

BRI (BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVES) AND ITS SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACT ON PAKISTANI PEOPLE IN A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The BRI is an umbrella initiative spanning a multitude of projects designed to promote the flow of goods, investment, and people. The new connections fostered by the BRI could reconfigure relationships, reroute economic activity, and shift power within and between states. This study focuses upon The Belt and Road Initiative's role in the cultural and economic integration between China and Pakistan. Aims of the present study are to find the social, political and cultural factors that strengthen China's connectivity with Pakistan and the world. It combines new and old projects, covers an expansive geographic scope, and includes efforts to strengthen hard infrastructure, soft infrastructure, and cultural ties. The study is purely based on a qualitative method, the sample of 20 respondents was selected and an in-depth interview method was used for data collection from Pakistan, on the topic of The Belt and Road Initiative's role in the cultural and economic integration between China and Pakistan. By the analysis of the data, researchers found the basic concepts and relationships about the BRI and culture or economic changes in Pakistan. So, this research concludes that the great BRI projects overall a positive step toward a bright future and it is going to rebuild the economy and infrastructure of Pakistan.

Key Words: Belt and Road Initiatives, Reroute Economic Activity, Infrastructure, Cultural ties, Economic Integration.

INTRODUCTION

This study is about China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is a strategy initiated by the People's Republic of China in order to connect Asia with Africa and Europe through land and maritime networks with the aim of improving regional integration, increasing trade and stimulating economic growth. This name was coined by Chinese President Xi Jinping, who drew inspiration from the concept of the Silk Road, which was established during the Han Dynasty 2,000 years ago, an ancient network of trade routes that connected China to the Mediterranean through Eurasia. The BRI has also been referred to in the past as 'One Belt One Road'.

The BRI has been associated with a very large programme of investments in infrastructure, development for sea-ports, roads, railways and airports, as well as power plants and

telecommunications networks. Since 2019, the Chinese state-led economy and BRI lending's volume has been in decline. The BRI now places increasing emphasis on "high quality investment", including greater use of project finance, risk mitigation tools, and green finance.

"BRI is an effort to develop an expanded, interdependent market for China, grow China's economic and political power, and create the right conditions for China to build a high technology economy."(Ahmad, 2017)

The plans for an economic corridor between Pakistan and China lead the way. China's Belt and Road Initiative, focus was on connecting China with the Chinese-invested Pakistani port of Gwadar through highway, rail and pipeline infrastructure. Investment projects under the Belt and Road

Initiative (BRI) will invariably bring environmental, climate and financial trade-offs, both opportunities and risks. This study basically focuses on how China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) energy projects will increase and diversify generation capacity, Cultural integration, high infrastructure and support economic development, which will be beneficial for Pakistan as well as for regional strength. Change in Pakistani culture is a major effect in Pakistani society which is caused by BRI.

“The initiative will also develop major industrial, agriculture, and energy centers in the participating countries, all linked to Chinese institutions.” (Economist, 2016)

CPEC will include the construction of industrial parks, agricultural farms, railways, airports, roads, a fiber-optic network, energy-generating projects, which includes one of the world’s largest solar farms and a high speed railway between Karachi and Peshawar that will travel over 160 km per hour. It therefore provides China with a potential corridor through the Karakoram Highway to the seaport at Gwadar in Balochistan on the Indian Ocean.

The project will also build a new telecommunications network linking Pakistan with China, and through China to Europe. Also includes culture and civic implications. This telecommunications connection will bring Chinese and Western culture, movies, and television.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Our objectives of the present study are as follow:

To explore the economic integration between China and Pakistan.

To examine the social and cultural changes in the Pakistani context. To investigate the development projects launched in Pakistan by China. To observe the political role of Pakistan in these big initiatives.

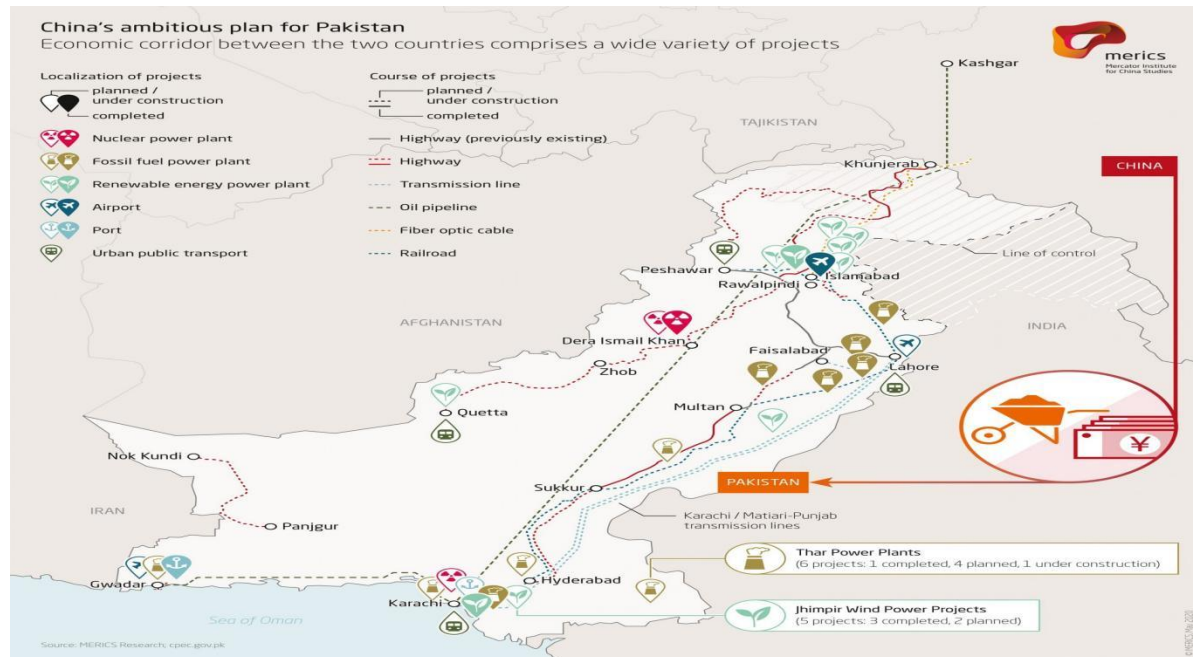
STUDY BACKGROUND

This study supports diverse initiatives and projects that are improving the connectivity throughout

Eurasia and beyond could serve to empower China’s economy, security interests and overseas development. First time The Belt and Road Forum in Beijing in May 2017, President Xi Jinping said that, “In pursuing the Belt and Road Initiative, we should focus on the fundamental issue of development, release the growth potential of various countries and achieve economic integration and interconnected development and deliver benefits to all.”

In March 2015, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs proclaimed an action (issued by the National Development and Reform Commission) that lights out specific policy goals of the BRI. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) estimates that the developing countries of Asia collectively will require \$26 trillion in infrastructure investment to sustain growth to support the BRI. Beijing has injected massive amounts into Chinese public financial institutions, such as the Chinese Development Bank (CDB) and the Export-Import Bank of China. Some BRI projects are already in workingsuch as those associated with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) a 3000-kilometer corridor that runs from Kashgar (China) to Pakistan’s Gwadar.

China’s National Development and Reform Commission, mentioned that “CPEC is an important loop in the larger chain of the Belt and Road Initiative, and would enable the possibility of a 21st Century Maritime Road.” Pakistani leaders also view CPEC as important. In the face of a recent hampered of CPEC projects due to geopolitical tensions, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan took some initiatives in October 2019 to push forward the development of CPEC and provide tax exemptions for the state-owned Chinese Overseas Ports Holding Company, which operates Pakistan’s Gwadar Port. The picture below is showing.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

“Research methodology is a collection of methods and methodologies that researchers apply systematically to produce scientific based knowledge about the social world.”(Neuman 2000,200)

According to Moulay

“Research methodology is a simple process of arriving at dependable solutions to problems through the planned and systematic collections, analysis and interpretation of data.”

This study is qualitative, with data collected via in-depth interview methodology and used together with the perceptions and opinions of people about the Chinese BRI project's role in Pakistani society. It is a more descriptive study which allows researchers to get a feel for how an entire population will react to a stimulus or product when asking questions about the major cultural and economic integration aspects that add value to the data being collected.

They reveal not just the answers but also the thoughts and emotions behind those answers. It also involves interpreting existing information to discover fresh insights, developing logical and grammatical structures for sentences, considering background assumptions and variables, and drawing conclusions based on evidence.

The Selection of Research Site

To obtain information for this research, participants were selected from Gawadar, Balochistan (Pakistan).The goal of this study was to determine how people feel about the launching developmental projects advantages in Pakistan by China. This study is a qualitative one, a semi-structured open-ended one-to-one was conducted to determine the influence of Chinese culture and economic growth in Pakistan.

Sampling Strategy

There are no precise principles while deciding a reasonable sample size in Qualitative research. It should not be too little to support any claim of attaining facts or not very expensive which permits the detailed case situated investigation that is the underlying principle of qualitative research. In a qualitative investigation, the underlying research is not the quantity of information but instead the richness of the information, not the aggregate tallies but rather the through portrayals. This study was conducted upon 10 respondents from the selected research site Gawadar using random sampling technique. Most respondents volunteered to participate in the study because they wanted the chance to tell their stories.

Tool For Data Collection

For the collection of data, there was a need for some tools through which data may be collected. The logic behind the selection of tools is that the present research topic needed in detail information, personal experience, and opinion of individuals from different backgrounds so according to the demand of the present research topic in-depth interview was the best possible option for that purpose. This tool is very much on par with traditional statistical surveys and questionnaires used in social science, which have proved successful over the years because they bring out important information that can be used to make a better-informed decision or improve public awareness. For the collection of data, it was necessary to use a medium where interviewees could express their opinions on the matter in a form that could be recorded. The logic behind the selection of this tool is that the present research topic needed in detail information, personal experience, and opinion of individuals from different backgrounds so according to the demand of the present research topic in-depth interviews were conducted.

Strategy For Entering Research Sites and Conducting Field Work

Keeping in mind the goals to enter a research site and lead hands-on work, the researcher required an adaptable work design, arranging access and relations with the individuals and choosing the amount to uncover about the study to the interviewees and gatekeepers (Neuman, 2010). But in this study, a group of experts who were working and planning about roads and motorways construction in Gawadar was used for entering a research site. To enter a research site and conduct a study, the researcher required access to the field and relations with the social actors and deciding how much to disclose about the study to respondents. In the beginning, researchers faced many troubles in selecting a perfect site for conducting interviews with respondents, where they feel comfortable and at ease in sharing their experiences. Usually, Researchers required to take into account the following aspects for entering the selected research site.

Negotiation, Rapport building & Disclosure. Gate Keeping.

□

Ethical Considerations

Different ethical challenges are being faced by the researcher at different research sites depending upon the nature and sensitivity of the topic being researched. So, there are some ethical considerations and protocols that researchers had to follow to overcome the ethical challenges faced in the field. Ethical protocols helped a lot in obtaining detailed and unbiased information from the respondents and making the data collection procedure easy for the respondents.

There are some of the important ethical considerations which was followed by the researchers in conducting an unbiased and effective research;

Informed Consent of The Participants
Data Confidentiality

Anonymity
Reflexivity

3: Data Analysis:

Data collected during the in-depth interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The field notes were converted into data documents under the supervision of experienced qualitative researchers. Analysis of the collected data was thematic by making themes of collected data in order to organize it. Then, coding was done of data line -by-line. And, data was divided into paragraphs according to its discussion and placed under the related themes.

Pakistani culture and BRI:

Chinese emerging projects in Pakistan leaving major effects on Pakistani local culture. It is going to rebuild Pakistani culture. Belt and Road initiative is just a Cultural diplomacy that has been part of human lives for centuries. With the advent of nation states, however, its modes and reach have expanded. It now transcends informal mechanisms to formal arrangements between states through which countries promote their arts, culture, music, education and language (Center of Public Diplomacy, 2018). "China has been promoting its cultural influence in Pakistan, for example, through numerous and regular social interactions between people of both countries working in the fields of culture, arts, science and technology" (Rana Shahzaib, 2022).

Growing up in the 1980s and 1990s when Pakistan Television (PTV) used to be the only TV channel in Pakistan, I remember vividly how Chinese

programs were translated and broadcasted in Pakistan. Beijing has also been promoting its ideological and cultural influence through Confucius Institutes (CIs) in Pakistan that promote the Chinese culture and language. Since the start of this century, CIs have opened on 500 university campuses are teaching Mandarin to more than two million people across the world (CDP, 2018). Since 2000, both countries have agreed on many projects for the promotion of the Chinese language in Pakistan. The National University of Modern Languages (NUML) in Islamabad has been teaching the Chinese language.

"CIs also established at the University of the Punjab to promote Chinese culture through Chinese language. Because when somebody wants to rule somewhere, he must promote his language there first as China is doing the same" (Hina, 2022). China is now trying to penetrate into Pakistan through the introduction of Mandarin. Balochistan has a negative approach towards CPEC and China, the Chinese presence in media is working as a huge normalizing agent. Unfortunately, the social impact of engaging with the Chinese is having its own undesirable results in the form of forced marriages or abduction of local Pakistani girls by the Chinese mafia (The Economic Times, 2021). One of the respondents said, "Mandarin is the 'new English' for young Pakistanis who are desperately in need of education and jobs."

Pakistan Economy and BRI:

Pakistan is building a port at the southwestern city of Gwadar on the mouth of the oil rich Persian Gulf. It provides an economical route for the flow of Central Asia's natural resources to the world along with easy access to the growing consumer markets of Asia. "This project conceptualizes the Gwadar facility as a hub port that will contribute significantly to the revival of Pakistan's economy" (Alia, 2022).

The Nation, a Pakistani news outlet, published; "In addition, secure energy sources, well-developed trade routes, and increased appeal to investors will bolster Pakistani textiles, agriculture, tourism, and manufacturing industries." The potential for this investment to have a net positive impact on both China and Pakistan. The projects include investments in both traditional and alternative energy sources, including solar, wind, coal, and hydropower.

The infrastructure projects will expand on Pakistan's existing roadways to create a 1,100 km motorway between Lahore and Karachi, update the Karakoram Highway connecting Rawalpindi to China; upgrade the Karachi-Peshawar railway to handle a train running at 160 km/h; and extend a railway network to connect Pakistan to the Xinjiang Railway in Kashgar (Denver Journal of International Law & Policy). CPEC will also establish a network of oil and natural gas pipelines, including one connecting Gwadar to Nawabshah in Iran. Gwadar is the connecting point for a substantial portion of CPEC activities.

Its strategic prowess rests on its advantage as one of the world's largest deep-water ports, connecting South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, and housing almost two-thirds of the world's oil reserves. The port's location at the mouth of the Persian Gulf makes it a prudent gateway for the first set of CPEC projects. But, there are also so many people in Pakistan who think this project is a negative thing as one respondent said; "Chinese long-term military presence in the region will pose complications for Pakistan." Because, by doing this one day there may be the ending signs of our own culture due to the supremacy of Chinese culture.

Prime Minister Imran Khan at Investment forum Saudi Arabia:

"CPEC is a great opportunity for Pakistan. CPEC connects us to China which is one of the biggest markets. Because of CPEC we are developing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) which invite investment across the globe. China is a huge market and the CPEC route will connect China and Pakistan located at a strategic position in the world." (CPEC Authority Office)

Regional Connectivity and BRI:

BRI is an excellent chance for regional peace, development, and growth. Through this project Pakistan and China are allowing the neighboring world to get involved in it. It can be like a medicine toward inter-regional turmoil drastically reduced. Russia, Iran, Afghanistan, and other Central Asian countries can benefit from the use of Gwadar Port and BRI's trade routes. Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the US can benefit by getting involved financially in this market for exchange programs of energy

and infrastructure deals. The key issues of security and regional turmoil can be eliminated.

"Pakistani international relations and foreign policy experts have said during a webinar that the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) will enhance regional connectivity and bring a brighter future to its members." (Xinhua, 2021).

Regional collaboration fits in well with China's BRI initiative, enhancing Pakistan's attractiveness to foreign investors, and aligns with both countries' recent expressions of welcome to Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Farhan Khan, assistant professor from the University of Bahawalpur, said in his comments that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) "is a flagship project of the BRI, it will bring sustaining economic development to help poverty and unemployment alleviation in Pakistan. CPEC will open up new vistas to job creation, economic growth, and increase in exports. It also has a local dimension in terms of economic and technological connectivity of different regions of Pakistan." he added.

BRI's function of regional Connectivity will increase the existing state of the regional economy, it will help to make less the Presence, level, and frequency of terrorist activity in the region. It will also be beneficial against the level of social and political unrest and local political risks. To alleviate some of these concerns, in April 2015, the Director General of Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) announced the creation of the "Special Security Division." While the joint military presence in the region to alleviate threats and barriers to the CPEC project.

Conclusions:

This study examined that the CPEC is viewed in Pakistan as a strategic shift in China-Pakistan relations from geopolitics to geo-economics. Chinese investment of USD

62 Billion in Pakistan's port infrastructure, railways, highways, mass-transit and power-generation projects, at a time of economic hardship, was welcomed by the Pakistani government and the people. At a time when foreign investors were divesting from Pakistan, Chinese investment was a sign of posing confidence in Pakistan's economy.

Diplomats and government officials on both sides called each other as "Iron-brothers" and termed the

friendship as "higher than the mountains, deeper than the ocean and sweeter than the honey" (Telegraph, 2013).

According to the findings of the recent study, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor will create a powerful network of trade routes and opportunities for sustainable development, which will be beneficial for China, Pakistan, and the surrounding region. The importance of such a program is its potential for negative impacts through increased use of coal, increased road traffic, interruption of wildlife migration, and displacement of human populations. This will provide a solid foundation for addressing key issues and potential roadblocks to CPEC's long-term success and also exists for a more holistic approach to sustainability.

Solutions include investments in local SMEs, establishing local development funds, implementing social and environmental impact assessments, creating a regional risk register, integrating contract disclosure clauses, restructuring infrastructure agreements and encouraging the involvement of neighboring countries. Pakistan and China will benefit from mitigated social, political, and environmental risks, in addition to more sustainable economic development.

According to the World Bank, "International trade has the potential to increase individual income and lift people out of poverty. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)/ Global Goals could also be achieved faster by increasing International trade and creating livelihood opportunities for the people from the global South."

China started investing over USD 62 Billion in Pakistan at a time when foreign investors had lost confidence in the Pakistani economy and were divesting from Pakistan. Recurring power breakdowns, slow-down of production of goods coupled with the corruption, uncertainty and lack of a stable government turned Pakistan into an investment nightmare. Foreign investors were not willing to take the risk to invest in Pakistan. Chinese mega investment in CPEC was hailed as a gift and a symbol of strategic partnership between the two countries.

The majority of people in Pakistan views CPEC in the positive light and welcomes the Chinese investment in their energy and investment starved nation (Kanwal, Pitafi and Malik, 2020). The announcement of CPEC had a strong and positive

impact on the Pakistan Stock Exchange (Yeung, Pang, and Aman, 2019).

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