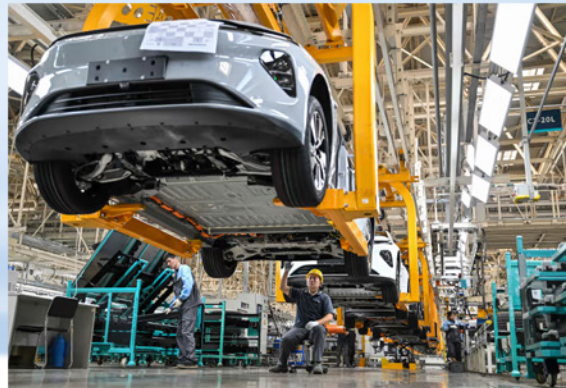




Vivekananda
International
Foundation

CHINESE FIRMS

STRENGTHENING SUPPLY CHAINS AMID
GLOBAL GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS



DR SARAH MUJEEB

VIF BRIEF

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Abstract

Chinese companies, including the manufacturing and logistics, are deeply integrated into foreign ecosystems in the sectors prioritised by the host governments where, like other foreign players, Chinese companies' growth is accordingly aligned with the host countries' priority sectors. One Belt One Road initiative has facilitated these operations while trade agreements of the plus one country provide new markets. Indonesia, Romania, Thailand and Vietnam along with players like Kazakhstan, Turkey, US and Poland are key China Plus One destinations. There is still a dearth of research on Chinese companies' strategic move from mainland China to a "China Plus One" model that includes other destinations. The available literature frequently fails to distinguish between Chinese and foreign companies or mostly concentrates on announcements made by Chinese companies based on different surveys. Moreover, existing academic papers lack a comprehensive evaluation of Chinese companies adopting the "China Plus One" strategy, a phenomenon that predates contemporary geopolitical issues such as US tariffs, the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Middle Eastern crises. This paper addresses the intricate nuances of China's meticulously crafted strategy, wherein Chinese firms, particularly in manufacturing and logistics, have successfully executed this transition. The strategy has facilitated access to raw materials from partner countries for Chinese firms, ensured the availability of mainland resources in partner nations for its companies, exploited free trade agreements (FTAs) and economic alliances to penetrate markets otherwise

inaccessible and allowed for growth in priority sectors of host countries. The smooth integration of Chinese companies into their partner countries' ecosystems is a prime example of their success and it substantiates China's resilience in the current era of tariffs and increased geopolitical unpredictability.

As complex as the global supply or value chains are, greater is the convolutedness exhibited by China which has multifaceted dimensions in its strategy of remaining a significant global player in supply chains shifts. Various media reports¹ are focusing on Mexico as the case of Chinese companies shifting the production facilities to Mexico and exploiting the United States Mexico Canada Agreement (USMCA) for exporting to the United States (US). A more relevant document in this regard is United States Trade Representative (USTR) report² dated 01 July 2024 which had highlighted concerns regarding Chinese investments in Mexico's automotive sector with the argument of such investments intending to "evade Section 232 and Section 301 tariffs on direct imports from China". While cognizance of such developments at varied points in time primarily involves trade and investment patterns, there is a complex web of China's strategic efforts which are beyond simple trade and investment flows. China has developed strategies to bypass economic sanctions and tariffs by strengthening trade and investment ties with target countries. While the focus often remains on exports, imports, foreign investments, the critical role of Chinese manufacturing and logistics firms is often overlooked.

Often China plus one is projected and evidenced to be a strategy for foreign companies with presence in mainland China so as to mitigate the risks. Enderwick (2011) emphasized how China's cost advantage is eroding particularly in labour-intensive industries³. Similar to this, OECD (2018)⁴ noted that rising costs and overheads in important Chinese industrial zones were driving shifts towards cheaper production bases. Empirical data on the disruption caused by the U.S.-China trade war, where tariffs raised operating costs and regulatory risks, is presented by Bown (2020)⁵. Findings by Antràs (2020)⁶ encouraged businesses to diversify their risk exposure by framing these conflicts as a contributing factor to increased geopolitical

uncertainty. COVID-19 revealed the vulnerability of internationally linked supply chains, especially those that are unduly concentrated in China, claim Baldwin & Freeman (2020)⁷. A strategic change toward resilience through regionalization and diversity was recommended by Miroudot (2020)⁸. Theoretical perspectives on Global Value Chains (GVCs), risk management theory and Push–Pull–Mooring Model have notable explanations in existing literature on firms shifting out trends but not exclusively driven by Chinese firms. Within the GVC paradigm, Gereffi & Fernandez-Stark (2016)⁹ contend that changes in cost, infrastructure and market access are propelling production reallocation. The rationale behind shifting operations outside China is supported by Christopher and Peck’s (2004)¹⁰ discussion of how diversity and redundancy lower systemic supply chain risk. Applying the Push-Pull-Mooring model to the China Plus One trend, Shih et al. (2025)¹¹ identify mooring factors (current investment in China), pull factors (increased investment incentives) and push factors (rising costs). The available literature on reconfiguration of supply chains by the firms moving out of China covers mainly the foreign firms, their choice of destinations and sectors but often excludes case by case well-planned China’s strategy of “China plus many” that caters to attain the maximum output in favour of China, given more countries are now cautious of China’s overcapacity and use of the tariff’s toolkit along with growing economic coercion. The focus of the existing literature on supply chain shifts led by firms is commonly evidenced in the background of first Trump-initiated trade war, the Covid-19 pandemic and disrupted supply-chains. However, Chinese firms’ adoption of China plus many strategy dates far behind these developments, highlighting China’s execution of the strategy that integrates the Chinese firms including both manufacturing and logistics with the ecosystem of the host countries. This is the key argument of the paper substantiating the successful strategy of Chinese firms yielding them more retaliatory power with lesser vulnerabilities in the present world of US led tariffs.

More than the shifting of non-Chinese companies, *it is the Chinese companies which have proven for production chains to be less sticky*. While the easy moving sectors such as textiles gained attention *from the*

point of view of non-Chinese firms, China has been successful in executing its strategy of China plus one since the not so recent past. Establishing manufacturing base in various countries helps in mitigating risks, access new markets, lower production costs, import more of Chinese raw materials into the host country (that often improves the country's trade balance with China) and export to the host country's FTA partners. Furthermore, China's participation in specific country's growth trajectory is often assumed to be the host country's dependence on China. What is overlooked is China's own beneficial and its interest specific strategy by its own companies to exploit the growth opportunities in the host country. A concentrated assessment of China's strategy reflected by an intricate coupling of Chinese firms shifting their manufacturing facilities, growing presence of Chinese logistics companies to service the moved manufacturing firms and growing imports specially the raw materials import by the host country from China has interesting dimensions of the global supply chains.

When a country imports from China increase, is it appropriate to label this as import dependency? The answer is complicated given there is an entire gamut of intricate global supply chains and the increasing number of Chinese businesses, particularly logistics firms, which aim to take advantage of the expansion potential of diverse industries in thriving economies. Is it justified to just look at growing imports from China by any country and term it as import dependency? With complex global supply chains and growing presence of Chinese companies including the logistics companies so as to leverage the growth potential of varied sectors in buoyant economies, NO is a more probable candidate in the context of import dependencies.

What does the GVC Database Reveal?

The exercise using TiVA (Trade in Value Added) Database 2023 edition by OECD, as done by Zhou, Tang, Chen and Boamah (2022)¹², provides crucial insights on value-add component of each of host countries across sectors such as technology (both telecom and computers), automotive (electric), electronics, renewable energy, metals, construction, consumer

goods, chemical and pharmaceuticals among others etc. Between 2015 and 2020, China's manufacturing export landscape shifted. While Southeast Asia expanded its importance in electronics, the US surpassed the EU in value addition across industries for China. Mexico continued to be significant while India emerged in information and communication technologies (ICT), reflecting global shifts in supply chain dynamics and trade. In terms of value addition, the EU was the largest contributor in 2015, especially in the manufacturing sector (USD 14.7 billion) and the motor vehicle industry (USD 1.1 billion). Mexico was still an important partner by 2020, but the US had surpassed the EU in terms of value addition in a wider range of industries, such as mining, chemicals, electronics, motor vehicles and ICT. In addition to highlighting Mexico's ongoing significance, this comparison shows how value chain participation has changed significantly, with the US increasing its sectoral leadership and Southeast Asia developing its electronics expertise while nations like India started more strategic contributions in high-tech industries.

Comparing the shifts and contribution of value-add exports from the origin country to China's gross exports of the particular economic sector, the effect of geopolitical frictions is also exhibited by the trade in value added. *It is found that in US, the share of value-add of manufacture of other transport equipment exports declined significantly from USD 1.2 billion in 2015 to USD 129 million in 2020. Increase in trade in value add in China's manufacturing is stark in case of Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand.* Mining and extraction of energy producing products' value add has amplified in Russia in 2020 as compared to 2015 for China's gross manufacturing exports. The fact that data on trade on value addition awaits updation for 2023, it is expected that more serious transitions shall be reflected by the same. *In this context, it is imperative to recall the highlights of speech by President Xi Jinping at the seventh meeting of the Central Financial and Economic Affairs Commission on April 10, 2020*¹³. For optimizing and stabilizing production chains and supply chains, President Xi clearly stated in his speech that "In order to safeguard China's industrial security and national security, we must focus on building production chains and supply chains that are independently

controllable (自主可控), secure and reliable, and strive for important products and supply channels to all have at least one alternative source, forming the necessary industrial backup system”.

The recent writings on firms shifting out of China, including UNCTAD (2021)¹⁴, Dey (2023)¹⁵, Kaushal (2024)¹⁶ and Veda Pathak (2024)¹⁷, conclude Vietnam, India, Mexico and Eastern Europe as favoured destinations and in sectors such as electronics, textiles and pharmaceuticals. Though there isn't a single comprehensive “database” of Chinese businesses that are definitely moving their activities or investments outside of China, an open-source intelligence assessment of presence of Chinese companies across sectors in destinations decided by multiple factors by the Chinese firms and the state along with the strong base of Chinese logistics companies provides insights into the trends. Over ten years, companies shifted Chinese manufacturing to strategic destinations.

Huawei: Huawei shifted production to India, Vietnam, and Thailand to counter US sanctions, reduce costs, and manage geopolitical risks. Chinese logistics firms like SF Express, Sinotrans and COSCO supported cross-border trade, with Thailand becoming a strategic hub for manufacturing, R&D and streamlined telecom supply chains. Due to security concerns, Huawei's participation in Vietnam's 5G deployment was restricted between 2020 and 2024 by geopolitical issues. With COSCO's investment in container facilities¹⁸, China increased its footprint in Thailand. In the Laem Chabang port, which is owned by Hutchison, COSCO will purchase a 12.5% stake in Thai Laemchabang Terminal (TLT) and a 30% stake in Hutchison Laemchabang Terminal (HLT). HLT was introduced in 2006 for regional expansion, whereas TLT has been in service since 2002.

BYD: With the help of Chinese logistics companies like COSCO, Sinotrans, and SF Express, BYD moved production to Brazil, Mexico, and the USA in order to grow internationally and avoid tariffs. A major step in establishing BYD's position in the EV and electric bus markets in South America was taken in 2015¹⁹ when it opened its first electric bus production plant in Campinas, São Paulo. By investing more than R\$ 3 billion in three plants in Bahia²⁰ that manufacture batteries, buses, and

electric vehicles, BYD has made significant strides in Brazil. As a result, it is noteworthy that initiatives regarding supply chain changes in electric car segments by Chinese enterprises precede the COVID-19 pandemic, the US-China trade war that began in 2018, the current dynamics of EU and US tariffs on China or China's new normal economy. Notwithstanding political difficulties in the US, BYD built a manufacturing plant in Mexico and extended its solar energy collaborations in Brazil from 2020 to 2024, providing panels and storage. BYD denied reports²¹ that it had put a halt²² to its EV manufacturing in Mexico until after the US elections. In order to increase mobility in Monterrey and Guadalajara, BYD teamed up with Mexican businesses to manufacture electric buses.

Despite not having any production facilities in the US, BYD manages its operations in Los Angeles concentrating on electric buses and renewable energy²³. In order to manufacture electric buses for North America²⁴, it established a manufacturing facility in Lancaster, California, in 2017. BYD's participation in India is seen in Renewable Energy Solutions, where the company has engaged in solar energy and energy storage systems, partnering with local entities to install solar PV systems and provide storage solutions²⁵. BYD's solar solutions are used in homes, businesses and factories. In response to Saudi Arabia's increased attention to the EV market, BYD is growing its footprint and working with regional partners to exchange knowledge on battery technology, autonomous driving, and other EV technologies, in turn helping the local EV industry grow more quickly²⁶. *Companies like BYD are anticipated to step up their efforts to obtain more production facilities and market access in countries like Russia and Argentina in order to avoid US tariffs as China's concerns grow.*

Lenovo: Lenovo diversified supply chains to Mexico, Hungary, India, and Brazil for tariff mitigation. Mexican facilities, benefiting from USMCA, help meet North American demand and ensure supply chain resilience, especially during disruptions like COVID-19.²⁷ Lenovo established Hungary as one of its regional hubs for Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)²⁸. Founded in 2021, Lenovo's internal manufacturing

plant in Ullo, Hungary, was essential for managing activities in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. It manufactures data centre devices, servers and high-end workstations. By expanding in Europe, Lenovo has reduced reliance on China-based manufacturing, showing its capacity for advanced manufacturing in Europe²⁹. Lenovo had set up its manufacturing in India nearly twenty years ago³⁰ and the opening of its state-of-the-art Research & Development (R&D) centre devoted to developing Lenovo's Infrastructure Solutions and the construction of high-performance AI server production in India was announced on 17th September 2024. Since 2005, Lenovo's Puducherry production line has been producing enterprise AI and GPU servers for AI workloads³¹.

Haier: By entering local markets and taking advantage of lower labour costs in places like India, Indonesia, and Romania, Haier has been growing its global footprint. Together with the Indian business Videocon, Haier opened a manufacturing facility in Ranjangaon, Maharashtra, in 2018³². Haier's Indian plant produced refrigerators, washing machines and air conditioners, reducing costs and supporting the Make in India initiative. This move taps into growing demand for white goods especially in rural and smaller towns. Furthermore, by 2024, there were announcements to invest INR 1,000 crore in a joint venture with the JSW Group of India³³. Haier established a manufacturing plant in West Java in Indonesia in 2012³⁴, which produced refrigerators and other home appliances. A similar strategy was followed by Haier in Romania, where the Chinese company's initial efforts were concentrated on breaking into the market as part of a larger plan to forge a significant presence in Eastern Europe. A major investment was made by Haier in 2017 when it purchased a home appliance factory in Romania that had previously belonged to Electrolux and was converted to produce Haier's goods for the local market as well as the wider European Union region³⁵. In 2021 itself, Haier started production in its brand-new IoT, Industry 4.0 cooling plant in Romania³⁶. Romania is now known to be a strategic hub for Haier Europe, a branch of the Chinese Haier Group, due to its refrigerator factory in Aricestii Rahtivani, near Ploiesti.

TCL: TCL partnered with Chinese logistics companies like Sinotrans, SF

Express, and COSCO Shipping to manage international supply chains in India, Vietnam, Mexico, and Poland. In 2018, TCL established a TV plant in India and expanded to smart home appliances by 2020.³⁷ TCL's entry in Vietnam in 2010 was led by early market penetration which turned into setting up of manufacturing facility in Vietnam in 2018. In 2018, TCL set up a local production facility in Binh Duong, Vietnam³⁸ which focussed on manufacturing smart TVs and home appliances, aligning with the Vietnamese government's support for manufacturing and "Made in Vietnam" initiatives. By 2020, TCL focussed on IoT-enabled smart TVs due to rising demand, while expanding manufacturing and partnerships in Mexico from 2017. TCL established a manufacturing plant in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico³⁹. The "Made in Poland" report highlighted the region's attractiveness, which helped TCL in setting up and expanding its business presence⁴⁰. According to media report, TCL has two facilities in Poland: a manufacturing plant in Zyrardow and a research and development centre in Warsaw⁴¹.

Gree Electric: Amid tariff concerns, Gree Electric focussed on Vietnam, Turkey and Egypt through joint ventures, local assembly, and strategic partnerships. In 2023, Gree emphasized local assembly in Vietnam to reduce costs and leverage its growing manufacturing hub status. From 2015-2020, Gree entered Egypt via distribution partnerships targeting large-scale HVAC projects. As OBOR countries, Vietnam, Turkey, and Egypt facilitated Gree's manufacturing, with Egypt signing a USD 1.1 billion green energy deal in 2024.⁴².

Sungrow: Sungrow is growing its production of renewable energy in Brazil, Vietnam, India and Turkey with the support of Chinese logistics companies like Sinotrans, SF Express and COSCO Shipping to support its global supply chain. With India and Brazil as non OBOR members and Vietnam and Turkey as OBOR members, Sungrow's strategy of shifting to these destinations is an interesting mix that illustrates the company's strategy of moving out of mainland. In 2013, Sungrow partnered with TATA Power and Renew Power to supply inverters in India. Sungrow concentrated on technological advancements between 2014 and 2018. The

first plant owned and run outside of China was the Bangalore plant so as to accommodate Sungrow's expanding clientele in many global locations⁴³. It was in 2019–2022 that Sungrow expanded its footprint, working with a number of Indian businesses, such as Mahindra and L&T. Its overall shipments in India surpassed 10 GW by 2022⁴⁴. Sungrow Renewables engaged in policy debates, R&D partnerships with Indian institutes, and invested in a 600 MW wind-solar portfolio in Vietnam since 2017. As per latest media updates of 15 October 2024⁴⁵, Sungrow has announced plans to invest an additional USD 1 billion in renewable energy with a combined capacity of one gigawatt in Vietnam. Its investments in renewable energy projects have crossed VND 14,700 billion (around USD 580 million). These projects include 300MW of wind power in Dak Nong, 100MW of wind power in Gia Lai, and 150MW of solar power in Binh Thuan and Tay Ninh⁴⁶. Chinese companies' strategies are deeply entangled abroad; in Brazil, Sungrow partnered with Comerc Renew on projects like Helio Valgas and Varzea da Palma.

Yunnan Tin Company: Yunnan Tin Company expanded in Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia and Myanmar, securing raw materials via joint ventures and establishing processing facilities. Indonesia's rich tin reserves led to strategic partnerships, especially in Bangka-Belitung⁴⁷. These collaborations focussed on exploring offshore and onshore mining to increase production capacities. The two largest producers of refined tin worldwide, Yunnan Tin Company (YTC) and PT Timah, have strategically cooperated to strengthen their respective market positions, according to updates from the International Tin Association⁴⁸. Yunnan Tin has made significant investments in Myanmar's tin sector, especially in Wa State, which it has self-declared as a major tin-producing region that borders Yunnan province⁴⁹. While the firm contributed to China's tin supply chain by obtaining substantial tin concentrates from the Man Maw mine, operational difficulties and strategy changes were apparent throughout 2019–2023⁵⁰.

The business continued to smelt in China despite changing its sourcing approach. China's imports depend on Myanmar as a major supplier of tin

ore along with continuous environmental issues with mining developments under CMEC⁵¹. Separating supply chain interruptions brought on by company issues or CMEC developments is made more difficult by lack of clarity of projects under OBOR. Following years of “disruptive and wasteful mining,” Myanmar’s Wa militia declared on April 18, 2023, that mining operations were to cease in August 2023 in order to safeguard the remaining resources⁵².

Sany Heavy Industry: SANY Heavy Industry is expanding market share by shifting supply chains to China Plus destinations. Local manufacturing in India, especially in Pune, has strengthened its role in infrastructure. Wind turbine contracts underscore SANY’s growing impact in India’s renewable energy sector⁵³. SANY India’s sales grew by over 100% year-on-year in some periods. Their local manufacturing base supplied the domestic market and exported to Africa and the Middle East. In October 2024, SANY signed 1.3GW turbine sales agreements with three subsidiaries of the JSW Group⁵⁴. According to Chinese media sources, Sany has been active in Brazil, where it established a production base aimed at serving the South American market⁵⁵. Sany’s emphasis in Brazil also included localizing products and collaborating with local partners for distribution and service. Although not a major manufacturing hub, Russia has been a key market for Sany, particularly in construction and heavy machinery⁵⁶. Sany has maintained its strategic position in North America⁵⁷. SANY started as a sales and service organization in 2006 in the United States and had started “semi knocked-down” (SKD) - assembling partially prefabricated vehicles - in October 2018⁵⁸. Sany America is now working to establish a regional distribution and customer support center on a 68-acre site near Wilmington’s port⁵⁹.

Shanghai Electric (SE): Shanghai Electric has shifted its focus outside China, particularly in the energy sector, by expanding its activities in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan. Through important CPEC projects, it keeps a significant presence in Pakistan. The Thar Coal Project which began in 2019 with the goal of producing 1,320 MW from local Lignite coal in the Thar desert is one such significant development⁶⁰. SE has engaged in solar

power projects in Egypt through joint ventures with regional and Chinese firms. In 2019, SE and ACWA Power signed an MoU for solar projects. SE also secured major orders for large-scale gas-fired power plants in Taiba and Qassim⁶¹. Further, successful securing of bids have been highlighted in the SE periodic journal of 2023 mentioning the win for bids for the design and equipment supply of the 150kV substation for Asia Pulp & Paper's (APP) OKI Mill Phase 2, the equipment supply for the 150kV GIS for IKKPINDO Factory Phase 4, and the primary equipment supply of the 500MW PV plant booster station in Kom Ombo, Egypt⁶².

China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC): CNPC expanded in Kazakhstan, Russia, and Iraq for energy diversification, infrastructure, and OBOR projects, collaborating with KazMunayGas.⁶³ The company also strengthened its position by acquiring further stakes in key energy ventures. CNPC is involved in natural gas extraction and transportation, contributing to the Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline, which channels gas from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan to China⁶⁴. In Russia, CNPC and Russia's Rosneft continued expanding their long-term relationship, culminating in a 30-year agreement to supply oil through Kazakhstan⁶⁵. While such developments may not be directly classified as China plus strategy of Chinese companies, their scaling up of investments are directed towards specific countries where Chinese investments are secure in amid the geopolitical challenges. CNPC was one of the first significant foreign investors in Iraq's oil fields, particularly the Ahdab field, and has remained a key player in the country's oil industry⁶⁶. In June 2024, the China Petroleum Engineering and Construction Company (CPECC), CNPC's construction arm, built a gas processing plant (GPP) to supply gas, particularly liquid petroleum gas (LPG), to power stations in Maysan Governorate. This is expected to eliminate all flaring at Halfaya field and reduce sulphur dioxide emissions by 30,000 tonnes per year⁶⁷.

Alibaba: Based on considerations including data sovereignty, regional expansion and latency optimization, Alibaba has been concentrating on the Cloud Services market in places like Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia⁶⁸. Alibaba had to expand in these destinations due to China's stringent data

protection regulations, governmental monitoring and increasing local rivalry from companies like Tencent and Baidu. China's Data Security Law⁶⁹ and Anti-Monopoly Regulations guided Alibaba, Tencent and ByteDance's global expansion strategy. Keeping in view Indonesia's geographical difficulties to guarantee dependable delivery and enhance the e-commerce experience, Alibaba had to invest in local and international logistics. Alibaba is more effective in catering to Southeast Asian markets because of Malaysia's advantageous location and the eWTP hub, which reinforce its function as a regional distribution hub. The Alibaba-NTU Global e-Sustainability Corp Lab (ANGEL), established in September 2024 by NTU Singapore and Alibaba Group aims to address environmental concerns such as lowering carbon emissions in supply chains and creating green digital solutions⁷⁰. Alibaba Cloud launched the Digital Accelerator Programme to increase the adoption of AI in Malaysia, according to media reports. Alibaba Cloud further intends to open data centers in Mexico, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and South Korea in addition to training 500 Malaysian companies⁷¹. On one hand, Alibaba Cloud's digitization of factories and supply chains in the automotive, electronics and textile industries benefits Southeast Asia's sizable manufacturing base and on the other, it supports China's geopolitical and economic objectives by offering cloud services in OBOR nations including Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia.

OBOR Connect

The widely accepted and known facet of Chinese presence across the globe is the opacity with regard to Chinese investments under One Belt One Road. It becomes difficult to differentiate the various announcements and manufacturing plans in China's OBOR partners to decipher if Chinese ventures or investments are under OBOR or as the company specific measure to diffuse various risks in its strategy to adopt China plus one. OBOR, nonetheless, is facilitating this shift of Chinese companies for China plus one.

Free Trade Agreements /Preferential Trade Agreements / Regional Agreements

China has few bilateral investment treaties (BITs), regional commercial agreements and about 20 free trade agreements (FTAs). China's vast network of trade agreements still has gaps, particularly with major nations like the US, India and the EU, as well as with regions like Africa and parts of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. While China does have to its credit the substantial trading links with the US, Brazil and the EU, there are no official free trade agreements. Due to political issues, the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) has not been ratified, trade is governed under the US-China Phase One agreement and Brazil and China trade takes place outside of an FTA. Mechanisms such as the MERCOSUR-China PTA are the primary means of doing trade.

In case of Japan, several consultative talks have taken place between China and Japan officials along with President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba meeting on the sidelines of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum summit in Lima, Peru⁷². Media reports pointed out how China is using Mexico as a backdoor to the US⁷³. Gachúz Maya (2022)⁷⁴ explored Mexico's economic benefit from US tariffs, USMCA's impact and challenges of growing trade deficit with China. Zermeño & Manzo (2024)⁷⁵ explore nearshoring and Chinese investment in Mexico's commercial relationship. The United States Trade Representative Report titled Report to the Congress on the Operation of the USMCA with Respect to Trade in Automotive Goods dated 01 July 2024⁷⁶ duly noted the concerns with Chinese investments in automotive sector in Mexico as intended to "evade Section 232 and Section 301 tariffs on direct imports from China".

Through trade agreements and economic alliances, the relocation of Chinese businesses to both OBOR and non-OBOR nations offers further substantial export potential. Russia's free trade agreements with several nations, Malaysia's free trade agreement with Turkey and Indonesia's economic partnership with Japan are important examples. Significant

access is also provided by Mexico's USMCA and EUMFTA accords as well as Turkey's several free trade agreements. Chinese companies can enter the US and EU markets by avoiding tariffs on Chinese goods credit to these partnerships. It is evident that China's efforts to join regional supply networks in the Americas and Europe are supported by the country's overall strategy.

China's Growing Raw Material Exports to the Identified Countries of China Plus Strategy

It is enticing to look at China's growing raw material exports to the identified countries of China plus strategy of the listed Chinese companies. While raw materials from China exported to a particular country comprises of the entire demand basket of Chinese firms based in the host country along with other firms, *the increasing trend of raw materials exports by China reveals important insights.* The export product share of the 20 countries defined as China plus destinations for the 13 Chinese enterprises shows important developments based on raw materials export data from the WITS database for 2022. A portion of 3.5% with 10% increase is held by Indonesia, 2.3% share with 8% growth by Malaysia, 1.2% share with 30% growth by Romania, 2.4% with 6% growth by Thailand and 2.8% with 22% growth by Vietnam. In addition, the US (11%), Poland (10%), Kazakhstan (12.3%) and Turkey (11.5%) have double-digit growth in 2022 but lesser shares. As a significant producer and exporter of critical commodities such as metals, rare earths and energy resources, China contributes in a variety of ways to the export of raw materials, guaranteeing the supply for its businesses operating in host nations. OBOR strengthens its geopolitical power by ensuring access to raw material sources in key locations.

Chinese companies' presence in India is more about India's growth trajectory. With enormous growth potential and the emerging sectors as new drivers of India's growth, Chinese companies' presence and participation in these sectors cannot be solely attributed to a myopic view of India's so-called dependence on China or on any foreign country for that matter. By the very economic logic and reasoning, these arguments

lose sanctity.

Application of theories of international investment, such as Dunning's 'Eclectic Paradigm: Ownership, Location and Internalization Advantages' requires the correct contextualisation. For instance, internalizing operations enables businesses to guarantee steady returns and adjust to local conditions in a developing host market like India.

Sungrow's growth trajectory in India, for instance, shows how the Chinese company has grown over the years in line with the growing potential in the field. India's push for EV infrastructure and solar expansion benefited Sungrow by raising demand for battery storage and renewable energy solutions across industries. By actively participating in the supply chains of their host countries—entering developing economies, focusing on important growth sectors, creating forward and backward linkages through Chinese logistics companies, importing raw or intermediate goods from China and finally exporting completed goods—Chinese companies such as Sungrow serve as prime examples of investment theories. China's approach to economic progress is exemplified by this strategic integration.

In the China Plus One context, a key question is why some countries benefited from trade tensions while others did not. Beyond manufacturing competitiveness, true alternatives to China must consider the presence of established Chinese firms in those countries, shaped by geopolitical events like the US-China trade war and Russia-Ukraine conflict. Important is to factor in China's deeper integration with labelled beneficiaries being OBOR members without much economic tangible benefits available in public domain. OBOR being opaque, complicates the success of manufacturing step-ups by the Chinese companies driving the joint ventures with the host countries. India, despite being a non OBOR country, has emerged as an important destination for Chinese presence over years with buoyant sectors driving India's growth and policies that support foreign participation in the supply chains across select sectors such as green energy segment.

China has been able to strategically secure market access in sectors such as electric vehicles in destinations as alternate to US or EU markets. Such

developments predate US China trade war starting 2018 or COVID19 pandemic or the present dynamics of EU's and US's tariffs on China or China's new normal economy. *China has penetrated the economies at a global level in the sectors prioritised by the governments where, like other foreign players, Chinese companies' growth is accordingly aligned with the host countries' priority sectors.* It is important for economies to think beyond burgeoning trade deficits or growing imports from China or any other country as part of their sustainable trade strategies and national policies. The very presence of Chinese companies in the entire ecosystem starting from the initial phase of entering the market, building brand recognition, capturing markets, venturing out in manufacturing and production with local partners and gradually establishing their own manufacturing plants to cater to the domestic market of the host country and its export destinations is crucial. One Belt One Road has played an important facilitator role in Chinese companies' operations in the China plus destinations and trade agreements (bilateral or regional) of these destinations have provided ample market for Chinese companies to absorb. With China inching towards its own trade surplus of the tune of USD 1 trillion in 2024 is not worried about Made in China tag anymore when its manufactured goods cross borders with the China plus destination tag. It is high time that world takes note of the complex web of well executed strategy which sounds contemporary but dates pretty back!

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