020, 41.5% of Türkiye's trade deficit was attributed to its trade with China. Türkiye primarily exports agricultural products, raw materials, minerals, and labour-intensive goods to China, while importing capital-intensive and high-tech products from China (Yilmaz, 2022). This trade structure highlights a contrast between Türkiye's low-cost, labour-intensive exports and China's advanced technology-driven and innovative manufactured goods. From 2000 to 2020, the most notable growth was observed in the trade of capital goods. Chinese investments in Türkiye, particularly after 2010, have significantly increased. The export share of capital goods from Türkiye rose from 30% in 2000 to 44% in 2015, and further to 53% in 2020. Chinese investors have also acquired substantial assets in Türkiye, with FDI playing a critical role in bilateral relations. Since 2001, economic ties have been strengthened through mechanisms such as swap agreements between China and the Central Bank of Türkiye, as well as growing Chinese investment in Turkish public and private sectors. Key areas of Chinese investment include telecommunications, infrastructure, and financial services. Between 2015 and 2020, numerous major acquisitions by Chinese capital were completed, underscoring the increasing economic integration (Tekler et al., 2023).

Chinese companies made strategic investments in Türkiye under the BRI, strengthening economic ties and delivering measurable impacts. In 2015, the China Merchants Group acquired a 65% stake in Kumport Terminal, Istanbul's major container hub, boosting container throughput by 20% and enhancing Türkiye's role as a logistics hub. That same year, ICBC acquired Tekstilbank, facilitating in financing for Turkish infrastructure projects. In 2018, Shanghai Electric Power invested in the Hunutlu Thermal Power Plant, generating of electricity and creating jobs. Finally, a 2020 partnership with Zorlu Energy advanced renewable energy initiatives, aiming for solar and wind capacity, supporting Türkiye's transition to sustainable energy. These investments highlight China's growing economic influence in Türkiye under the BRI framework (Göçer & Ergenç, 2024; Güneylüoğlu, 2022; Isık, 2020; Songül, 2021).

Figure 3 shows the total FDI stock of China in Türkiye from 2013 to 2023, measured in millions of U.S. dollars. The data was sourced from Statista and prepared in 2024. China and Türkiye's economic relations quickly grew in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. Chinese capital flooded into Türkiye, supporting energy, transportation, and infrastructure projects. Over this period, the investment levels demonstrated notable trends, reflecting China's increasing economic engagement with Türkiye. These investments likely highlight strategic initiatives aimed at fostering bilateral economic ties, potentially driven by China's global investment strategies under the BRI and Türkiye's strategic location as a regional economic hub. Interestingly, the amount of FDI From China increased dramatically from \$502 million in 2012 to \$3 billion in 2023 (Statista, 2022).

Türkiye showed its dedication to staying in line with China's global infrastructure finance policy in 2015 when it decided to join the BRI. Despite the benefits of this

alliance, Türkiye has become increasingly concerned in recent years about the widening economic imbalance between the two nations. **Figure 4**, in 2022, Türkiye

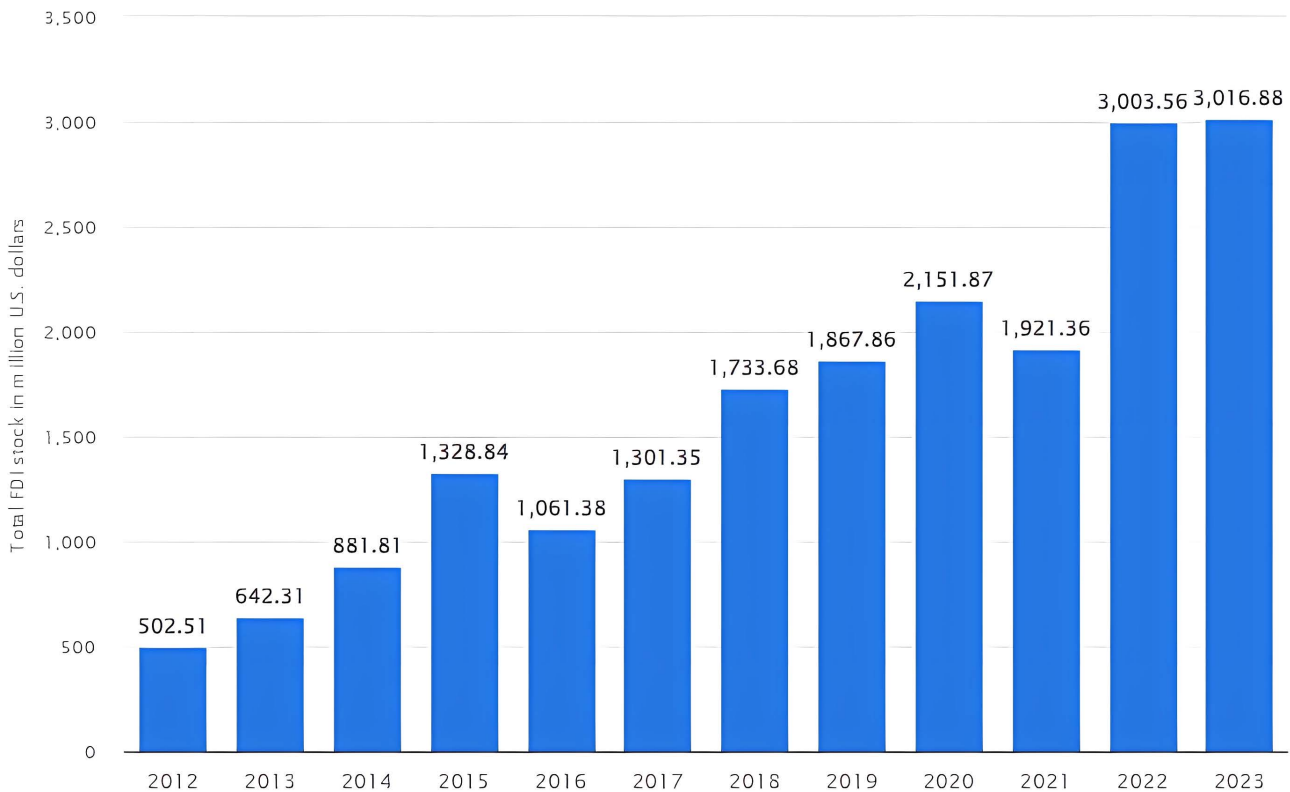


Figure 3. The total stock of FDI from China in Türkiye between 2013 and 2023 (in billion U.S. dollars).

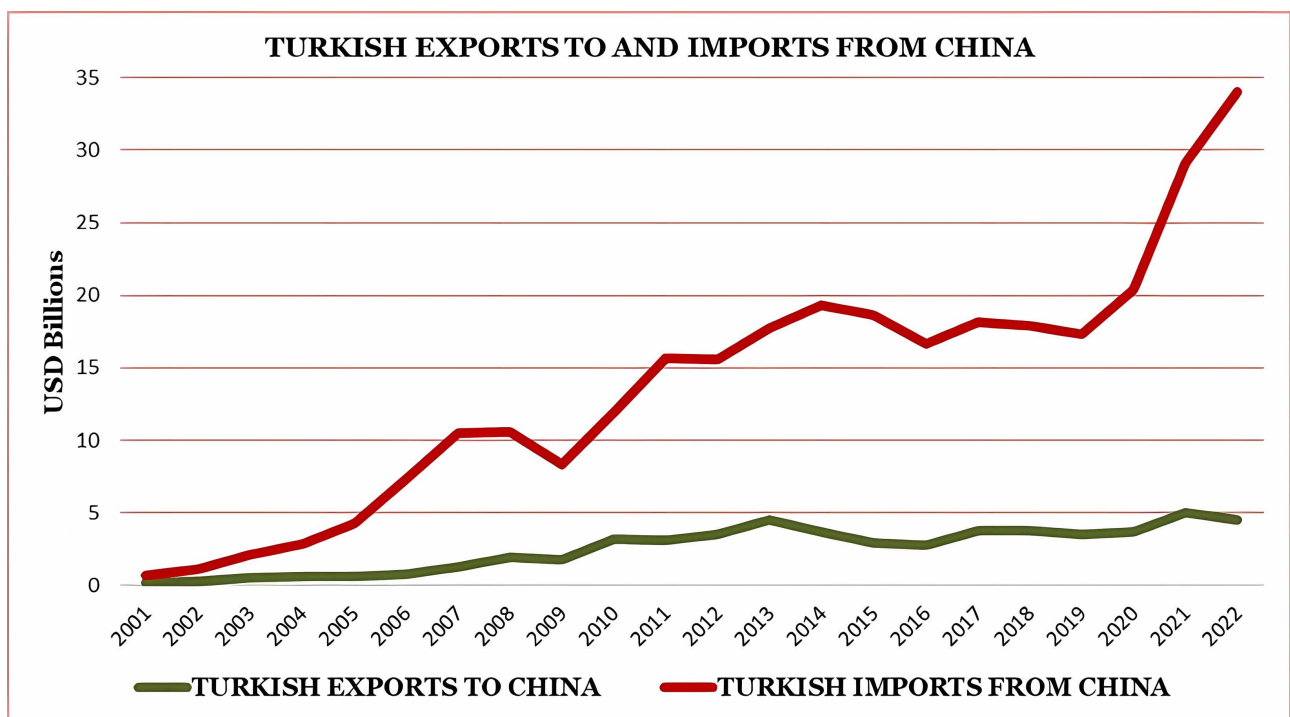


Figure 4. Turkish Export and Import with China (in Billion U.S. dollars).

imported an astounding \$34 billion worth of commodities from the People's Republic of China, while exporting \$4.5 billion worth of goods to China, according to China Med Data (Işık & Leonardo, 2024).

Furthermore, despite Türkiye's important location between Europe, the Middle East, and the rest of Asia, Turkish researchers and pundits have started to express rising disenchantment with the perceived reduction in Chinese infrastructure/BRI projects. Furthermore, headlines on how Chinese businesses might outcompete Turkish competitors in the Middle East and North Africa started to appear in Turkish media, which might put Ankara's plans to turn the nation into a regional supply chain hub in jeopardy.

Türkiye can address its trade deficit with China by implementing key strategies:

1) Export Diversification: Shift exports from low-cost goods to higher-value products like machinery, automotive parts, and renewable energy technologies, following examples from Malaysia and Kazakhstan (Chin et al., 2021).

2) Favorable Trade Agreements: Negotiate agreements to enhance market access for Turkish goods, focusing on competitive sectors such as agriculture, textiles, and automotive manufacturing (Osman, 2022).

3) Attracting Chinese FDI: Increase Chinese investments in strategic industries like technology and green energy to strengthen Türkiye's industrial base and reduce reliance on imports (Gürel & Kozluca, 2022).

4) Regional Supply Chains: Leverage Türkiye's strategic location to boost transit trade and value-added production for Chinese-European trade routes (Atlı, 2018).

5) Services and Tourism Growth: Boost revenue from Chinese tourism and services by utilizing improved BRI-driven infrastructure. Hosting 50 million tourists annually could significantly offset the trade deficit (Gürel & Kozluca, 2022).

6) Domestic Production: Incentivize local production in high-value sectors like electronics and industrial machinery to reduce import dependence (Dilek et al., 2022).

13. Cooperation between China and Türkiye Based on the "Türkiye Dream" and the "BRI"

Türkiye is a regional power located in Eurasia with an extremely geopolitical position and thus plays an important role in the "Belt and Road Initiative". In November 2015, the G20 summit, which Chinese President Xi Jinping attended, was held in Antalya, Türkiye. President Xi stressed that the Chinese would "adhere to its deep integration into the global economy, carry out the "BRI".... and build a community of common interests". Before the summit, Xi and Erdogan discussed strengthening strategic communication, utilizing platforms like the Silk Road Fund and AIIB for common development. Türkiye expressed eagerness to deepen cooperation with China across various fields, actively participating in the BRI.

The two countries signed a memorandum of understanding to promote joint construction under the Belt and Road Initiative, providing crucial policy support

for their collaboration. Therefore, both countries have made it clear to strengthen cooperation under the framework of the “BRI”. President Xi emphasized the need to buttress the development strategies of the two countries, which is the reason why and significance of the article’s focus on the development strategy of Türkiye (Zan & Tao, 2018).

Türkiye also has serious concerns about China’s initiative; this is because:

1) China’s Rising Global Influence: Since becoming the world’s second-largest economy in 2010, China has emerged as a dominant global power. Türkiye cannot afford to overlook the implications of China’s growing influence on the international stage.

2) Strategic Role in the United Nations: As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, China wields considerable influence on global issues, including those directly impacting Türkiye’s national interests. This strategic position underscores Türkiye’s need to engage constructively with China.

3) Persistent Trade Deficit: Türkiye’s substantial trade deficit with China remains a longstanding challenge. To address this imbalance, Türkiye has been exploring avenues to attract greater Chinese investment. This issue was a focal point of discussion during President Erdogan’s meetings with President Xi Jinping, reflecting its importance in Türkiye-China relations.

4) Opportunities in the BRI: The BRI represents a significant opportunity for Türkiye to advance its “Türkiye Dream” of economic development and regional integration. Türkiye places great importance on initiatives like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund. As a founding member of the AIIB, Türkiye has actively supported these frameworks, viewing them as instrumental in achieving its economic and strategic goals (Zan & Tao, 2018).

14. Comparative Analysis with Other BRI Nations: Lessons for Türkiye

The BRI has produced effects, on the countries involved due to their geographical locations as well as economic and cultural backgrounds. By examining how Türkiye has been affected in comparison, to BRI nations one can gain perspectives on the opportunities and obstacles that Türkiye encounters in optimizing its gains from this undertaking.

1) Economic Integration and Trade Balance: Countries such, as Malaysia and Kazakhstan have taken advantage of the BRI to enhance their trade connections and promote collaboration. In the case of Malaysia specifically, they have effectively utilized the BRI to attract investments in port and railway facilities to strengthen their role as a logistics centre in Southeast Asia. These initiatives have notably increased Malaysia’s trade activities with China and other nations resulting, in development (Chin et al., 2021). Kazakhstan has also made use of the BRI to upgrade its infrastructure and strengthen its position as a link, between Europe and Asia. This has led to FDI and improved regional connections (Tian, 2016; Zaki et al., 2024). On the other hand, Türkiye has faced challenges due to an increasing

trade gap, with China. It imports high-tech goods while exporting cheaper labour-intensive products. From 2016 to 2021 Türkiye brought in \$113 billion in goods from China. Only sent out \$13 billion in return showing a gap (Yilmaz, 2022). Looking at the strategies of Malaysia and Kazakhstan Türkiye could benefit from a trade negotiation approach and expanding its range of export products to enhance its trade equilibrium.

2) Tourism Development: Thailand and Vietnam are, among the participants in the BRI who have effectively utilized the program to enhance their tourism industries. In Thailand's case, eco-tourism and sustainable approaches have been emphasized to attract tourists while preserving its cultural treasures (Uçar & Topal, 2018). Vietnam too has incorporated its heritage into its tourism plans by highlighting historical sites and traditions to entice global tourists (Teo et al., 2019). Both nations have seen outcomes from targeted marketing efforts and collaborations, between public and private sectors facilitated by the BRI platform. Despite having a historical background Türkiye encounters issues concerning excessive tourism and environmental harm. The instances, in Thailand and Vietnam underscore the significance of endorsing tourism approaches. Türkiye might consider embracing eco-tourism methods and enforcing more stringent rules to oversee the influx of visitors at renowned destinations such, as Cappadocia and Ephesus.

3) Infrastructure Development and Sustainability: Pakistan's encounter with the BRI illustrates the advantages and challenges associated with infrastructure ventures, like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). While CPEC has led to enhancements in road systems and energy facilities that boost connectivity and economic development, in Pakistan (Teo et al., 2019). There have also been apprehensions regarding debt management sustainability and the environmental consequences stemming from these initiatives. Türkiye has experienced investment, in its transportation infrastructure with projects like Istanbul Airport and high-speed rail systems contributing to the growth of tourism and trade opportunities in the country. However, Türkiye needs to strike a balance between developing infrastructure and taking factors into account. Drawing lessons, from Pakistan's experiences Türkiye aims to steer off issues related to mounting debt and environmental damage.

4) Cultural Exchange and Soft Power: Asian nations, like Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, have utilized the BRI to advance diplomacy and enhance cross-cultural understanding among nations involved in the initiative like China (Kulaksız, 2019). Organizing events and festivals along with engaging in exchanges and joint efforts in preserving heritage sites have deepened their cultural connections with partner countries within the BRI framework. Thereby not only boosting cultural tourism but also fostering mutual respect and cooperation at a regional level. Given its positioning as a link between the East and the West, Türkiye appears well-placed to assume a role in facilitating cultural exchanges, between different regions. Türkiye can boost its influence, within the BRI framework by supporting diplomacy and organizing events that highlight its heritage in a collaborative

effort, with other nations involved in the initiative.

5) Environmental Considerations: In Sri Lanka's encounter, with the BRI initiative highlights the need to strike a balance between growth and environmental preservation efforts. The development of the Hambantota Port and its accompanying infrastructure projects has enhanced trade activities and has also triggered concerns regarding harm and displacement of local communities (Rita, 2000). Türkiye can gather insights from Sri Lanka's journey by conducting environmental impact assessments (EIAs) for its BRI-linked initiatives.

Embracing energy resources and integrating eco technologies into infrastructure projects will pave the way for sustainable progress, in the long run. **Table 1.** Show the summary of comparative insights and lessons for Türkiye in BRI.

Table 1. Comparative insights and lessons for Türkiye in the BRI.

Aspect	Country Example	Key Insights	Lessons for Türkiye
Economic Integration	Malaysia, Kazakhstan	Leveraged BRI for enhanced logistics, trade networks, and foreign investment.	Diversify exports, negotiate better trade terms, and attract higher-value investments.
Tourism Development	Thailand, Vietnam	Promoted eco-tourism and cultural heritage with sustainable practices and targeted marketing.	Adopt sustainable tourism policies and limit over-tourism at cultural sites.
Infrastructure	Pakistan	Improved connectivity but faced debt sustainability and environmental issues with large-scale projects.	Conduct Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and ensure debt sustainability.
Cultural Exchange	Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan	Used cultural festivals and academic collaborations to enhance regional cooperation and mutual respect.	Invest in cultural diplomacy and promote cross-cultural events to strengthen ties.
Environmental Impact	Sri Lanka	Balanced trade benefits with challenges like habitat loss and local displacement due to large-scale projects.	Integrate green technologies, focus on renewable energy, and minimize ecological harm.

Source: Authors.

15. Conclusion

This research thoroughly examines how the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) influences Türkiye's tourism industry and economic ties while promoting exchanges, between nations in a location bridging Europe and Asia. The results emphasize Türkiye's advantage, from the BRI; it brings prospects for boosting tourism income and employment opportunities while also enhancing infrastructure modernization efforts; however, hurdles like the ongoing trade deficit with China and the environmental consequences of expanding tourism should not be underestimated. With its legacy and historical treasures, Türkiye is well placed to leverage the BRI's focus, on cultural diplomacy and heritage conservation to foster shared understanding and global cooperation. However, the challenges posed by tourism, environmental harm, and reliance require a careful and thoughtful strategy to secure lasting viability.

The research also found the significance of embracing tourism approaches and enhancing trade talks to tackle economic inequalities while establishing measures, for preserving heritage sustainably. Working with allies and utilizing diplomacy play a vital role in enabling Türkiye to optimize its geopolitical and economic benefits, within the BRI structure. This study adds to the literature, about the impacts of efforts such as the BRI while providing practical recommendations for decision-makers in government and various sectors like culture and industry stakeholders. It suggests adopting an approach that harmonizes progress, with environmental and cultural preservation efforts and showcases Türkiye as a prime example of sustainable development that embraces cultural enrichment in a globally connected environment. This study sets the foundation, for research on tourism and economic partnerships by exploring both the positive aspects and obstacles faced by Türkiye in its changing role, within the BRI and the global economy.

Policy Recommendations for Sustainable Tourism

To maximize the benefits of BRI-driven tourism while mitigating its environmental and social impacts, Türkiye must adopt a set of targeted policies that promote sustainable tourism. These policies should focus on balancing economic growth with ecological preservation and cultural integrity, ensuring long-term benefits for the nation.

Firstly, **comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)** should be mandatory for all tourism-related infrastructure projects. These assessments will help identify and address potential environmental risks, such as habitat destruction and pollution, before project implementation. Moreover, integrating green technologies into infrastructure development, such as renewable energy sources and energy-efficient designs, can minimize carbon emissions and promote eco-friendly operations. Secondly, Türkiye should develop a **national eco-tourism strategy** to diversify its tourism offerings and protect sensitive ecological areas. This strategy could involve limiting visitor numbers to fragile sites like Cappadocia and Ephesus through visitor caps or timed entry systems. Additionally, promoting community-led tourism initiatives can ensure local communities benefit directly from tourism while preserving their cultural heritage and natural resources. Thirdly, **waste management systems** in key tourist areas should be upgraded to address the growing demand. Investments in recycling facilities, waste-to-energy technologies, and educational campaigns on sustainable tourism practices can significantly reduce the environmental footprint of tourism activities.

Cultural preservation is another critical area. Türkiye should implement policies to **safeguard its UNESCO-listed sites and other heritage** landmarks from over-tourism and physical degradation. This could involve partnerships with international organizations to secure funding and expertise for conservation efforts. Lastly, fostering **public-private partnerships** can mobilize resources and expertise for sustainable tourism projects. Collaboration with private stakeholders, including hotel chains and travel agencies, can help implement innovative solutions for sustainable operations. By adopting these policy recommendations, Türkiye can

leverage the opportunities presented by the BRI to develop a tourism sector that is economically vibrant, environmentally sustainable, and culturally enriching.

Innovation and Main Contribution to Research

This research study brings a new perspective, to understanding the effects of the BRI on travel patterns and trade relationships through its impact on cultural exchanges, between China and Türkiye. The study's main focus is, on analyzing the effects of BRI-related progressions like infrastructure investments and cultural engagement efforts on benefits and economic integration advancement. The study not only enhances foundations in global relations and economic collaboration but also provides valuable advice for real-world use and policy development. This research provides policymakers industry experts and all involved parties with research-backed viewpoints for making choices regarding tourism growth, cultural outreach, and trade promotion, within the BRI context. In the end, this research expands our knowledge of how the BRIs shape border connections and collaborations. It serves as a tool, for enhancing discussions guiding practical applications, and shaping policies in the intertwined fields of tourism, culture, and global commerce.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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